

**SONOMA FOR SALE?  
 LAST TANGO IN PARADISE**

by Will Shonbrun

These hillsides that frame the city of Sonoma offer us a way to learn about our surrounding environment. Through observation and close contact with our natural surroundings, we not only learn the genus and species of plant and animal life, we are also afforded the greater lessons of inter-relatedness and interdependency, self-organization and cooperation necessary for the survival of all living systems.

Increasingly our world, natural and institutional, is being altered in ways that have a profound and devastating effect. Global warming and climatic changes, disappearing species and ecosystems, rapidly increasing reliance of toxic chemicals and the resultant poisoning of earth, water and air have brought us to our greatest challenge: our future survival. Perhaps central to the dissolution and disintegration of our natural world and social structures is the relentless and insatiable quest for greater and greater wealth. As author David Korten so aptly puts it in his examination of the post-corporate world, "Our obsession with money has led us to create an economic system that values life only for its contribution to making money. With the survival of civilization and perhaps even our species now at risk, we have begun to awaken to the fact that our living planet is the source of all real wealth and the foundation of our own existence."

Sonoma's northern hillside is at stake. A hotel developer wants it in order to make more money for his company and himself. At the outset, some of Sonoma's elected officials acted with poor judgment, suspicious silence and a flagrant disregard for due public process. A couple of Sonoma's City Staff set the whole thing in motion by offering up the only piece of hillside property Sonoma owns to a prospective lessee. The people who live in the city of Sonoma are now left to decide what's of true value: the

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**LOCAL VS. CORPORATE CONTROL**

by Jerry Bernhaut

By a vote of 58% to 42%, Arcata voters recently passed Advisory Measure F. This initiative directs the City Council to hold two town hall meetings on the issue of maintaining a vital democracy in the face of corporate power. Measure F also calls for the Council to ensure democratic control over corporations that do business within the city "in whatever ways are necessary to ensure the health and well-being of our community and its environment." This language raises such possibilities as a living wage ordinance and stronger environmental regulation.

The Arcata business community predictably responded to Measure F with complaints about creating an unfriendly business climate, left wing idealists telling people how to run their business, excessive government regulation, and creeping socialism.

Here in the Valley of the Moon, we also

have reason to be concerned about corporate wealth undermining the representative, democratic nature of government. Recent examples are:

\*The initial "secret" meetings between agents of the Rosewood Corporation and Sonoma City staff and Council members.

\*Supervisor Cale acting as Grand Marshall at a major raceway event and generally supporting the Sears Point expansion in the face of local opposition. It was only after strong criticism of the first draft EIR of the Sears Point expansion by local citizens and the Valley Citizens Advisory Commission that the Supervisor voiced some criticism. He is still perceived by everyone closely involved as backing the project.

\*The absurd interpretation of the provision in the raceway's use permit requiring compliance with the noise element of the

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**DOWN THE DRAIN**

by Tara Treasurefield

Kay Brady, a 20-year resident of Fetters Hot Springs, represents Sonoma Sanitation Reform. She contends that the Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District (SVCSD) isn't meeting the needs of the community it serves.

SVCSD is responsible for wastewater management for the City of Sonoma and the Sonoma Valley. It has been part of the Sonoma County Water Agency since 1995. The current Directors of SVCSD - County Supervisors Cale and Reilly and Sonoma Mayor Ramponi - review/ap-

prove/reject environmental documents, budgets, and capital projects relating to SVCSD. The Directors meet concurrently with the Board of Supervisors every Tuesday at 8:30 a.m. in Santa Rosa.

Critics charge that the SVCSD has placed the public health and the environment at risk. In September 1997, Northern California River Watch filed a suit alleging violations of the Clean Water Act at SVCSD's Sonoma Valley plant.. SVCSD also came under attack in November

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land as it is, or money.

