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Board OKs first phase of Mission preservation

By MARY BROWNFIELD

INITIAL STEPS to preserve the Carmel Mission and make it earthquake-resistant received a unanimous thumbs-up from the city's historic resources board Monday afternoon.

Funded by the Carmel Mission Foundation — which is not affiliated with the Catholic Diocese — the work will mostly focus on the Basilica, which was built in 1771 and is one of the most important historic structures in the state.

Father Junipero Serra, who founded the string of missions that led to European settlement of California, is buried there.

According to the report presented by planning and building services manager Sean Conroy at the Oct. 18 HRB meeting, the first phase calls for removing the roof to insert reinforcing materials in the walls, repairing or replacing deteriorated siding and roofing materials, and upgrading mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems.

A saint's birthday

It also includes replacing the deteriorating gated entry arch with a lightweight material that's similar in appearance, building new ADA-compliant restrooms at the rear of the Basilica and upgrading the existing bathroom at the Downie Museum, installing a memorial plaque wall in the courtyard to honor project donors and Serra's 300th birthday, and improving

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PHOTO/CHRIS COUNTS

This deteriorating arch at Carmel Mission will be replaced, according to plans approved by the historic resources board.

P.B. Co. seeks permits for homes, hotel rooms

■ First public hearing could be in December

By KELLY NIX

MORE THAN three years after the California Coastal Commission rejected the Pebble Beach Company's plan for a new golf course and other development in Del Monte Forest, a scaled-down version of the project has undergone its first review by a team of county planners.

The new plan includes a 100-room hotel adjacent to the Spyglass Hill Golf Course, up to 80 new hotel rooms at The Lodge and 60 at the Inn at Spanish Bay, and 90 single-family homes, but no golf course. It also calls for "preservation and protection" of more than 635 acres of forested open space, including large stands of native Monterey pines.

The P.B. Co. submitted the project application to county planners on Aug. 31. Story poles have also gone up at several sites.

"We filed an application to initiate the approval process based on the agreement we reached with the coastal commission staff," said P.B. Co. executive vice president Mark Stilwell. "We spent a lot of

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PUC judge says, 'Build the desal plant'

By KELLY NIX

A STATE official Thursday approved a regional water project for the Monterey Peninsula that would replace water drawn from the Carmel River, but capped the cost of building the new water project that can be passed on to ratepayers at \$275 million.

Administrative Law Judge Angela Minkin's 226-page proposed decision — accompanied in a lengthy document by California Public Utilities Commissioner John Bohn's proposed alternate decision — is a major step in a long-sought alternative to pumping from the overdrafted Carmel River.

"We are pleased Judge Minkin's decision has been released, because this is a major milestone of our project," Cal Am spokeswoman Catherine Bowie told The Pine Cone Thursday afternoon.

The regional water project, which includes a 10 million-gallon-

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ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT PRISONERS COST MILLIONS

By KELLY NIX

IT COSTS Monterey County taxpayers more than \$3 million each year to lock up undocumented immigrants in the county jail, according to data provided by the sheriff's office.

The Monterey County Jail houses an average of 131 inmates per day who are suspected of being in the country illegally. The numbers of those inmates — booked on a variety of minor and major crimes — fluctuates.

But data provided to The Pine Cone this week indicate it costs county taxpayers an estimated \$10,000 per day — or \$3.7 million per year — to incarcerate undocumented immigrants.

"Housing illegal immigrants is simply something that can't be avoided," said Monterey County Sheriff's Cmdr. Mike Richards.

Food, medical treatment, employee costs and a variety of other expenses are factored into holding an

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'The chief thought it was mind boggling that people from California would do this'

■ Peninsula residents join international effort to rescue fistula women

By PAUL MILLER

IN 2007, during a trip to the impoverished, landlocked African nation of Niger, Pebble Beach resident Rita Steele had a chance encounter that changed her life and set her on a personal journey to help relieve the misery of a medical condition afflicting millions of women and teenage girls in Sub-Saharan Africa.

"We were in Niger to set up 'microcredit' programs to facilitate economic growth in rural areas," Steele recalled. "And then I saw all these women living in shacks by the side of the road."

When she asked who they were, she was told they were shunned and forced to live on their own because they have obstetric fistulas, which are practically unknown in the West but leave millions of young mothers in undeveloped parts of the world in lifelong misery.

"They marry when the girls' bodies aren't finished growing," Steele said. And, with no access to a doctor or hospital, many of these

girls have great difficulty delivering babies through their immature pelvises — a heart-breaking situation that goes on for days and often results in death for mother and baby. But if she is lucky enough to live through it, the mother's childbirth agony can be compounded when her organs rupture, allowing urine or feces to leak into her vagina.

"It's something that's completely preventable and usually also curable with a \$450 surgery," Steele said. But in a culture that has little medical knowledge, not to mention doctors or hospitals, the women are simply left untreated. Soon, they start to stink and develop sores and are cast out by their families.

"It's one of the most horrible things I've ever seen," Steele said. "And there

Rita (third from left) and Shelby Steele (second from left) meeting with Amiru Kassum of Goruol (holding walking stick) during a pilot fistula project in Niger in 2008. The tribal chief welcomed the effort, which relieved the lifelong misery of shunned women such as those pictured at right. Also in picture at left are (from left) a translator, Dr. Anders Seim of Norway, the chief's aide, and Dr. Alou, a local fistula specialist.

are 130,000 new cases a year."

When she returned from the 2007 trip, Steele told her husband, Shelby, a research fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, that she wanted to help the women she had seen, and the millions more like them.

"I had retired from being a psychologist after 28 years, and the more I researched the problem of obstetric fistulas, the more I wanted to do," she told The Pine Cone. "It

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PHOTOS/COURTESY RITA STEELE