



Palos Verdes Peninsula News

Serving our community for more than 70 years

Residents can stay informed with online features

*By Ashley Ratcliff, Peninsula News
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RPV — When something happens in Rancho Palos Verdes — a disaster, a road closure, a fire — finding out the details may be as easy as checking your inbox.

Created in 2000, the city's best-kept secret has been its listserver program, designed to keep residents in the know about particular events. Subscribers have the benefit of gaining access to timely information by choosing from 50 listserver topics to receive e-mail notifications about.

A listserver is a system that simultaneously dispenses information to a large group of members via e-mail messages.

"We believe that it's a great tool for connecting and providing information to our residents in the community," said Dennis McLean, RPV director of finance and information technology. "It enables us to improve the transparency of our processes, as well as share fun information regarding some of the events that we provide to the

community, like Shakespeare by the Sea, the Fourth of July celebration and Whale of a Day."

According to McLean, the most widely used group is Breaking News with 1,200 subscribers. The listserver categories that were established for land-use projects like Marymount College, Crestridge senior housing, St. John Fisher Catholic Church and the Valero station have between 500 and 900 subscribers.

The e-mails allow residents to "stay in touch with how a project is evolving," McLean said.

"Interestingly, the RPVTV (Channel 33) is also a large group, as is the group for council and Planning Commission meetings," McLean said. He added that the city now provides "complete" staff reports with all attachments for agenda items.

Tom Redfield, the Revival & Renaissance Coalition founder, said the listserver comes in handy when his neighbors, friends and community members look to him for answers about various projects.

"It is one of the most invaluable services that the city offers in the way of communication ... I'm amazed at how many people use it, and I'm amazed at how many people don't use it," said Redfield, an RPV resident since 1971.

Since its inception, the listserver has been put to good use during some hairy situations.

“Probably the most striking event was when we had the major gas leak (in March 2004) in the vicinity of Ridgegate [Drive] and Hawthorne [Boulevard], which caused for a number of residents to be evacuated immediately,” McLean said. “We used the Breaking News listserver to provide the community with updates on the progression of the emergency all the way until its end, when residents were allowed to go back home and the streets were opened.”

The system also was widely used to report on the status of the infamous storms of 2005, McLean said, as well as the fire near City Hall that occurred last July.

The listserver, the direct result of a suggestion from Ted Vegvari, director of Palos Verdes on the Net, was integrated with RPV’s Web site, with the help of McLean, PVNET and its interns. Now, every time subscribers receive a breaking news item, it also is automatically posted to the main page of the city’s site, which boasts six million hits annually.

According to McLean, there is “little or no cost” to maintain the system.

“That’s the beauty of it ... We wouldn’t be able to afford to provide something like our list server system without the collaborative relationship that we have with Ted at Palos Verdes on the Net,” McLean said. “It would simply be more costly than what the city budget could afford.”

The tech-savvy city also allows streaming video of its City Council and Planning Commission meetings directly from the Web site, as well as live on Cox Communications Channel 35, the government access station for all of the communities on the Peninsula.

Additionally, the city has a non-emergency reporting system, whereby residents can advise RPV officials of life’s little situations, such as a fallen tree, a pothole, running water in the street or “anything else that they think the city should know about, for the benefit of all,” McLean said, adding that since offering this service, the city receives notices daily from residents.

“That actually works well for us,” he added. “We’ve got the system configured where the e-mail is received by the appropriate city staff so that they can not only reply to the e-mail sender but, obviously, pass along the information so that [staff] can solve the problem.”

That feature is advertised prominently on the city’s main page.

To subscribe to the listserver, visit www.palosverdes.com/rpv/listserver/index.cfm or click on the “Click Here to Get E-mail Updates From the City” link on the home page’s left-hand side.