

The Reactor

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A mellow marsh dream

When I heard, a couple of years ago, that my son Mike was on the board of directors of the Friends of the Arcata Marsh, I was somewhat interested. When I heard the marsh was used as the final treatment phase for the local sewage treatment plant, I remembered how my trips to the Pacifica library had been made less pleasant from time to time by smells from the sewage treatment plant across the street.

Then I visited Arcata Marsh, walked along the park-like shorelines, enjoyed the sight of many species of birds which in turn were enjoying themselves on the little islands in the marsh, saw the blinds used by Humboldt University students in their class projects, and enjoyed the pleasant freshness in the air produced by the marsh as it performed its utilitarian chore, purifying the water before it became part of Humboldt Bay.

I'm looking forward to Pacifica's marsh, planned to accomplish the same goals handled successfully by the Arcata Marsh for more than a decade. It's unlikely Pacifica will get as much national publicity as Arcata. Certain perks go with being first. But Pacifica will have the benefits of Arcata's experience.

The article in the prestigious Smithsonian Magazine started out with "A California town proves ingenuity is a match for high-tech engineering in turning sewage into a natural resource."

The micro-organisms that grow around the roots and stems of the cattails, bulrushes, duckweed and other aquatic plants break down the nutrients in the water, and make it useful to the plant life. In turn the marsh attracts ducks, coots, herons, hawks, avocets, and pelicans. Smithsonian says Arcata Marsh birders have tallied over 200 species.

I'm looking forward to the time when Pacifica has as enjoyable a situation as I found in the Arcata Marsh. It's unlikely I, or even Gil West will find 200 species, but for certain the Pacifica Marsh will attract telescopes, binoculars and cameras, each one manned by someone enjoying views of bird life close up.

A potential problem will become a highly beneficial use.

Fairway Park

In particular the people of Fairway Park, whose concern for the environment is the stuff of local legend, should be delighted with the idea. It will, among other benefits, provide a home for the small frog that feeds the San Francisco garter

snake. The garter snake in turn will provide food for various raptors, which will in turn enhance the viewshed. All Pacifica will benefit as we take care of our waste water in the most ecologically satisfying way I know.

I can think of few other projects with the same potential to satisfy ecologists, hard-headed, bottom-line oriented taxpayers, city administrators, and the neighbors, who will find their neighborhood has gained a major asset for hiking, meditating or sunset appreciation. I only regret this asset won't be a part of the Linda Mar area where I live. Lake Matilda, which is now the location of Anza, Balboa, and other streets of western Linda Mar would have been a logical place for a marsh if we had thought of it 40 years ago.