

# LIVE OAK LOCA: a group spawned by disaster

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**A**LTHOUGH only two years old, LOCA has galvanized support from the "mavericks" who live in Live Oak — as founding father Carl Johns calls them. It now boasts about 100 members who pony up \$5 annually for membership fees.

LOCA rose out of the floodwaters of the 1982 winter storm, when rain swept over a poorly designed drainage system and caused \$250,000 in damage to homes along 15th and 16th avenues, Rodriguez and Webster streets and Capitola Road.

One of the affected homeowners was Johns, whose neighbor had been on the county's back for eight years, trying to get the drainage system fixed. Throughout those years, the county had collected fees for a new storm-drain system, he said.

What bothered Johns was that nothing had been done to fix the problem. Live Oak was a disaster waiting to happen when the 1982 100-year storm hit.

As the floodwaters receded, Johns "found an awful lot of people who were milling around and upset."

The time was ripe for organizing.

Johns called a meeting and "over 100 people attended, which was unheard of in Live Oak," he said. Many months later,

after press and public pressure, the drainage system was improved.

"We had to be tenacious," recalled Johns.

If anything, the struggle in the midst of a crisis taught Johns that Live Oak needed a group.

"How the hell will a community survive without an organization?" he wondered. "The politicians will take the course of least resistance. If this had happened in Aptos, those folks would have been screaming."

LOCA members eschew the label "political." Said Johns, "We were accused of being a selfish, property-owners' or-

ganization in the beginning. But we are not that. We try for a true cross-section of citizens from Live Oak.

"We are very careful to deal with issues only. The fallout is that we do get political," said Johns. "The politicians who support us, we support. We came into a lot of flak with (Supervisor) Gary Patton on affordable housing."

Live Oak, said Johns, "should take its fair share of affordable housing — no more, no less. But we could see a profound effect on our neighborhoods. There was more high-density housing than any other area of the county, yet no library and no street improvements."

"We are basically an information group for the community," said Johns. "When somebody has a problem — an injustice — we like them to come to us, and we review it with them."

LOCA members come from all political stripes, all walks of life. There are lawyers, civil engineers, housewives, retirees, government employees and police.

"By not using words like liberal or conservative, we've brought a wide group together," said Johns. "Almost everything we've decided has been on a unanimous vote."