

CHOMP, Blue Shield trade accusations over health care \$\$\$

By CHRIS COUNTS

WHILE PRESIDENT Barack Obama, Congress and the health care industry haggle over how to provide medical coverage for every American without bankrupting the country, a war of words between Blue Shield of California and Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula has brought

the contentious debate to our own backyard.

The debate started when Laura Zehm, chief financial officer at CHOMP, submitted a letter to the Monterey County Herald, which was published in its May 24 edition.

In the letter, Zehm offered an explanation for why CHOMP's physicians do not treat patients with Blue Shield at the prices Blue Shield is willing to pay — which often means patients end up being stuck with a hefty portion of

their medical bills. According to Zehm, it's because Blue Shield offers "unacceptably low reimbursement rates."

The way Zehm sees it, Blue Shield's policies are costing its customers money.

"What this means for you, our community, is that when

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Bach Fest launches search for new conductor

■ Bruno Weil's finale will be 2010

By PAUL MILLER

AFTER 19 years as the music director of the Carmel Bach Festival, Bruno Weil will call it quits next summer, the festival announced Thursday.

Longtime concertmaster Elizabeth Wallfisch will also be leaving the festival next year, she told The Pine Cone.

From his home in Augsburg, Germany, Weil said he wanted to retire from the Bach Festival while it was at its artistic peak.

"You should resign when you've just won the World Series, not when somebody wants to get rid of you," Weil said.

At home in London, Wallfisch expressed a similar sentiment. "Every year we've had truly great performances, and the bar always got higher," Wallfisch said. "But there comes a point when you just have to hand something along."

Missing out on holidays

Both artists will be traveling to Carmel next week for this year's festival, which begins July 17 with a performance of Haydn's "The Creation."

Wallfisch, who joined the Bach Festival in 1993, said the trials of being on the road five weeks every summer were a consideration for her, but so was the end of her longstanding partnership with Weil at the Carmel event. "The hardest thing for me was to be away from my family every summer," she said. "But Bruno's my best friend in the world as far as music goes. I cannot work without him."

In August 2003, during the opening season at the



PHOTO/PAUL MILLER

Six years ago, conductor Bruno Weil (right) and concertmaster Elizabeth Wallfisch (center) signed new contracts with the Bach Festival. With those contracts ending, both musicians decided to leave the festival next year.

renovated Sunset Center, Weil and Wallfisch signed new contracts to continue their leadership roles in the Bach Fest. But with those contracts coming to an end, Weil said it was time for him to pass the baton.

"Of course, it is not easy, because I love the festival and Carmel so much," said Weil, who is 59 years old. "But a new generation must take on the challenge of

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FEDERAL JUDGE MAY ORDER RATIONING

■ Sierra Club lawsuit seeks 35 percent cutback to protect fish

By KELLY NIX

THE CARMEL River's population of steelhead trout is in danger of disappearing and only drastic measures can save it, according to a lawyer for the Sierra Club in San Francisco.

And that's why the group says it filed a lawsuit June 25 in U.S. District Court against California American Water seeking an immediate 35 percent cutback in the company's pumping from the Carmel River. An initial hearing on the suit is scheduled for Aug. 14 in San Jose.

The case has been assigned to Judge Jeremy Fogel, who was appointed to the federal bench by President Bill Clinton and is a former appointee of Governor Jerry Brown to state court.

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Beach commission won't recommend fire ban

By HANNAH MILLER

AFTER HEARING pleas from nearly two dozen residents who cherish the tradition of building bonfires on the town's main beach, and only a few who don't, the Carmel Beach and Forestry Commission decided Thursday afternoon to recommend the planning commission continue to allow beach fires, while increasing public education and awareness about the right way to build a fire and where it's permissible to do it.

"I really like going to the beach and having bonfires, and I think that if

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Military academies welcome Peninsula grads



Grant Randall, shown here graduating from P.G. High in June, is off to the Merchant Marine Academy next week — one of eight Peninsula teens accepted to service academies this year.

By KELLY NIX

BEGINNING NEXT week, the life of Pacific Grove High School graduate Grant Randall — just a few days after he turns 18 — will be distinctly different.

That's because Randall will be off to Kings Point, New York, to embark on a four-year stint as a midshipman at the elite United States Merchant Marine Academy, one of the nation's five service academies.

"I am thinking about being a cruise ship captain," Randall told The Pine Cone. "That is one of the main reasons I chose the Merchant Marine Academy."

Opened in 1943, the Merchant Marine Academy, located in Eastern Long Island, emphasizes in maritime and naval specialties. Midshipmen are trained in marine engineering, navigation, ship administration and other maritime-related subjects.

Graduates from the academy have the option of serving on U.S. flagged merchant vessels, working as civilians in the maritime industry or serving as active duty officers in

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Dogs prohibited in Hatton Canyon — and this time it's not temporary

By CHRIS COUNTS

A DECISION last week by the Transportation Agency for Monterey County not to pave the northernmost 1.2 miles of the Carmel Hill and River Trail could spell doom for residents who want to

walk their dogs in Hatton Canyon.

Residents once walked their dogs along an old dirt access road in the canyon, but in March, the California Department of Parks and Recreation posted signs prohibiting dogs

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Bixby Bridge for sale, asking \$64,000



Builder, heavy equipment operator and artist Michael Miller has a bridge he'd like to sell you. And he's not kidding. See story page 13A.