

## **New Vigor for the Community: Starr Community Center & Spath Aquatic Facility**

*Story by Lin Barrett & Lisa Norman  
Photos and renderings provided.*

The C.V. Starr Community Center, which will include the Sigrid and Harry Spath Aquatic Facility, has been thirty years in the making. Local residents came together, launched the dream and worked tirelessly raising funds with dinners, Aquathons, sales, and individual donations. None worked harder than Tessie Branscomb, the Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District's Aquatic Director. Tessie has been the steadfast spirit behind this movement and continues working tirelessly to achieve it.

Local drives raised about \$250,000 by 1997, when Harry Spath stepped forward and made more than a million-dollar donation to help build the new center. Harry and his wife, Sigrid, were former businesspersons in Fort Bragg. They owned and operated a successful laundry business. Harry served as a volunteer fire fighter and was a Fort Bragg City councilman. He was active in local service clubs and contributed generously to many local nonprofit organizations. Harry's faith revitalized the project. The Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District went forward with conceptual drawings and architectural plans. A serious fund-raising program was launched in late 1999.

The District recruited Lin Barrett to head up the drive. She helped to raise more than \$6.2 million in less than four years.

Barrett worked with local elected officials to land more than \$1,346,000. Fourth District Supervisor Patti Campbell, who has had an abiding commitment to seeing the center built, and Fifth District Supervisor David Colfax led an effort that resulted in \$1 million in Tobacco Tax Settlement monies being committed to the project. They also successfully appropriated \$46,000 from other sources. Senator Wes Chesbro appropriated \$300,000 for the project through a member's request.

Former Fort Bragg Mayor Alder Thurman approached Barrett about the Starr Foundation. Thurman explained that Neil Starr, also known as Cornelius Vanderstarr had been born in Fort Bragg in 1982 and had graduated from Fort Bragg High school in 1909. After many business ventures, he went on to found what is now known as A.I.G., one of the largest casualty underwriters in the world. Starr had formed a foundation in his name. Barrett worked with Thurman and other local historians and genealogists whose families were connected with Starr in some way. Denise Stenberg, Thurman, Pat Rivers and Joann Matson helped Barrett land a \$3 million grant from the foundation.

Successful grant applications and community events and donor drives have drawn the recreation and aquatic center project nearer to completion. An extremely active committee is working hard to gather the funds needed to start construction. Under the aegis of the Friends of the Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District, President Susan Larkin is working dauntlessly to finish up the current \$2 million drive. Bob Rodriguez, Bob Krebs, Tessie Branscomb, Jim Shock, Bryan Ballard, Jere Melo, Paul Douglas, Charlie Boise, Don Holland and Sallie Werson have joined Barrett and the new local donor drive coordinator, Heather Paulsen. They are working with large groups of volunteers to help make this dream a reality.

### **Economic Boost**

The new center will have a significant positive economic impact on the coastal economy. Based on other major public construction projects, the aquatic facility project will infuse, conservatively, \$4 million to \$5 million into the coastal economy immediately prior to and during construction. This translates into salaries for local workers, construction supervisors, and sub-contractors, as well as revenue from motel rentals, grocery store and restaurant sales from temporary workers staying in the coastal area, and includes revenue from the purchase of materials, supplies and equipment rentals.

Similar facilities have demonstrated an intermittent local financial impact from events held at the center. The state-of-the-art eight-lane pool will be a sought-after competition venue. Careful pool design creates

optimum conditions for good competitive times. It is anticipated that swim meets will attract an average of 250 swimmers per event. The average family of a swimmer spends \$500 a weekend on lodging, food and entertainment. This means the average event will bring \$125,000 into local coffers during a single weekend. The slides, running river and other leisure features at the new center will assure return visits to the coast. The location at Maple and Lincoln streets will bring visitors through downtown Fort Bragg past local businesses and stores. Lodging and purchases by visitors to the center will result in increased tax revenue for the county from the increased Transient Occupancy Taxes paid by local lodging establishments and sales tax revenue paid by local businesses.

The long-term financial impact will be positive in several ways. First the new center will provide seventeen new jobs, fifteen of which will be full-time and above the minimum wage standard. It will also relieve the Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District of an annual \$75,000 to \$100,000 deficit experienced when operating the present Fort Bragg Recreation Center. The District always has a balanced budget, but the present recreation center cannot operate in the black because of its severely deteriorated condition. Further, according to studies done by the well-respected Sports Management, Inc., the new center is likely to generate a positive cash flow. Sports Management predicts 95 percent to 115 percent ratios between expenses and revenue. These two factors will translate into more and improved recreational activities and programs throughout the coast.

The C.V. Starr Community Center/Sigrud and Harry Spath Aquatic Facility—a state-of-the art recreation, fitness and aquatic complex—will provide local residents and visitors to the coast with an all-weather, year-round, family-friendly, affordable recreational facility.

