

NEWS CLIPS

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**Resource Conservation and Public
Outreach**

Organized by date

Las Virgenes schools founder Alice C. Stelle dead at 95

District matriarch a leader in education

The Acorn Staff | on March 21, 2018

By Stephanie Bertholdo



RESPECTED COUPLE—Alice Stelle was a pioneer in local education. Her late husband, Mac, helped found the Las Virgenes water district. Courtesy photo

Alice Condee Stelle, a founding member of the Las Virgenes Unified School District, died March 14, but her legacy of activism and love for children lives on in the hearts of many.

Stelle died of a stroke at her home in University Village, a retirement community in Thousand Oaks. She was 95. One of Stelle's five children, Betsy Blum said her mother had suffered a stroke the previous week.



SMILES—Above, Stelle in the 1980s. At right, she greets former superintendent Bud Marley at the Las Virgenes school district's 50th anniversary celebration in 2013.

Stelle was a pioneer in the early years of the school district and went on to serve five terms on the board of education. The A.C. Stelle Middle School in Calabasas was built and named in her honor in 2004.

Stelle's husband of 73 years, Macneil "Mac" Stelle, was a founding member of the Las Virgenes Municipal Water District. He died in 2015.

Alice Stelle began her involvement in local education in 1957 when she launched a battle to prevent the Las Virgenes region from being annexed into L.A. Unified School District.



Courtesy photos

Stelle worked to pass the first bond measure to unify the Las Virgenes district, but the action lost by four votes in January 1963. Refusing to give up, she and others donated \$125 each to finance a second campaign, and on April 23, 1963, with voter turnout at an unprecedented 97 percent, the bond measure passed by four votes.

After the election, Stelle joined the new LVUSD board of education and served 25 years overseeing the building of more than a dozen schools from Calabasas to the Ventura County line.

Family affair

“My mother believed in the family dinner,” said Blum. “Every night we had a family dinner with everybody in the household. She wasn’t a great cook—she was so active—but she cooked from her regular menus that included classic spaghetti and meatloaf.”

Jeanie Blount, another Stelle daughter, shared a story about her own love of horseback riding and the support she received from Mom.

“I watched (people) jumping horses and fell in love,” Blount said. Before she knew it, her mother had arranged for riding lessons and formed the Hidden Hills Hunters with other families.

“She was my biggest cheerleader and I had a great time. My love of horses continues to this day.”

Lorie Zapf, now a member of the San Diego City Council, was among the 17 children who were fostered in the Stelle household.

“I was going to Agoura High School at the time,” Zapf said. “My mom was a severe alcoholic with severe mental health issues. Our dad couldn’t take care of us anymore, so my sister, brother and I went our separate ways to different foster families.”

During Zapf’s search for a foster family, she met Stelle, then a school board member.

Zapf lived with the Stelle family when she was in 10th through 12th grades and also while attending community college.

Living within the structure of the Stelle household was a challenge for Zapf.

“(Alice) was firm but not mean. She had rules. I was expected to be home for a family dinner every night. I didn’t want to question what would happen if I didn’t. She gave me that kind of stability that I never had, boundaries and rules that I never had. She just treated me (and other fostered kids) like family. I never felt that if I did something like a stupid teenager that I would be kicked out.”

In 2010, Zapf asked Stelle to issue the oath of office for her first term on the San Diego council.

“She was able to go on stage and swear me in,” Zapf said. “Here I was and it was because of her. It was the first time that I had revealed to everybody that I was a foster kid.”

Chris Sickelton of Paso Robles had been fostered by the Stelles, since the age of 12. He credits Alice Stelle with pushing him to reach his potential.

“It is absolutely a fact that I wouldn’t have graduated (from Calabasas High) without Alice’s constant, yet kind, influence for me to get it together and graduate,” said Sickelton, who went on to earn a computer tech certificate and has held computer jobs ever since.

Stelle also had a humorous side.

Chris Blum, Stelle's grandson, said he loved it when his grandmother would say, "You're my favorite grandchild for your age and weight.' She said that to all her grandchildren."

Former Las Virgenes superintendent Donald Zimring also spoke fondly of Stelle.

"Few people deserve the titles of pioneer and visionary more than Alice and Mac Stelle," Zimring said.

"(Alice) was pioneer in convincing a rural/farming/ranching region to combine four one-room schools into a school district for the benefit of the area's children. She was a visionary in seeing what local control could mean to the quality of education," Zimring said. "Under Alice's leadership, the district was one of the very first in the nation in the 1960s to structure itself around a middle school (grades six through eight) rather than the traditional junior high (grades seven through nine) model."

Zimring said Stelle made sure that once the district was unified, all new schools would have air conditioning: "Something unheard of in our region at the time," he said.

Celebration of life

Alice Stelle is survived by a son, three daughters, eight grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren and a sister, Lois Seed of Carlsbad.

A celebration of Stelle's life will take place at 2 p.m. April 21 at A.C. Stelle Middle School in Calabasas. Condolence cards may be sent to Betsy Blum at 50575 Falcon View Road, Coarsegold, CA 93614.

