

# COASTSIDE

Tiny Treks  
makes  
huge  
impact

## Neighborhoods

A guide to the places  
we call home on the coast







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*Sequoia Novak found splashing in a puddle to be a bit more entertaining than the birdhouse activity.*

*Photo by Ashton J. Hacke/Coastside News*

*Left: Miramar*

*Photo by Ashton J. Hacke/Coastside News*

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## Feels like home

Neighborhoods have been on my mind a lot lately—especially with my older sister just buying a house in El Granada. As she and her family settle in, I can't help but watch my niece light up as she starts kindergarten at El Granada Elementary. Her excitement has me thinking about what truly makes a neighborhood feel like home. Even though my sister and I grew up in Half Moon Bay, seeing them put down roots just a few miles away reminds me that there's always something new to discover here on the coast. We all share this beautiful stretch of shoreline, but each neighborhood has its own distinct character, offering fresh perspectives and a sense of place all its own.

Just last week, Ashton J. Hacke—one of our writers and photographers who also grew up here—asked me, “If you could recommend one spot to someone who just moved here, what would you say?” Honestly, it's a tough call! The coast is packed with so many great places to explore. It's part of what makes this area so special. This issue of Coastside Magazine is all about those connections, whether you've lived here forever or just moved in.

What's new this month? We're thrilled to welcome Jay Crawford, a new historical flashback contributor from the Pacifica Historical Society. In this edition, Crawford dives into Pacifica's past through the eyes of Santa and one of his elves—yes, you read that right. Meanwhile, local meteorologist and photographer Jan Null shares tips on capturing the elusive green flash at sunset. If you've ever wanted to see it for yourself, his column will definitely inspire you.

This month, Editor Peter Tokofsky caught up with Pacifica Planning Commissioner Samantha Hauser to talk about neighborhoods. With her background, she's uniquely qualified to explore the many meanings of the word. In their conversation, she shares her perspective on what makes a neighborhood truly functional and welcoming.

We're also spotlighting Pedro Point, one of Pacifica's unique neighborhoods, with a story by Kathryn Wheeler, who recently joined our staff full time. She highlights the area's stunning views, quirky charm and most importantly, its tight-knit community. The 80-year-old Pedro Point firehouse, a beloved community hub, needs some major repairs but the neighborhood's commitment to preserving it shows just how special this place is.

As for me, I had the chance to chat with Clemens Heldmaier, general manager of the Montara Water and Sanitary District, about their new composting program. Thanks to a CalRecycle grant, MWSD is distributing composting pails to residents, making it easier to keep organic waste out of landfills. Sustainability starts small, and it's exciting to see programs like this gaining traction on the Coastside. Hacke and I also had the chance to visit a Tiny Treks class at Quarry Park, which was, to put it simply, adorable, as you can probably tell from the photo on this issue's cover.

Whether you're exploring a new neighborhood, rediscovering familiar streets or simply passing through, I hope these stories spark fresh discoveries, rekindle old memories and remind you just how welcoming our coastal home can be. **COASTSIDE**



*Emma Spaeth is the Publisher of Coastside News: Half Moon Bay Review, Pacifica Tribune, Coastside Guide and Coastside Magazine*



*The Pedro Point Firehouse needed some paint and repairs even before dry rot was discovered beneath the siding. Photo courtesy Danny Estrella*



*Repairs are underway on the firehouse, Pedro Point's gathering place. Emich and Estrella are confident funds will be raised to pay the bill. Photo courtesy Danny Estrella*



# PEDRO POINT REACHES A TURNING POINT

A community rallies to save its gathering place

When Danny Estrella moved to Pacifica's Pedro Point, he knew he had found gold. On his morning jaunts to town, down the neighborhood's winding streets, he would get stopped by nearly a dozen neighbors who wanted to know his name and his story. In short order, he came to know many of those residing in the neighborhood, which now features approximately 200 single and multi-family homes built into the hillside surrounded by ocean and mountain views and abutting the Pedro Point Headlands, a 255-acre preserve.

There's a unique charm here, said Gary Emich, who is a long-time resident of Pedro Point, and friend of Estrella. In "34 years I've never once taken that view for granted," referring to the mountains he sees out the window at his home. Pedro Point became a haven for Emich during his years of commuting to San Francisco for his high-level position with the postal service. "As I came over the mountain and down here I could leave all that crap behind," Emich said. Pedro Point "would always be waiting."

Pedro Point is "free of the trappings of urbanity," said Estrella, who moved to the neighborhood for access to surfing. He initially lived in a rented house with multiple roommates before he and his wife bought their own house 30 years ago. Unlike San Francisco, his birthplace, a strong sense of small-town community still prevails in the neighborhood. "This is my family," Estrella said of his neighbors, with tears in his eyes. Pedro Point is "the center of the universe, it's the happy place."

