

V I E W P O I N T

Activists May Save Brentwood Trails

By TOM FREEMAN, *Special the Palisadian-Post*

On July 25, the Mountaingate Development Project was unanimously approved by the City of L.A.'s Planning and Land Use Management Committee (PLUM) after a hearing in City Hall. This agreement included a modification to provide unobstructed public recreational use of the Canyonback and Mt. St. Mary's trails in Brentwood, after Canyon Back Alliance and other trail supporters spoke in favor of the revised plan. The City Council was expected to provide final project approval yesterday.

For the past year, Canyon Back Alliance, joined by hundreds of supporters, has objected to the Mountaingate development project's adverse impact on recreational use of the Canyonback and Mt. St. Mary's trails. This summer, however, Councilman Bill Rosendahl's office, through the tireless efforts of District Director Norman Kulla, brought the once-feuding parties together in order to achieve a remarkable resolution. Over a two week period, Canyon Back Alliance worked with Mountaingate developer Castle & Cooke, the City of Los Angeles, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and representatives of the Stoney Hill community in Mountaingate in a joint effort to protect public recreational use of the two contested trails.

We are thrilled to announce that these efforts have succeeded far beyond our expectations. While the specifics are still being worked out pending final City Council approval, the parties have reached agreement on the critical terms:

- (1) The Mt. St. Mary's Trail will survive – and it will be better than before because it will bypass the Stoney Hill neighborhood completely; and
- (2) The Canyonback Trail will be wholly outside the planned residential enclave, hewing to the western-most alignment along Canyonback Ridge, with scenic views of the unspoiled hillsides.

Canyon Back Alliance is greatly indebted to:

- Rosendahl and Kulla, whose leadership made this public victory possible.
- Former Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan was instrumental in working with the engineers and geologists to find creative solutions.
- Joe Edmiston and Paul Edelman of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, whose knowledge and wisdom on all things trail-related helped the parties bridge what had seemed un-bridgeable.
- Robert Garcia, executive director of the Center for Law in the Public Interest, who inspired everyone to keep their eyes on the need for public trails and open access to those trails, for the use and enjoyment of everyone – especially the City's economically disadvantaged, who have far too few opportunities to enjoy unspoiled, natural trails.

We also recognize the efforts of developer Castle & Cooke and the Stoney Hill community in Mountaingate, who have generously partnered with Canyon Back Alliance to assure that public access to these historic recreational trails is not only preserved – but improved!

Finally, and most importantly, the hundreds of Canyon Back Alliance supporters who sent letters to public officials, appeared at public hearings, donated to our organization, and helped spread word of this important public issue. Thank you all for your help!

(Tom Freeman is an attorney with the Canyon Back Alliance.)