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GOING TOGETHER

· Jerry Hornof

Our theme for 2024 has been Home is an Oasis. This captured the concept that our home in many ways is like an oasis in that it provides refuge, relief, and a pleasant escape for our often very hectic life. Symbolically, it is a place where you can find safety



and sustenance. It describes a peaceful area in our everyday lives. Unfortunately, the horrific fires in the Pacific Palisades and Altadena demonstrated how quickly our Home as an Oasis can be lost. Although our Westdale community was spared, many of us have family and friends that have been severely impacted by the fires. I am sure all of you are supporting relief efforts for those devastated communities. In retrospect, I think one of the aspects of oasis I failed to emphasize was community. For Pacific Palisades and Altadena, too many of them lost their homes; but all of them, and us as well, have lost the communities those neighborhoods represented. Pacific Palisades students in my Santa Monica College Emeritus classes talk about how much they miss former neighbors who are now forced to scatter as they find new housing either locally or with family throughout the state. Recovery of homes and community will not be easy. On a Thursday evening shortly after the fires, my wife and I attended a Los Angeles Philharmonic concert. Kim Noltemy (President and Chief Executive Officer) and Jason Subotky (Board Chairperson) spoke before the concert. In Mr. Subotky's remarks, he referenced a proverb thought to be of African origins: "If you have to go far, go together." We know we have a long road to recovery, but together we will accomplish it.

In light of the Pacific Palisades Fire, the Westdale Homeowners Association (WHOA) Annual meeting changed the location, date, and scope. As I stated in the email announcing the change, a major part of our annual meeting is presentations by the 11th District Council Office



VILLAGER

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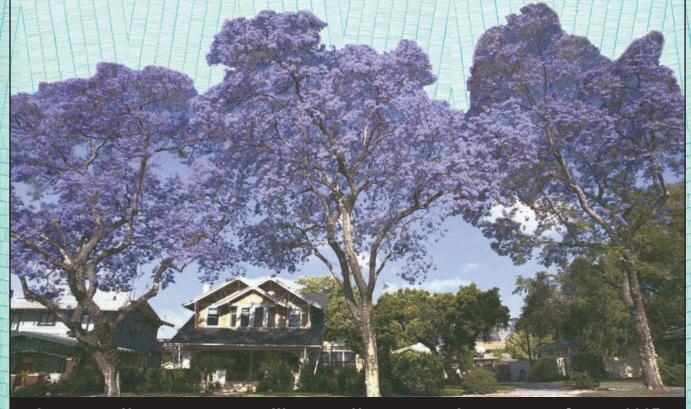
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+ QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTDALE HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION + SPRING 2025 +

(Traci Park) and the LAPD (Senior Lead Officers). Both these groups were not available to attend this year given their current activities related to the fires. In coordination with the Mar Vista Neighborhood Association (our neighbors to the south), we joined forces and convened a community meeting with a combination of music, speakers, and fundraising for those impacted by the fires. The meeting opened with a brief appearance of Los Angeles Police Officers from the Pacific Division and Los Angeles Fire Fighters from Fire Station 62. Both groups thanked the audience for their support, and they were greeted to a standing ovation. The gathering entitled Rhythms and Resilience included comments by the association presidents, St. Bede's Rector Jennifer Wagner Pavia, Ahavat Torah Rabbi Ilana Grinblat, 11th Council District Mar Vista Field Deputy Matt Halden, and other community representatives. The Mar Vista Music Project provided the musical entertainment. Performers included Allen Gittelson, Magical West Afrikan Tunes Trio, MV3 Jazz Ensemble, Frank Basile, and a Folk Sing-a-Long led by Al Keith, Karen Hart, and Frank Nemiroff. Find a recording of the event at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOiK0NcB0tw. Thanks to all the Westdale HOA members who were able to attend.