The proposed center and aquatic facility will have two pools, a water slide, a running river, wading pool, spa, child care facility, gymnasium, offices, physical therapy and fitness rooms, and community meeting and activity rooms. The forty-thousand-square-foot facility will be located at Maple and Lincoln streets in the heart of Fort Bragg, California.

### **The Center**

The new center will be owned and operated by the Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District. The District serves more than thirty thousand individuals residing in a thousand square mile area. MCRPD is the only organization providing wide-ranging indoor and outdoor recreational, fitness and aquatic activities for youth and adults in this area. There is no YMCA, Boys and Girls Club or similar public or nonprofit organization operating a recreational facility in this large isolated rural area.

MCRPD provides over one million user-hours per year of recreation activities on the Coast. More than five thousand participants per month take part in activities at the Fort Bragg Recreation Center, including adult, youth and children's athletic leagues, classes, day camps, pre-school and after-school child care, arts and crafts, swim lessons, adaptive aquatics, a swim team, Special Olympics, and free night recreational activities. The number of participants will increase dramatically with the completion of the new center. The new center will replace MCRPD's existing aged facilities; it will continue to offer affordable recreation and healthful activities for individuals of all ages. While one of the strengths of the center will be the prospect of intergenerational and family activities, the two main populations who need this facility are the young and the old.

The current recreation center is heavily used by folks fifty-five years of age and older. Extremely popular low-cost adaptive aquatics programs, operated in conjunction with College of the Redwoods, are stretched to capacity. The anticipated increase in the senior population on the coast will create a greater need for programs for this age group. The new center has been designed with these programs in mind. The "beach entry" to the pool and the electric lift will greatly improve access to the pool for persons with limited mobility. The warm-water pool and resistance water "river run" will provide an opportunity for healthy, comfortable exercise for this age group.

At the other end of the age spectrum, the proposed facility will offer programs for youth that cannot be offered in the present recreation center. The leisure features and the possibility of competitive swimming and diving, along with large multi-purpose rooms will make free, low-cost and subsidized programs

available for local youth. The pool will have allow for deep water aerobics and scuba diving lessons. The center will become a much-needed wholesome place for local youth to hang-out.

The weight room, with modern weight training machines, will appeal to a broad cross-section of the community. The large multi-purpose rooms will allow expansion of the aerobic exercise, dance and yoga classes and will be used by various groups for classes and meetings.

Inclusive community planning has established a jointly held vision of a long-awaited center. Fort Bragg and Mendocino schools, the College of the Redwoods and the health care district have helped with careful collaborative planning to assure that local organizations and individuals will get maximum use of the facility.

Schools are planning to use the center for regular and special education classes, teams, conditioning and job training. The Mendocino Coast Health Care District will use this facility for outpatient physical therapy, as well as cardiac rehab and obesity programs. The College of the Redwoods will continue to conduct their extremely popular Adaptive Aquatics courses. The College anticipates adding other courses, such as lifeguarding, scuba and sea kayaking, when the facility opens. Special Olympics, Master's and youth swim teams will use the facility to host regional meets, which will have significant benefits to the local economy.

### Crucial Juncture

Fund-raising for this project is at its most crucial juncture. Construction is closer than it has ever been, but support from individuals and businesses is urgently needed to make it happen. With more than 70 percent of the needed funds in hand, the Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District is in the final stage of a campaign to raise funds to build this much-needed community center.

The Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District has resolved to start construction if \$2 million can be raised locally by November 2004. They will take out a loan for the remainder, while they continue to write applications and raise funds in other ways. Over \$330,000 of this amount has been raised with negotiations pending for \$700,000 in local funds. If this goal is met, construction will start in spring 2005 with the center opening to the public in 2006!

### How to Help

There are a variety of ways for you to contribute to this worthy project. Gifts or pledges may be made to the Friends of the Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District, a not-for-profit organization. There are several programs that may be of interest to you.

- Name a Facility or Room
- Finish or Furnish a Room
- Join the Coast Fitness Club
- Create a Memorial to a loved and respected relative or friend
- Make in-kind contributions to the Just Build It! program
- Structure your gift through the Planned Giving program, or...Let us know what works for you!

Donations or pledges of any size are welcome, and may be made as a single gift or as convenient for the donor. All gifts are tax-deductible.

For more information, contact Lin M. Barrett, Development Director, or Heather Paulsen, Local Donor Drive Coordinator, at the Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District: **(707) 937-4808**.

To make a donation or pledge, mail the following information to:  
 Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District  
 213 E. Laurel Street  
 Fort Bragg, CA 95437

Donation:  
 Enclosed please find my donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ toward the C.V. Starr Community Center/Sigrid and Harry Spath Aquatic Facility.

Pledges:  
 I pledge \$ \_\_\_\_\_ toward the C.V. Starr Community Center/Sigrid and Harry Spath Aquatic Facility. I will pay \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ months.

Information:  
 Please call me. I would like more information about how I can be helpful.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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