**Not an Easy Matter**

Since this is basically a land for money deal, let's look at the money part of it. The City Manager reports that the current status of the city budget shows a shortfall due in part to an unexpected expense (FireMed service), and a one-time police communications equipment expense. While it's true that the current budget picture may not look good, a few years ago things were a lot worse and the city was in the red for between 2.5 and 3 million dollars. However, in the last couple of years, that deficit was made up, and at the end of '98 the budget showed a small surplus. A look at the history of Sonoma's past financial picture shows that there have been good and lean years. The fact of the matter is Sonoma has been here for a long time, even BT (before tourists), and in all likelihood will maintain. New York City was on the verge of bankruptcy some years ago, and to my knowledge it's still there. Sonoma is a desirable place to live and visit, and is the hub of a strong agricultural industry.

Furthermore, a look at the hotel and B&B projects on line (applications already approved or pending) shows a very favorable TOT (Transit Occupancy Tax) revenue projection. The projects on line or already in construction represent 285 new hotel rooms spread out over eleven owners. These new projects would bring Sonoma an additional \$750,000 in tax revenues per year without having to lease our open space. The 105 room Rosewood/Paradise Hotels & Resort project (just exactly whom would Sonoma be doing business with - Rosewood or Paradise, and who owns and operates Paradise Hotels?) represents a lot of TOT revenues. Does the city of Sonoma want to be dependent upon and beholden to one powerful corporate entity? There are some other questions to consider. The City could cut a deal with Rosewood/Paradise

Co., but they in turn could sell it to some new entity down the line. Suppose whoever winds up owning the hotel wants to expand the operation, and double the amount of rooms, and add more tennis courts and swimming pools and bar/restaurants, etc. The eleven acres they project developing now could easily become twenty or thirty acres enveloping the whole hillside. After all, it's in the nature of business to expand.

Then there's also the possibility that the hotel business might fail. The City, being the landlord, would then

have to find a new lessee. Is that a role and responsibility they want to take on?

Besides offering to become the single most influential financial source in Sonoma, one of the selling points they espouse is an additional 250 new jobs. But most of these would be low-wage service and maintenance jobs, of which there is no shortage. There's no affordable housing for these employees, and no public transportation to get them to and from work. Rosewood

proposes buying an empty city lot to convert to a parking lot. That would certainly be a plus to our town! Rosewood's PR guy, developer Hal Thannisch paints a picture of Rosewood as just a little old family business. One or more of the Hunt family, one of the richest families in the world, and the Maritz, Wolff Co., an investment and travel business, own Rosewood. This is not exactly The Brady Bunch.

**A Pearl Beyond Price**

It all comes down to a question of what's more valuable, nature or money. There are those who want to treat nature as a commodity, and there are those who would sell themselves for a piece of the profits. There are also those who see in nature an intrinsic value far greater than money. The hotel promoter promises something in it for everyone, but his agenda is to make

money, pure and simple. On the other hand, those who want to protect the land, preserve it for all to come and use freely, and be true stewards (not landlords) are motivated by love and respect for the land, and for nature as it is, uncivilized and incorruptible, not reduced to a figure in some account book.

The people of Sonoma are being asked to trade off their one and only signature piece of natural beauty, the foothills of the Mayacamas Range, the last visible vestige of how it all looked hundreds of years ago, and that forms in part their hillside backdrop. There are no other such parcels under City control. What is its worth?

I suggest it's a pearl beyond price. If Sonoma gives up its golden hill for coffers of silver we will have made a devil's bargain. The land is really why we live here. The landscape is what draws people to this place. It is our place; our identity and we share it with Jack London, Vallejo, and the Pomo, and the Miwok and the other native peoples who lived here for centuries. If we lose the last piece of that, then we

have lost a part of ourselves.

How many of us really know this land? How

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many of us have walked it, and spent time there? How many can name the animal and plant species that live there? How many of us have stood near the crest of this hill and been struck by the incomparable view of our city and the surrounding valley? We should know what we've got before we are willing to give it up.

This land can be our legacy for all who live here and will live here. This place can teach us about our natural environment and our place in nature. This learning is something that can be shared with everyone, rich and poor. This is a people's heritage and must include everyone.

This land is an integral part of the spirit and soul of Sonoma, and to develop it rather than to learn from it would bring a kind of bankruptcy from which there is no recovery.

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