Many of you are familiar with the Mar Vista Community Council. Neighborhood Councils are advisory bodies who advocate for their communities with City Hall on important issues like development, homelessness, and emergency preparedness. This is a Vote-By-Mail (VBM) only election. This is a Los Angeles City sponsored election and requires that you register with the city to receive a ballot. Your normal County ballot process does not apply to this election. All the information needed to apply for a ballot is available at the MVCC website (www.marvista.org/). Please note that Westdale HOA is in Zone 3. Registration for the election closes on March 10th. The election date is March 18. Ballots must be postmarked by that date. Respecting fairness to all the candidates, the Westdale HOA does not endorse or advertise individual candidates or candidate slates.

Westdale HOA dues are voluntary but are very important in supporting many of the activities we support including this publication. Please read the article in this issue relating to membership application and payment. Thank you for being a member.



I want to thank our Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) coordinator Carl Ginsberg. In his role as the CERT West Bureau Coordinator. He has been onsite supporting the Los Angeles Fire Fighters in the Pacific Palisades. He has worked tirelessly in this role, and we acknowledge and thank him for his dedication and commitment to the Los Angeles community.



In closing, the 2025 theme will be Going Together. The essence of community is being, learning, and doing together. Going Together is how the Westdale Home Owner's Association thrives.

CRIME & SAFETY REPORT



Great news! Our neighborhood has reported zero crimes since the start of the year! You can verify this yourself at crimemapping.com.

The success of our "Mar Vista Neighborhood Watch" WhatsApp Group has been particularly noteworthy. During the winter holiday season, members organized private security coverage—an initiative that helped ensure a peaceful and safe holiday period for our community.

I'm deeply grateful to all neighbors who have joined and remain active in our WhatsApp Group. While not everyone feels comfortable actively participating (myself included), it's reassuring to know we have such a vigilant community looking out for our entire neighborhood.

could it be that I have found my home at last? Home at last...

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

· leff Lake

Like many in Los Angeles, the Windward School community was directly impacted by the recent wildfires. In the aftermath of the devastation. Windward witnessed an outpouring of support from our community, eager to assist those impacted by the disaster. This collective effort was fueled by a shared desire to provide comfort and relief not just to Windward members, but also to our wider neighborhood community.

To respond to the immediate needs of those affected, Windward's Service Learning program organized a community-wide event to benefit Save the Children, an organization that collaborates with the Red Cross and Project:Camp. Project:Camp provides vital emotional support to children impacted by natural disasters by creating safe and comforting environments through pop-up camps across Los Angeles. These camps offer displaced children an opportunity to heal and regain a sense of normalcy.

On January 30, the Windward community came together to pack over 150 comfort kits for Project:Camp, filling each kit with blankets, games, craft supplies, and other essential items. The generosity of students, parents, and volunteers made it possible for Windward to provide much-needed relief for children in crisis.

The collaborative spirit was further amplified through a partnership with the Potomac School, an independent K-12 institution in McLean, Virginia. Windward and Potomac worked together to personalize the comfort kits by inviting student groups from Potomac-the Service Learning Club and the Good Guys Club-to write and illustrate cards of encouragement. These heartfelt messages were included in the kits, offering a tangible expression of solidarity that transcended state lines and helped bring comfort to the young campers. This collaboration was made possible

thanks to Sarah Beck, Windward's incoming Head of School, and current Assistant Head of School for Academics at Potomac, who helped to connect our two communities in this meaningful way.

This partnership between Windward and Potomac highlights the power of community and the importance of service. It not only provided immediate relief to those affected by the wildfires but also expanded students' understanding of how collective action can make a lasting impact. Through this effort, students from both schools were able to directly advocate for causes that were meaningful to them, while connecting with a broader community committed to helping others.

As we reflect on the strength of our larger community during times of hardship, we are also reminded of the incredible leadership that helped to see us through. Tom Gilder, who will be retiring this Summer after 38 years of service as Head of School, has been an instrumental part of our journey for over four decades. His unwavering commitment to honoring the vision of our co-founder. Shirley Windward, and his forward-thinking leadership has made Windward the dynamic institution it is today. While we will deeply miss his presence and leadership, we take comfort in knowing that Tom's legacy will continue to guide and inspire us, especially as he supports and mentors Sarah throughout her transition and beyond.