Letters

Twin pillars of the community

By [The Acorn Staff](#) | on March 21, 2018

I learned about the passing last week of Alice Condee Stelle and of Joanne “Jody” White five months earlier.

On the backs of these two dedicated and determined women was built the Las Virgenes Unified School District.

Their loss is irreplaceable.

I was one of the few fortunate people who served with them on the LVUSD Board of Education. Elected in 1975 at the age of 20, my time with them was limited to my four-year term.

They had been elected in the late 1950s and remained in office until 1981 (Jody) and 1990 (Alice).

They oversaw the growth of our school district from one elementary campus—Las Virgenes Elementary School, now A. E. Wright Middle School—to more than a dozen at the end of their tenures.

I grew up in Las Virgenes schools and was one of the thousands of beneficiaries of their hard work and clear vision. By the time I came on board we had 12 schools under our watch. Alice and Jody cared for each of them as parents would nurture 12 children.

They invested not only their countless thousands of uncounted hours in building the schools brick by brick, but also their hearts and souls.

No other two people have made such a great and lasting impact on Las Virgenes families as Alice and Jody.

Very few of us “oldtimers” are left to relay the early stories about the LVUSD to newcomers.

Without Alice and Jody’s guts to sustain the drive for unification in 1962, there is no doubt that the Las Virgenes area would have been annexed to the Los Angeles Unified School District 50 years ago. Their foresight and hard work presaged a loftier future for Las Virgenes students.

I am a better man today because of them. My later parenting skills were built on the foundation that they helped develop. My decision-making process was buoyed by the constant dissection of information presented by staff for board debate and action.

And my ability to focus attention on causes and effects rather than on personalities was honed by their examples.

Thank you, Alice. Thank you, Jody.

Michael Power
Lexington, Ky.

BRIEFS

By [The Acorn Staff](#) | on March 21, 2018

Fire-wise gardens are hot stuff

A fire-wise gardening and native plant sale will take place from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fri. through Sun., March 23 to 25 at Golden Heart Ranch, 3190 Triunfo Canyon Road, Agoura Hills.

Guests can learn about wildfires and how a landscape of native plants can protect a home.

Hundreds of native plants will be for sale. Experts will be on hand to give tips on planting and advice on choices for specific landscapes. Take-home literature and resources will be available.

Admission is free.

EDITORIALS

Where our storm water goes

LA Times 3/21/2018

Southern California needs to hold onto more of the rain that falls. Northern California needs less.

As the March rains loosen more Southern California mud and fill more Northern California reservoirs, the state still flirts with drought and we still run short of water. Los Angeles is engineered to hustle filthy storm water to sea as quickly as possible, as if it were the evil fluid of the primordial abyss, yet we spend millions to import precious snowmelt from the Sierra. It's all just water. Meanwhile, the Trump administration proposes to raise Shasta Dam in the far north of the state to capture more rainwater to send south, but Democrats resist. Does any of it make any sense?

It does, but it requires some time contemplating a map of California.

In vastly oversimplified terms, California has two great mountain ranges that run north-south. Smaller Pacific storms drop their payloads on coastal cities when rain clouds run into the lower, western ranges. The bigger, colder storms make it east to the Sierra before releasing their water as snow.

But nothing is that simple. In fact the western ranges are crooked, and in Santa Barbara County they bend from north-south to east-west and form a horizontal wall that, at places in the San Gabriel and San Bernardino mountains, reaches two miles high. The coast, rather than face west, runs diagonally. The third side of this geographic triangle is formed by the so-called peninsular ranges — an odd name for mountains sitting deep within Southern California until you realize that geologically, they are the northern end of Baja California.

Squeezed into this small triangle, which runs roughly from Santa Barbara to San Diego and features an attractive climate and flat, buildable spaces, is half of California's thirsty population of 39 million. Winter rains here are modest — except when they aren't, when storms hit the sun-warmed south-facing horizontal mountain wall. The precipitation rarely gets cold enough to take the form of snow, so instead of piling up to melt during the spring and summer, as it does in the cold, west-facing Sierra, the water comes all at once, rushing suddenly from the mountains and through all those flat areas built out with homes. There it can turn into the sort of deadly mud that hit Montecito in January and again threatens areas on the mountainous margin of the Southern California triangle. It is the reason that in the 1930s engineers began the decades-long job of encasing the Los Angeles River in concrete, to move the fearsome water safely to sea.

The other half of California's people, and two-thirds of its precipitation, are spread around the rest of the state. Central and Northern California have also seen their share of cataclysmic flooding over the years, but instead of trying to push the water out to sea as quickly as possible, they have tried to capture it in order to release it in the spring and summer, when it is needed for crops.

In fact, agriculture grew so big and so important that it quickly gulped down much of the annual snowmelt and began over-tapping groundwater. Now, between diversions of Sierra snowmelt for crops and for residents in the Southern California triangle and the Bay Area, and with the added pressure of drought, the water that used to flow down the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers and out to San Francisco Bay is too paltry to sustain migrating salmon and other species.