Once a haven for vacationers from San Francisco, Pedro Point, an outcropping of land nestled above Shelter Cove Beach on the southwestern edge of Pacifica, gradually became a year-round community when Pacifica was incorporated in 1957.

Estrella describes the community as one that welcomes even those

*Left: Gary Emich, left, and Danny Estrella look up at the construction work being done on their beloved firehouse.*



*A view looking south from Linda Mar Beach to Pedro Point*

beyond the neighborhood's boundaries and invites them to share their community events. "It's very loose and very open," he said. "It extends to almost anybody on the face of the earth, it's not circumscribed by a specific geographical boundary."

A quarter of a century before Pacifica's incorporation, the residents of Pedro Point formed the Pedro Valley Improvement Association, today known as the Pedro Point Community Association. The group created a self-sufficient community, said Estrella. Residents began pooling money to bring sewer, water, paved streets and improvements to the once shabby, improvised neighborhood.

What has defined the community over time, the two men said, is a deep and shared love for preserving the character of the neighborhood, which includes actively engaging with neighbors in formal gatherings and acts of kindness. "We are close-knit and bound by our common interests," said Estrella, of which the environment and nature are foremost.

As a result of its desirable location, the median home price in Pedro Point at the end of 2023 was nearly \$2 million, according to real estate website Redfin. The neighborhood has become even more close-knit in its fight against developers, who Estrella says want to destroy the quirky nature of Pedro Point by building modern high-density developments uncharacteristic of the current homes that are varied in color and nestled into the hillsides.

As a unified front, the men said the community feels equipped to win its fight to preserve Pedro Point. We have "smart people who can deal with the legality," and contribute financially when issues arise, said Estrella, even if that means residents contributing ample unpaid time to maintain the community.

In 2020, residents fought developers who wanted to build a three-story building in the neighborhood. Residents reached a compromise requiring the developers to revise their plans and instead construct a two-story building, with four instead of six condos, and 12 parking spaces instead of 20.

Now, Estrella said, they are up against one of their biggest challenges, this time coming from within the walls of the community's crown jewel.

At the heart of Pedro Point, said Emich, treasurer of the PPCA, is



*Top: Estrella is all smiles outside of one of the firehouse's walls that hasn't been ripped open.*

*Bottom: Gary Emich inside the firehouse.*

the firehouse. Nearly 80 years old, the quaint firehouse, with a small stage for performances, a kitchen and an outdoor playground has been the gathering place for Pedro Point residents since its inception. According to history given on PPCA's website ([pedropoint.org](http://pedropoint.org)), the firehouse was built by hand by 32 members of the original neighborhood association. It was funded by \$700 pooled by the neighborhood to construct what would become a social hall and home for the neighborhood's one firetruck.

The firehouse, with exposed beams and a display of historical memorabilia, still hosts more than 20 community events a month, according to Estrella, who was recruited to the 12-person board of the PPCA nearly

30 years ago and has served as president, vice president and secretary. Now he manages everything from the logistics of movie and pub nights to weddings and birthday parties that take place at the firehouse nearly every weekend, as well as the community's beloved monthly potlucks.

While the Pedro Point community was once composed of working class fisherman and vacationers, it now is made up largely of older residents who have called the neighborhood home for decades. Estrella said, however, that he has seen more and more young families move in since Covid. Newbies tend to have deeper pockets than those who settled here when he did as a surfer in a shared home, he added.

Even as the population changes, both Emich and Estrella maintain that the sense of community has remained the same. "I'm encouraged," Estrella said. At "our potlucks I'm seeing more and more people coming, and that's really good." Young families continue to bring their kids to movie nights regularly, Estrella said. "I give them a lot of credit for wanting to be a part of the community."

But whether this idyllic sense of community can last depends on whether the aging firehouse can stay standing. The firehouse's exterior siding is shedding and its roof desperately needs new shingles. In past weeks, a whole new can of worms was opened when contractors discovered dry rot beneath portions of the siding.

Emich said that the discovery of the dry rot was a major blow to the association, whose members had saved up for, and expected, a refreshed building in just a few weeks time. Emich and Estrella expect the repairs to cost north of \$35,000, money they don't have. Funding these essential projects means "We'd have to have a lot of rentals and a lot of community support," said Emich, adding that its charm has been its downfall over time. "Being literally mere steps away from the Pacifica State Beach it's taken its share of beating from Mother Ocean," Emich said. "For the past several years it has looked disheveled and dingy."

Construction has begun on the siding, funded through community support and the association's rainy day fund, which is sustained through private events. But these events, and the funding they provide, are currently on hold due to the construction.

Nonetheless, both Estrella and Emich remain hopeful that the money will be found, and the community will persist, just as it has for decades.

"We're a very active community," said Estrella. "We will find a way."

**COASTSIDE**