Windward is incredibly proud to be part of a community that exemplifies compassion and generosity. Through the collective efforts of our students, parents, and volunteers, we were able to make a tangible difference for those impacted by the January wildfires. This initiative highlights our commitment to supporting not just our own, but our neighbors and broader community in times of need. As a school, we understand the importance of standing together and offering help where it's needed most, and we are grateful to be part of a nurturing community always ready to lend a hand and make a lasting difference.







Please renew your Westdale Homeowner's Association membership!!

WHOA DUES

· Sharri Dunn

Hello neighbors! We are bound together by our geography: North of Palms, South of National, East of Inglewood, West of Sawtelle: We are the Westdale Homeowner's Association. The Association requests a small annual dues which allows us to communicate with, and in small ways, take care of our small pocket of homeowners and renters. The membership dues pays for our communications (newsletter and website primarily), the annual block party and other community events. We also support Mar Vista School and Mar Vista Park - doing what we can to make them neighborhood gems for our residents.

CERT contributions pay for supplies that go in our WHOA emergency supplies container stored at Mar Vista School. Neighborhood CERT members are prepared to use those

supplies to take care of those in our community in case of an emergency. We cherish our village and appreciate your support.

So far we have received contributions from less than 100 of our 907 homes. Please consider paying your dues of \$30 per year for up to three years, and any contributions to CERT are also appreciated. You can check to see if you have paid for 2025, 2026 or 2027 on our website west-dalehoa.org. Navigate to the Membership section and scroll down to Westdale Homeowner's Dues Status. If you haven't paid, check the Membership Support page with instructions on how to pay by mail, drop off a check, or submit electronically and pay via Zelle.

We also welcome you to be a part of the community by filling a board position, writing an article for the newsletter, or helping to plan our annual block party. Send us a note at westdalehoa yahoo.com.

http://westdalehoa.org/membership/membership-support



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NATURE REPORT: RECOVERING FROM FIRES

·M. Umar

It's finally spring in Los Angeles — a season often regarded as one of rebirth and new life. But this spring arrives after a devastating winter. The recent fires have been some of the most destructive in state history. More than 50,000 acres burned. Even though Westdale was not directly affected, you probably know people who were. People lost houses, schools, neighborhoods, and in some worst-case scenarios, friends or family members. For a few weeks, the inferno made it seem as if spring would never come.



But it has, despite the destruction. Now leanup efforts are underway. Of course, a fire that burns cars and buildings is very different from one that just burns wood. Urban fires create dangerous pollutants, which may affect human health. The exact details of which pollutants are found where are uncertain. Scientists are trying to figure it out via studies of the environment around peoples' homes.

In addition to their toll on human life, the fires also impacted plants and animals. In the past, California's wildfires occurred every few decades because of lightning. They were short-lived and necessary for new growth, clearing away dense vegetation so new plants could grow. In fact, some species of plants will only sprout if a wildfire happens. Other shrubs have adapted to fires by storing water in underground structures called burls. Small, fast fires are necessary for a healthy Southern California environment.

Nowadays, fires occur far more frequently due to human activity. Cigarettes, arson, and campfires are more likely to start a blaze than lightning. These fires



are bigger and more destructive. Since the 1980s, they've happened increasingly often, making it harder for nature to recover. The human practice of immediately putting out any wildfires also creates a smorgasbord of fuel for the flames, making them even bigger. There are no simple solutions, so just be extra careful with cigarettes, barbecues, etc.

As a result of the recent fires, many animals have been displaced from their homes. You may see more animals than usual, roaming around at odd times of day. This could mean they're searching for new territory after the fires. As always, don't feed them. Feeding a wild animal is generally not a good idea. Not only does it cultivate unhealthy human-animal interactions, but the food could make them sick. (While ducks are unlikely to attack humans that don't feed them, bread is still extremely unhealthy for them.) Putting water out is more helpful.

Also, the recent rains have made toxic runoff flow

into the ocean. There's a sensitive kelp forest environment out there, and the runoff can create dangerous algae blooms. It's depressing to imagine Southern California's majestic kelp forests as a rocky seabed scraped clean of any life. Hopefully, this doesn't happen, but it's almost certain the fires will have an effect on marine life.

