

BLOG P.

# Nick Pagnini: Mister Felton

By MARDI BROWNING-DOUGLASS  
 Sentinel correspondent

**H**E'S A grocery store owner, a fire captain and football coach. It might seem that Nick Pagnini couldn't make up his mind what to be when he grew up; but five minutes with the man will convince anyone that one thing Pagnini knows is his own mind.

He's lived in Felton nearly all his life, with a few years out for college, a stint working at Disneyland, and time in the Marine Corps. He graduated from Santa Cruz High in 1954, and when he left the Marines he returned home to work for his dad, Roy of Roy's Market in Felton.

Pagnini now owns the market, established by his father in 1934. He also coaches 35 freshman football players at San Lorenzo Valley High, leading them to an undefeated season, and is a captain of the Zayante Fire District.

"I feel like I should say Nick who?" says Beverly, his wife of 30 years, laughing. "I don't get to see him much — in the mornings to say goodbye, sometimes at lunchtime, occasionally in the evening ..."

Beverly and Nick are birds of a feather, though. She's involved with SLV High as secretary of the Cougar Club and assists with the Cougar News monthly newsletter.

"I have my own interests, too," Beverly said. "If I didn't keep busy, I would have gone cuckoo over the years."

Her husband said the changes in San Lorenzo Valley have been gradual but dramatic, considering its transformation from a summer resort area to a year-round community.

"When I was a kid, it was such a quiet place," Pagnini reminisced. "Ben Lomond had a couple of buildings but Boulder Creek was the bigger town, and Felton was a summer resort."

"Your business would go up about 50 percent in the summer, but right after Labor Day you could shoot a cannon down the street without hitting anyone, it was so quiet," he said.

Pagnini said the area's change

to a bedroom community for San Jose and the Silicon Valley doesn't bother him a bit.

"To me, whether it's somebody who's lived here for 50 years or somebody who's been here just one year, as long as they contribute to the community, what's the difference?"

Pagnini's love of the community is what keeps him so busy; he has been firefighting about 11 years now. His work with Zayante Fire often calls him away from the store or coaching.

"You have to help your community in any way you can," Pagnini said.

"You either do it or you're not really part of your community."

Rose Kelly has been working at Roy's Market for almost 31 years

and has known Nick equally as long. She started out working for his dad, and said that the main difference between the two is Nick's sense of humor.

"His dad was much more serious, he was from the old time," Kelly said. "Nick is from the new time — he's very easy to work for, he's a real cinch!"

Kelly said Pagnini has donated to just about every charity imaginable, and that generosity falls right in line with his feelings about community service.

"He's donated to every organization that you can think of — churches, disasters, whatever, Nick is right there, always," Kelly said. "He's a very giving person, he's never refused anybody."

Pagnini is definitely part of the

landscape in Felton.

"On a typical day, I come in early and get things done in the store, grab a bite to eat, go up and coach, then come back to work and hopefully no fire calls will come in, but it happens."

Pagnini gets called to structure fires, propane tank leaks, all kinds of calls including earthquake disasters, he said. Last week the district held a debriefing session for the firefighters and their families to deal with post-disaster stress.

"What happens when you work for an emergency service is you actually have some of the pressure taken off, because you're involved in dealing with the emergency itself," Pagnini said, adding that his family bore the brunt of

the disaster during the quake and its immediate aftermath.

"Actually it wasn't the quake so much as the aftershocks," Beverly said. "I didn't panic or anything, I just got really mad when they kept happening."

Pagnini said, "Basically, I was gone for a week. But you wouldn't believe the people that I'd known for years, all came in to help. They're the ones who carried the load — I was busy carrying somebody else's load."

Pagnini's home wasn't structurally damaged in the quake, but the chimney was damaged and the interior was a shambles from broken crystal and keepsakes. He was at the firehouse when the quake hit, having been paged just moments earlier.

"I had just opened the doors and I thought, 'Oh, an earthquake,' but then it kept going, and the engines started jumping around inside the bay, and I said 'I gotta get out of here!' It was just like a dream, when you're trying to run over uneven ground."

In the days that followed, Pagnini said the Zayante Firehouse and Community Center became a virtual K Mart of needed items like Coleman stoves and flashlights, as well as home for between 20 and 30 families for a few days.

"All of a sudden the things we read in those little emergency booklets were coming true," Pagnini said. During the storm and slides in 1982 and '83 that left many Lompico and Zayante residents homeless, Pagnini was a key figure in rescue operations.

His dream for the San Lorenzo Valley is to bring the valley towns together as a stronger political entity.

