

## Live Oak's LION neighborhood improvement project extended through 2012

By **KIMBERLY WHITE -- Santa Cruz Sentinel**

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LIVE OAK - Residents here have big plans in store for their neighborhoods: walking trails at Chanticleer Park, signs reminding drivers to slow down in residential neighborhoods, speed bumps on 17th Avenue, and maybe even creating a couple colorful murals to brighten up blank or fading walls.

That list of projects was compiled by Live Oak residents who were actively involved over the last year with the Leadership in our Neighborhoods program, or LION, whose goal was to get neighbors talking and working together to figure out how to liven up their neighborhoods.

The program launched through the Community Bridges/Live Oak Family Resource Center in January, with a one-year, \$85,000 grant from the county's Redevelopment Agency. The grant was supposed to run out at the end of December, but the resource center managed to stretch those dollars and plans to continue it through 2012, said Steven Weiss, who's heading the program. That way, the residents who worked together to develop those ideas will be able to see the fruits of their labor.

There were certain goals and expectations, Weiss said, but "there was also an organic component of getting people together and not knowing who would participate or for how long." Taking things more slowly, he said, "allows for the process to take place in a less rushed and more natural way. People need that time to get to know each other and figure out which projects are going to be salient and come together to improve the community."

Other improvement projects include possibly installing a community bulletin board at the Live

Oak Supermarket at the corner of Capitola Road and 17th Avenue, while another group hopes to create a large "Welcome to Live Oak" mural at the back of a property on Childers Lane.

"The ultimate focus is that people are involved in a democratic participatory process so they can feel power and build community," Weiss said. Once residents find out about the program and see the benefits of working together, he said, it builds momentum and "they're participating in things they might not have otherwise."

For example, Live Oak resident Rebecca Jordan moved to the Pleasant Acres Mobile Home Park on 17th Avenue in 2009, after having spent the previous three decades living in large, urban areas. She got involved with the Chanticleer neighborhood group in the spring and said it's been a great way to get active in the community and learn more about features, such as organic farms, that she didn't even know existed in Live Oak.

"The greatest outcome for me is not just meeting people, it's also feeling more connected to making change, being a part of the community, keeping an eye out for the children that I see," she said. "It sort of has gone from attending a meeting to really caring about where I live in a way I hadn't before."

In the coming months, the resource center plans to apply for additional funding from community foundations and other sources to help pay for the projects - an especially important element, since the remaining grant funds can only accomplish so much, and the fate of the county's RDA is still in

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limbo.

In June, the state's Redevelopment Agencies were dismantled under one state law, while another allowed cities and counties to continue operating those agencies by making annual payments to Sacramento. Those laws were later challenged to the state Supreme Court, which is expected to issue a ruling next month.

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