All of this may seem hopeless, but there are ways to help the environment recover. If you see a wild animal that seems hurt or distressed, call a local wildlife rehabilitation center. You can also donate to organizations like LA Animal Services, which are treating injured animals. Save LA Cougars is another organization that helps local wildlife. When it comes to displaced pets, you could try fostering one.

Large wildfires have happened here before. With the advent of climate change, they will definitely happen again. It seems bleak, but there are success stories. 271 steelhead trout, an endangered species of fish, were successfully evacuated from Topanga Creek. As it turns out, humans weren't the only ones moving away from the fires. The future of the fish is uncertain, but people managed to save over half of them. With continued effort, they might stop being a threatened species!

Wild animals may not be able to adapt to the increasingly frequent fires fast enough on their own,

so we should do our part to help them when the opportunity arises. And although the destruction caused by these fires is massive, this is also a chance to create a less fire-prone, more environmentally friendly rebuilt city. I hope that future can become a reality. This year hasn't started ideally, but our city and its environment will recover.

Keep looking for creatures this spring!

TENNIS ANYONE?

· Níkkí Coburn

Have you taken tennis lessons at Mar Vista Park in the last couple of years? If so, you may have been instructed by an older gentleman named Mike Levitt. I met Coach Mike two years ago when I started taking youth tennis at Mar Vista Park. At that time, he was the head coach. You might be surprised to hear that he was the oldest instructor there. Mike is 83 years old, retired, and is coaching with LA Department of Recreation and Parks voluntarily.

Before he started teaching tennis, Mike had a long career in the tire industry. He helped move a high-performance tire brand from China to the United States. Then later, Mike built a tire company that has now become a 1.5-billion dollar national business.

You may think a man like Mike would have been playing tennis for his entire life. Not so. Mike only started playing when he was 46 years old; and he never had a single tennis lesson. Mike loves coaching, because he loves the sport and wants others to enjoy it as well. He told me that he loves all his students, and he feels great when he is there helping them. Mike was named the head coach at Mar Vista Tennis because he was considered the most capable and had the greater ability to handle the other coaches.

Overall, Mike is a wonderful coach. He makes sure his students understand what they are doing wrong. As a student of Mike, he helped me a lot with my skills. From him, I got a lot better with my backhand and my serving. I would 100% recommend him. Sadly, Coach Mike is no longer at Mar Vista, but you may find him coaching at Penmar Park in Venice.



REAL ESTATE REPORT: SEVEN SCAMS

· Ron Wynn

Here are seven real-life scams that could catch homeowners completely off guard, with actionable steps to protect themselves:

- 1. Deed Fraud: Losing Ownership Without Knowing Scenario: A scammer forges documents to transfer ownership of your home to themselves, then takes out loans or sells the property without your knowledge. Example: An elderly homeowner in Chicago discovered her property deed had been transferred to a stranger, who then rented out her home while she was away.
- How to Protect Yourself: Regularly monitor public records for changes to your deed. Sign up for fraud alerts with your county recorder's office. Secure original property documents in a safe place.
- 2. The "We Buy Houses" Scam Scenario: Scammers target financially distressed homeowners, offering a quick cash sale at a fraction of the home's value. These offers often come with hidden clauses that leave the homeowner with nothing. Example: A single mother in Florida was promised \$50,000 for her home but unknowingly signed over ownership for just \$5,000 due to deceptive contract terms.
- How to Protect Yourself: Always read contracts carefully and consult a real estate attorney before signing. Be wary of unsolicited offers and promises of "fast cash." Verify the legitimacy of the buyer and their company.
- 3. Home Improvement Scams Scenario: A contractor offers a discounted rate to repair your roof or install solar panels but demands payment upfront and never completes the work. Example: A homeowner in Texas paid \$10,000 to a contractor for roof repairs after a storm. The contractor disappeared after removing only part of the damaged roof.
- How to Protect Yourself: Check the contractor's license and reviews online. Never pay the full amount upfront; use milestones for payments. Get multiple quotes and a signed contract before starting work.
- 4. Foreclosure Relief Fraud Scenario: Scammers pose as foreclosure relief specialists, offering to "save your home" by transferring the title to their name temporarily or asking for upfront fees. Example: A man in New York paid \$3,000 to a "specialist" who promised

to negotiate with his lender but instead filed fake bankruptcy papers, worsening his financial situation.

