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Posted on Sun, Jun. 13, 2004

ASKING AN UGLY QUESTION

FLIERS IN LOS ALTOS HILLS LINGER AFTER TOWN PICNIC

Wildflowers aren't the only things sprouting up in rustic Los Altos Hills this month.

Dozens of fliers asking passersby ``Am I Ugly?" are posted along Moody and Elena Roads.

Ugly is supposed to refer to the utility poles upon which the signs are tacked, but after more than a week, some residents say the yellow fliers are even more hideous.

The publicity stunt looks familiar in a town where large wooden cows at key intersections voice displeasure over the town ``getting milked" out of its only public school.

The ``Am I Ugly?" fliers asked people at the town picnic last Sunday to vote on which are the Hills' ugliest poles. As of Saturday, the fliers were still stuck on every pole along an otherwise scenic stretch of Moody Road.

Andrew Coleman, a member of the town-appointed undergrounding committee, said he took down the fliers he posted almost immediately after the picnic and encouraged colleagues to do the same.

Beautification is the goal of the committee, which is looking for a one-mile area to bury utility lines as a test to show residents -- most who don't back the idea -- what kind of a difference it would make.

Most picnic-goers disliked poles on Purissima, Fremont, Moody and Page Mill roads, Coleman said.

The signs may be unsightly to some, Coleman said, but ``they're certainly not as ugly as the poles."

Clearing things up?

It's known as the Palo Alto Process -- that interminable public discourse over everything from traffic barriers to utility lines. Process junkies know that debaters often invoke the comprehensive plan, the city's long-term growth blueprint. What exactly is the comprehensive plan? Well, according to a city report on the plan's status, it remains ``a dynamic document that shapes the future of Palo Alto." How?

``To accomplish this, a number of steps have been taken, including integrating the Comprehensive Plan into the budget process through the use of the Comprehensive Plan Implementation Plan Status Report. Departments work with the Comprehensive Plan Implementation Plan, which summarizes all Comprehensive Plan policies and programs, including lead department or fund, timing of the implementation and general financial implications. . . . The Implementation Plan provides the foundation for development of department work programs that form the basis for budget resource allocation."

Oh. That explains it.

World-hopping councilwoman

Rosemary Stasek's seat at the Mountain View City Council chambers will be empty this month. She'll be in Afghanistan teaching women how to make jam, jelly and preserves.

It's her third trip to Afghanistan, and a chance for the veteran activist and world traveler to help Afghan women start small businesses with the help of a micro-loan program.

She left Friday on the venture through a non-profit she calls ``a little help." Stasek's interest in women's issues and travel have taken her to Cuba, Nepal, Ecuador, Mexico, Thailand, Azerbaijan, Venezuela and other countries. In May 2002, she joined a delegation on rebuilding Afghanistan and returned to Kabul, the capital, last summer when she wanted to teach her preserving practices, but was sidetracked by a more immediate need: refurbishing a women's prison.

She hopes this trip will be even more fruitful.

Sniffing at P.A.'s cat craze

Palo Alto's recent encounters with wandering mountain lions and bobcats have yet to set a trend on the Peninsula.

One Atherton family called authorities after spotting a bobcat in the backyard. Advice from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which responded: Leave it alone and see if its mother comes to get it.

Elsewhere, police dispatchers laughed last week -- with relief, no doubt -- when asked if there'd been any sightings in their towns. ``We're *not* Palo Alto," said one, with the hauteur reserved for those yet without cougar craze.

Be ready for a lot of running

San Jose State University senior **Rachel Greathouse** always knew she would have to work hard for her college education. She just didn't know it would involve running around the state Capitol in Sacramento in June, sweltering in a cap and gown.

Greathouse, the incoming student body president, was one of several dozen students from around the state who last week staged a "Capitol runaround" to protest Gov. **Arnold Schwarzenegger's** proposed budget cuts to higher education.

She had logged about 10 miles so far and brought some backup -- **Mike Nguyen**, San Jose State student government's newly elected director of legislative affairs.

By Greathouse's run Wednesday afternoon, the students had completed about 360 miles. They planned to knock off Friday and the weekend, and were hoping to round up enough volunteer runners to return Monday. Their goal was to run around the Capitol around the clock until a budget deal is reached.

The governor's \$500 million-plus in state funding cuts proposed for the California State University and University of California systems are expected to push more than 25,000 eligible students out of those systems.

Internal Affairs is compiled by Assistant Peninsula Bureau Chief Jennifer Files. Julie Patel, Sharon Noguchi, S.L. Wykes and Becky Bartindale contributed items this week. Send tips to jfiles@mercurynews.com or call (650) 688-7554.



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