



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Rabbi Richard Litvak fought for the Par 3 affordable housing plan.

RABBI RICK LITVAK: FIGHTING THE AFFORDABLE-HOUSING FIGHT

By **SORAYA GUTIERREZ**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

APTOS— The afternoon sunlight filters through the stained glass in the sanctuary at Temple Beth El, bringing to life the window's colors but a rather dark memory for Rabbi Richard Litvak.

Litvak, the temple's senior rabbi since 1977 and a voice for affordable housing, recalls how the temple's 12 glass panels were created by a local artist who couldn't afford the area's cost of living and ended up moving to Minnesota with her husband.

Litvak is all too familiar with this scenario, having heard simi-

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2006

NEWSMAKERS OF THE YEAR

Another in a series profiling the people behind this year's headlines.

lar stories from hundreds of families who have been priced out of the housing market.

"It reminds us just how unaf-

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Litvak

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fordable housing is for the average person in Santa Cruz County," he said.

This year, Litvak was a key player in the push to build 210 units at the 13-acre Par 3 property, an abandoned golf course off Mar Vista Drive.

The effort sank in the face of community opposition, reminding Litvak and others how difficult it can be to build low-cost housing here.

The housing issue intensified in 2006 because state mandates required county supervisors to set aside land — more than 30 acres — to rezone to affordable housing. Included was acreage off 7th Avenue in Live Oak, off Cunnison Lane in Soquel and off Atkinson Lane outside Watsonville.

Jan Lindenthal of South County Housing, a partner in the failed Par 3 housing project, knows that finding acceptable housing sites is a challenge in this area.

"In Santa Cruz County, it's tough, no question about it," said Lindenthal, who has been involved in several housing projects from Felton to Watsonville.

To associate low-income families with bad neighborhoods, she said, is a common misconception. However, in many cases similar to Par 3, residents said it's not so much affordable housing that they oppose, but the loss of open space and an increase in traffic.

Suzanne Shynne lives in Aptos and was one of nearly 1,500 residents countywide who signed a petition to save the Par 3 land from development.

"We all were concerned with a loss of recreation space," she said.

Residents in the San Lorenzo Valley have also asked county leaders not to build affordable housing projects in their community, citing environmental concerns. In Felton near the Felton Faire Shopping Center, opponents of an up to 62-unit affordable housing project said the homes would not fit with the valley's character.

Richard Litvak

HOME: Aptos.

AGE: 56.

OCCUPATION: Senior rabbi, Temple Beth El, Aptos.

FAMILY: Lives with his wife; has one daughter in L.A., one in Washington, D.C.

IN THE NEWS: Strong voice for developing affordable housing at former golf course.

But after the failure of the Par 3 project, Litvak isn't ready to end his quest. Neither are other religious leaders in the Mid-County area who belong to Communities Organized for Relation Power in Action, or COPA.

"We feel our efforts to raise the issue and need for affordable housing have really been successful," said Litvak, known to many as "Rabbi Rick."

Residents who favored a park on the Par 3 site were given two years by county supervisors to raise the funds to buy Par 3 and keep it as open space. But COPA is not about to watch from the sidelines.

Affordable housing, Litvak said, is a topic that COPA will continue to press to the public and the Board of Supervisors.

But Supervisor Ellen Pirie, whose district includes Aptos, insists the community doesn't want to see the unusually large, flat parcel be developed for housing.

"It was less an opposition to affordable housing than it was a desire to retain it as a recreational asset," she said.

Large housing developments don't belong in Aptos, neighbors told county supervisors, where traffic is abundant and resources are not.

According to the county planning director, what's likely to happen next is for a new housing development proposal to surface.

"It wouldn't surprise me at all to see a new proposal in the next six months," said Tom Burns, who has estimated the Par 3 price tag at \$10 million. "(Developer) Brad Bowman is still in the picture."

Bowman, with First Federal Properties in San Jose, holds

an option on the property, and could still present plans to build hundreds of apartments, Burns said. While the land is zoned for parks and recreation, a rezoning request and general plan amendment could change that.

"I don't think it's over," Burns said. "Anything is possible."

In Aptos, where the median price of a home tops \$700,000, South County Housing is moving ahead with another housing project in the Seacliff area. The Gilroy-based nonprofit developer had partnered with Standard Pacific Homes of San Jose to build a mix of market-rate and affordable units at the Par 3 site. While Peter Dunne of Standard Pacific pulled out of the deal in May to the delight of park proponents, South County Housing completed a 39-unit affordable housing complex in Seacliff.

The project is a small step forward, Lindenthal said, "But to those 39 families, it's huge."

That's what fuels Rabbi Rick, who views affordable housing as a "moral and civic" duty.

The new Seacliff homes show what "affordable housing" is, and Litvak looks forward to the day similar developments are built throughout the county.

"We still believe that affordable housing will be built on the Par 3 property," he said.

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Bio L

Gene Lewis, musician, teacher, dies

by WALLACE BAINE
Sentinel arts writer

SANTA CRUZ — Gene Lewis, a pillar of the Santa Cruz arts community, died Sunday at his home after a long bout with cancer. He turned 60 in January.

Lewis was a musician, composer, singer and teacher of unique talent. His passions ranged from renaissance folk music to piano jazz to opera and he shared those passions with countless students and colleagues.

"I used to call him Mr. Music," said close friend Miriam Ellis, who worked



Lewis

with Lewis in the Santa Cruz Opera Society. "He was just so eclectic and talented."

Lewis was a central figure in countless Santa Cruz musical organizations. With Philip Collins, he co-founded New Music Works, the cutting-edge group devoted to supporting contemporary composers.

He formed the Renaissance Singers and was an integral part of the Santa Cruz Chorale. He wrote music and performed with Shakespeare Santa Cruz and the Dickens Players at UC Santa Cruz.

He also was a vital contributor to the Santa Cruz Chamber Players and the Santa Cruz Opera Society. In the late 1970s, he was a fixture as a pianist at Pearl Alley Bistro and at lunch time folk/classical jams at the Main Library.

He was trained in math at Oxford University and was a teacher of significant standing in Santa Cruz County,

having taught students in jazz, classical and other idioms at Gateway School and Georgiana Kirby School and in private practice.

"He was an absolute gem," said Dave Dorfan, whose 12-year-old son Ben was one of Lewis's students. "The things he taught my son were just immeasurable."

Lewis was diagnosed last July with a rare and deadly form of cancer that attacked the lining of his red-blood cells. He kept up his hectic teaching schedule and was composing music to the end, said Ellis. Several benefit events were organized to help Lewis and his wife, Julia, offset the costs of his treatment.

Lewis made a list of those who helped him by either donating money or helping him in his day-to-day living, said Ellis. "It's about 14 pages long single-spaced. The number of people he touched in this community is just as-

tounding."

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"He was really this kind of angelic person," said Kate Hawley, actress and playwright who worked and traveled with Lewis in the Dickens Players. "There was this kind of sweetness to him that was just second-nature."

With the Dickens Players, a UCSC-based group that explored the legacy of Charles Dickens on stage, Lewis was in charge of finding English folk songs that fit the demands of the narrative. At Shakespeare Santa Cruz, he composed award-winning works. At the Santa Cruz Opera Society, he sang tenor and toured nursing homes and elder-care facilities performing arias. He recorded improv jazz piano. His best instruments were piano, flute and lute.

"He had such a curious mind," said Ellis. "He was very learned and erudite, just so curious about the world."

Arrangements are pending.