- How to Protect Yourself: Only work with HUDapproved housing counselors for foreclosure assistance. • Avoid anyone asking for fees upfront or guarantees of stopping foreclosure. • Verify claims with your lender directly.
- 5. Overpayment Rental Scam Scenario: You rent out part of your property, and the tenant "accidentally" sends you a check for more than the rent. They ask you to wire back the extra amount, but the original check bounces after you've sent the money. Example: A homeowner in Arizona fell victim to this scam and lost \$2,000 after refunding the overpayment from a fake check.
- How to Protect Yourself: Never accept overpayments or wire money to anyone. Verify funds have cleared before issuing refunds. Use a property management service to vet tenants and handle payments.
- 6. Fake Utility Worker Scam Scenario: Someone posing as a utility worker claims they need access to your home for maintenance or inspections but uses the opportunity to steal valuables. Example: A homeowner in California let a "gas company worker" into her home, only to discover later that her jewelry and cash were missing.
- How to Protect Yourself: Always ask for identification and verify with the utility company before letting anyone in. Call the utility company directly using the number on your bill to confirm their visit. Never let someone in if you feel unsure or pressured.
- 7. Property Tax Scams Scenario: You receive a letter claiming you owe overdue property taxes and must pay immediately to avoid foreclosure. Scammers direct you to send payments to a fraudulent address. Example: A retired couple in Georgia lost \$5,000 after paying a fake tax lien notice.
- How to Protect Yourself: Verify tax bills directly with your local tax office. Avoid paying through unofficial websites or links in emails. Be suspicious of urgent payment demands or threats.

Conclusion: Homeowners face increasingly sophisticated scams that can lead to financial and emotional devastation. By staying vigilant, verifying claims, and consulting professionals when in doubt, you can protect yourself and your most valuable asset. Remember, if something feels too good to be true — or too urgent to be legitimate — take a step back, investigate, and seek advice before acting.





MAR VISTA PARK REPORT

· Jerry Hornof

Mar Vista Recreation Center (MVRC) continues to be a very active and enjoys "go together" space in our community. The park offers a wide variety of programs for all ages. Please visit https://www.laparks.org/reccenter/mar-vista for information on all the opportunities. Of special note, the very popular MVRC Spring Youth Soccer Program registration is now open with league play beginning on March 29th.

The Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks is continuing its survey to gather information to help plan programs that best meet the needs of our community. Please take a moment to complete the survey.



The Park Advisory Board (PAB) has been working to address the tree canopy at the Park. MVRC has suffered a loss of trees due to a variety of causes including wind damage, disease, beetle infestation, and aging. Prior to the pandemic (1st quarter 2021), there was a plan to combat such loss, by planting a wide variety of trees throughout the Park. The initial focus was primarily along the perimeter of the Park but also reviewing the entire canopy. At the time, Los Angeles Recreation and Parks (LARAP) arborists from the Forestry Division had selected the following types of trees for this Project: Torrey Pines, Pink Trumpet trees, Marina Strawberry trees, Coast Live Oaks, Shumard Oaks, and Red Oaks. Such species of trees were selected as suitable replacements to mitigate the loss of trees at MVRC. In addition to tree plantings, the proposed funding provided by LARAP Forestry Division would also have provided for a two-year maintenance program through its licensed landscape contractor. This included monthly, as-needed maintenance, deep water irrigation, weeding, pest abatement, and tree replacement in the event of any tree loss. Unfortunately, the LARAP Forestry Division plan for MVRC was never implemented. Since 2021, MVRC has continued to experience losses in its tree canopy. The PAB is actively engaging with the LARAP Forestry Division Principal Forester to address the canopy issue at the park and get back on track to replenish this environmentally and esthetically important resource.

As always, please enjoy the park and its mission to provide and support vital and enjoyable recreational opportunities in our community.



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