

How a parcourse ran afoul of neighbors, the county

By GUY LASNIER
STAFF WRITER

Out in La Selva Beach, between two rutted dirt roads, there's a narrow little strip of land that's a park of sorts. Since 1959, when the community's recreation district took over the island between Asta Drive and Arbolado Drive, the trees grew, the weeds grew, and the poison oak grew. To most neighborhood residents that was just fine; it's the only kind of growth they wanted.

Then in July, the La Selva Beach Recreation District began installing a parcourse on the island, and its directors haven't had much rest since. Not only are the neighbors up in arms, but the district now finds itself embroiled in a costly permit hassle with the county.

"It's become a civil war," one county staffer said.

For the uninitiated, a parcourse consists of a series of stations where a jogger can stop and perform an exercise — pull-ups, push-ups, side steps etc. — then move on to the next stop. The course is designed to test most muscles in the body, as well as providing aerobic benefit.

"I don't mind the construction so much — it's those signs," said Stella Knouse, a retired school principal and resident of 26 Arbolado Drive for 10 years.

Agrees her neighbor, June Sanders, of 5 Asta Drive: "The signs are really horrible."

Art Case, who lives around the corner on Mar Monte Avenue, compares the signs to the old Burma Shave advertisements that lined America's highways of yesteryear.

The 20-stop and 20-plus-sign La Selva Beach parcourse was installed along the edge of the island by young people from the Youth Employment Service

program. The multicolor signs with the Wells Fargo Bank logo explain what you do with the weird looking contraptions at each stop.

The course stands half-finished now as the rec district seeks a use permit to complete it, a process that's likely to cost close to \$2,000.

But, what's worse, in the minds of many, is that the parcourse got started in the first place.

And that troubles La Selva Beach Recreation District chairman Linda Bourgaize.

"We were happy and proud of ourselves," Bourgaize said. "We felt for a minimal outlay we got a terrific thing. Now I'm real sad."

After controlling the wooded strip of land for 26 years, rec district officials wanted to put it to use in a way "least intrusive to the land," Bourgaize said. District taxpayers pay for what little upkeep there is, although a few years ago they spent \$14,000 to cut down some dangerous trees.

The district directors felt there was a need to expand recreational services, and a jogging course seemed like a good idea, she said.

Another district director, Pete Stanger, agreed. Last Thursday night, at a town hall meeting called by Supervisor Robley Levy (who lives at 27 Asta Drive, right by parcourse

station 11), he said that a parcourse seemed appropriate for an age group not well served by the district.

The kids have a playground and the older people have the clubhouse for events, Stanger said, but there's not much for residents in their 20s and 30s, like himself, who like to run and exercise.

Several residents came to that meeting to voice their displeasure over the course.

Levy suggested several times when the subject came up that people take their parcourse concerns to the next rec district meeting Sept. 10, and to the county when a public hearing is held on the use permit.

Bourgaize said in an interview that the board of directors first planned to spend about \$700 for a bare-bones kit containing build-it-yourself parcourse stations. Then, the volunteer firemen kicked in \$3,000 raised from their dances and pancake breakfasts. And one of the other directors knew of a program Wells Fargo Bank offers where it matches 50-50 money raised by local groups for a parcourse.

The district got hold of a county parks department employee who drew up plans in

his off time and the La Selva Beach Recreation District had itself a \$9,200 kit of lumber, signs and exercise contraptions paid for mostly by others. Then, with the teenagers' labor from summer employment program, at no cost to the district, it seemed that the course was all set to go.

But someone forgot to tell the residents along Asta and Arbolado drives. They found out soon enough and showed up at the monthly rec district meeting Aug. 6, not at all happy.

Having already made some phone calls, some of the opponents discovered that the district needed a use permit to erect the parcourse, which brought construction to a halt.

"We had absolutely zero idea we had to have any kind of permit," Bourgaize said. "We never dreamed of it."

Stanger said that since a county parks employee drew the plans and there was no plumbing and no electrical work, the thought of a permit never came up.

They do need a permit — a level 5 permit to be exact, which means a public hearing before the zoning administrator. The district must hire someone to draw up the formal application, which will then be assigned to a county planner, who will write a staff report prior to the hearing.

Here's an estimate of what it will cost:

- \$310 for a review;
- \$345 for a coastal permit (the site is in the coastal zone);
- \$465 for a commercial development permit (anything not residential is commercial development in the eyes of the county planning department);
- \$445 for an environmental review;
- \$205 for an erosion control pre-site review.

That adds up to \$1,770 — not counting the cost of hiring someone to make the application. A bureaucratic parcourse of its own, you might say.

And the extra expense is a problem to the district, which had hoped to use most of its \$33,000 budget to remodel the La Selva Beach Clubhouse this year, Bourgaize said.

Knouse, who keeps a tally of who uses the course as she gardens near the apex of Asta and Arbolado, said, "the main thing we objected to is they put it in and didn't tell anybody."

Only two men used it Friday, she said, and they didn't even do any of the exercises. They just jogged around, which they could have done even before the course was put in.

Case, who comes down with his dog from his Mar Monte Avenue home, suggested that benches and hammocks might make a better course — at least for the retired folks.

Perhaps Pat DeSimone, a La Selva Beach fire captain, summed it up best: "Seems like no matter what you do on that strip it's the wrong thing."

Signs of controversy



The La Selva parcourse — Does it look like the Burma Shave signs of yesteryear?