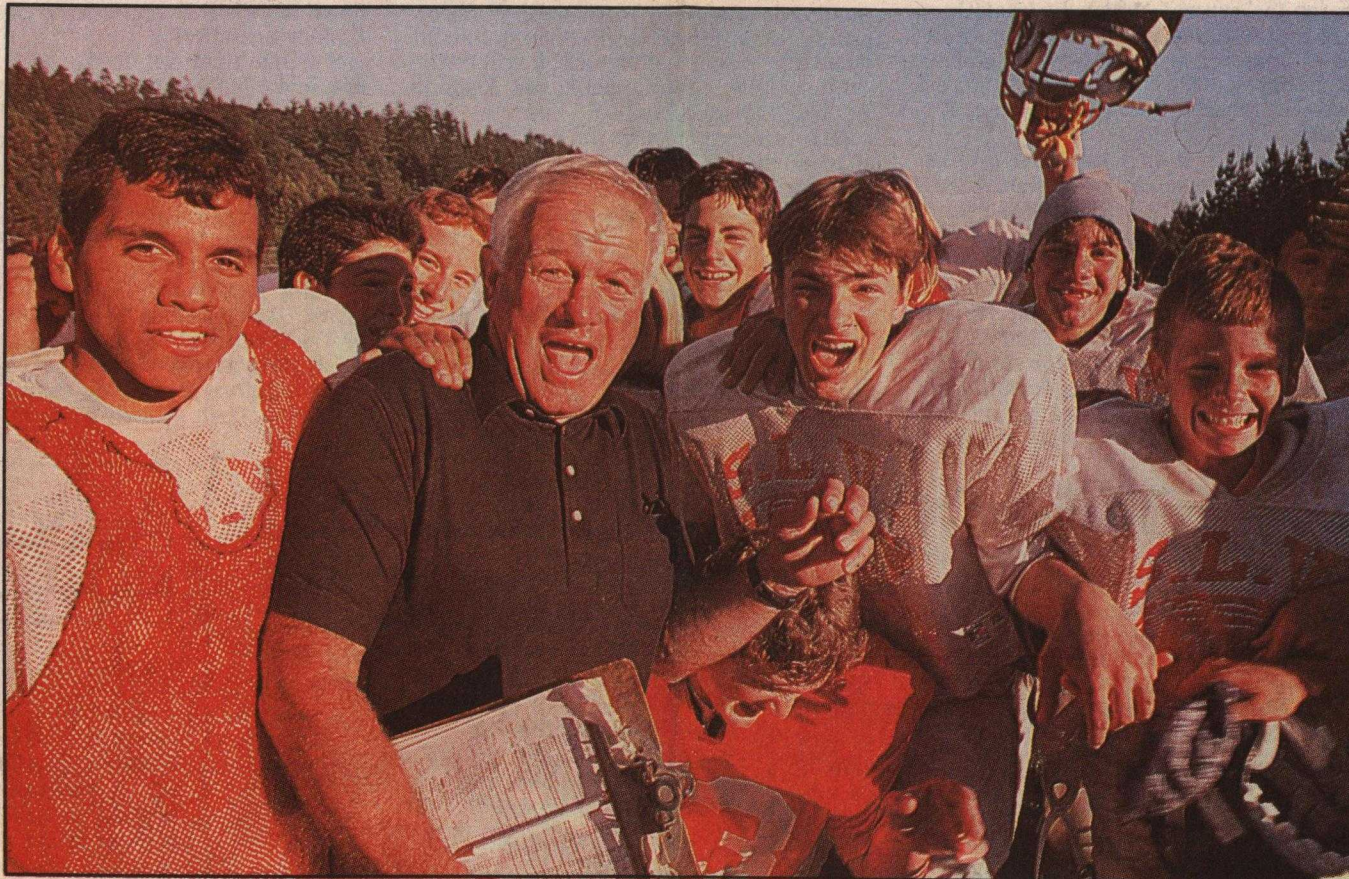
"I've always been wanting to see a valleywide incorporation," Pagnini said. "All the valley towns from rim to rim would come together. Right now we're kind of dictated to by supervisors from Watsonville or Santa Cruz."

Pagnini said the valley used to be pretty much left to its own, but now the surrounding cities are becoming more invasive.

"The unincorporated areas were much stronger in the past because city areas were tighter, but now they're wanting to expand — Scotts Valley pokes its nose over here occasionally, mostly because they want our water. If the three towns would get together they would make a strong union," he said, but he doesn't expect to see that happen in his lifetime.

Earthquakes, storms, slides and politics notwithstanding, Pagnini's staying put. He loves his community, especially the weather.

"Every morning when you get up in Felton it's nice," he said. "We're away from the fog and the smog, and we have real seasons here — I love fall and spring, winter and summer. It's always something different."



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Enthusiasm follows fire captain Nick Pagnini, especially on the football field as he coaches the Cougars.