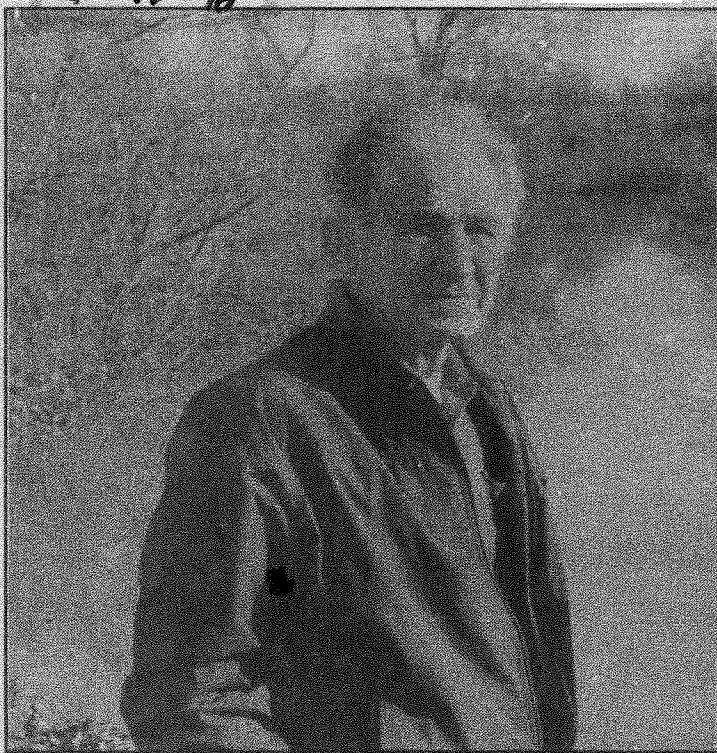


Laguna Park plan spurred by \$200,000 gift

2-11-98



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EMMETT BLINCOE

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SEBASTOPOL — A surprise gift of \$200,000 for the Laguna Park project drew gasps and cheers when it was announced at last week's City Council meeting.

"I am stunned," Sebastopol Mayor Kathy Austin said after attorney Ken Jacobs announced the gift from his client, Emmett Blincoe, a retired contractor who pledged the money in memory of his late wife Loretta.

Blincoe, who also pledged to make future donations to the Laguna Park, committed his gift "with the assumption" the Council would in turn vote to spend \$78,000 on the park design plans which are the Laguna project's next phase.

The council quickly followed suit Tuesday, voting unanimously to fund the Laguna Park plans as well as spend an

estimated \$162,000 on other city recreation needs.

The audience of about three dozen city residents cheered the surprise donation as well as the Council's vote to fund a cross-section of recreation projects including a new multi-purpose room at Ives Pool, improved sports facilities at Analy High School, and a new athletic field at Ragle Ranch Park.

The vote represented a major turnaround for the Council, which in September was deadlocked on whether to fund plans for the Laguna Park nature preserve or commit the money to "active" recreation projects such as youth soccer fields.

Last week's action followed meetings during which Sebastopol City Manager Paul Berlant and city Planning Director Kenyon Webster met with nearly a dozen representatives of city recreational inter- [Please see Gift page A9]

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ests, including Sebastopol youth soccer, the Community Center, Western Sonoma County Swimmers (which operates the city's Ives Pool), Sebastopol Little League, and Analy High School.

The result was last week's cooperative appeal for sharing \$240,000 in city recreation funds, which are projected to accrue over the next 18 months.

"It was a very very positive situation" meeting with city officials and other recreational interests, Analy High School Athletic Director Chip Castleberry told the Council last week.

City staff will now prepare a phased program of recreation projects to be implemented over the next year and a half, said City Manager Paul Berlant.

This week Blincoe, who initially declined an interview about his gift, spoke briefly to reporters about his donation. The 70-year-old Sebastopol resident said he and his late wife talked about making some sort of donation before she passed

away last December.

"We talked about it before," said Blincoe, a San Francisco native who moved to Sebastopol 25 years ago "to take it easy," after working as a contractor in the city and Daly City.

He said he and his wife, Loretta Blincoe, had talked about planting a grove of trees. "We wanted to give something that was worthwhile," he said. He later settled on the idea of supporting the Laguna Park.

In a letter to the City Council, Blincoe said "I have always appreciated Ragle Park and the Joe Rodota Trail. On my walks I am continually inspired by the natural beauty of Western Sonoma County. I appreciated the fact that there are currently many trails providing public access to these natural settings. However, I feel we can do better."

In an interview Monday, Blincoe said that "I consider mine (donation) small. I don't think it's that much ... it's no problem for me," and he is encouraging others to also donate to the Laguna Park project.

Blincoe said he walks every day, either at Ragle Park, or at

Annadel or Spring Lake parks in Santa Rosa.

"I am pleased to make this commitment, and hope to be walking on the trails of the Laguna Park in the near future," he said in his letter.

Blincoe has received thank you letters from citizens after his donation, and his attorney Ken Jacobs said he has received more than 50 telephone messages and personal messages thanking Blincoe.

He indicated that he would like to see the park built as soon as possible. "I haven't got that much more time anyway," said Blincoe.