That leaves us with this odd environmental juxtaposition: In Northern California, we hang on to too much storm water and instead need to send more of it to sea to prevent the ecosystem from collapsing. But in Southern California, where our concrete riverbeds sweep biological and other toxic hazards into the ocean to foul beaches and poison marine life, we must send less out to sea and instead hang on to more of it, capturing it and allowing it to percolate into our aquifers to be naturally cleansed and available for reuse in lieu of the Sierra water that we import in excess.

Meanwhile, why not raise Shasta Dam?

There are many reasons, including continued environmental degradation of the type we need to reverse, but let's focus on something else: Shasta is part of the federal Central Valley Project, and its water is used on farm fields that contract for that water. But that relatively small group of farmers would not pay for the project; U.S. taxpayers would. Just as Los Angeles taxpayers financed the projects that quench their thirst with mountain water — the Owens Valley project, the State Water Project, the Colorado River project — the people who pay should generally be the people who benefit. That's something to keep in mind when considering any dam or other water project.

Los Angeles County voters are likely to see a storm water tax ballot measure in November to allow us to finally make use of those hazardous pulses of rain. In the end, we may need to re-engineer the Southern California triangle to finally keep that water for ourselves, stop flushing it out to the ocean, and allow more Sierra water, farther north, to proceed to the sea.

Scarred by fire, scared about rain A potential for mud flows and flooding

Communities brace for biggest storm of season



A SAN LUIS OBISPO firefighter pulls a hose to clear a drain in a flooded parking area at a housing complex in Montecito, Calif., in January. A new storm poses a fresh threat to the community this week. (Michael Owen Baker For The Times)

By Joseph Serna
LA Times 3/20/2018

An atmospheric river that forecasters are billing as the biggest storm of the season is expected to drench Southern California beginning Tuesday night, bringing with it the potential for mud flows and widespread flooding, the National Weather Service said.

The storm, which is being fueled by warm western Pacific waters, will deliver consistent rain across much of California, providing some relief to areas that have seen a resurgence in drought conditions.

Apart from storms in November and January, California has suffered an abysmal rainy season. State officials say it would take something along the lines of a “March miracle” of heavy rains to rescue the state from its water doldrums.

Though recent precipitation may not amount to a miracle, data show that it has improved the state's water supply.

"It has been an impressive March relative to an extraordinarily dry winter and preceding times," said state climatologist Michael Anderson.

On March 1, California's snowpack — a significant source of natural water storage — stood at about 25% of average. By Monday, it was nearly twice that at 48%.

Since Oct. 1, this is the only month when rainfall has met or exceeded its average across the entire Sierra Nevada. Storms have dumped 8 or more inches of rain in the northern Sierra and San Joaquin River basins and more than 5 inches in the Tulare Lake basin since the beginning of the month, the Department of Water Resources said.

Downtown L.A. has received nearly 1 1/2 inches of rain this month, just shy of the historic average. The upcoming storm will probably push the area above that by the end of the week, according to forecasts.

Although the precipitation is a welcome addition to California's water supply, it poses a more immediate danger for communities beneath burn scars in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties, which just four months ago suffered wildfires.

The Thomas fire grew to become the state's largest on record, scorching the mountains around the Ojai Valley in Ventura County and mountains above Summerland and Montecito in Santa Barbara County. Some areas were turned into "moonscapes," with vegetation singed to the root.

Those areas now repel water and are extremely susceptible to mud and debris flows because there is nothing holding the soil in place. If it rains at a rate of more than half an inch an hour — and current forecasts say the storm holds the potential for twice that rate Wednesday night — those hillsides could dissolve into rivers of mud.

"It's rain for 36 hours. It's going to be consistent, but vary in intensity," said weather specialist Stuart Seto of the National Weather Service in Oxnard. "This is going to be one of the greatest storms of the winter."

Seto said it's impossible to predict exactly how big, where and when a heavy storm cell would develop and trigger a mud flow. In January, a once-in-200-year event unfolded in the middle of the night when a storm cell met the south-facing foothills above Montecito and dropped half an inch of rain in five minutes.

The ensuing debris flows overwhelmed Montecito's creeks and buried the town, killing at least 21 people and destroying more than 100 homes.

Monday evening, Santa Barbara County authorities issued mandatory evacuation orders for residents living below the burn areas.

Rob Lewin, director of the Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management, said in a statement that this week's deluge will be the "most powerful storm" since that

Jan. 9 event. The storm poses less of a danger in Northern California's wine country, which was ravaged by fires in October, because there will be less rain there, experts said.

But areas where land wasn't burned because of steady rain will also be at risk.

"Anyplace that has those steep hillsides with rocks and things, any low-lying areas, are going to be a concern with rain," Seto said.

Hillside neighborhoods in Burbank could see debris flows, and Topanga Canyon Boulevard could be shut down as it was last week when a light storm caused a hillside to collapse onto the road, marooning cars.

Southern Californians should have an emergency kit prepared in case they lose power in their home or are stranded on a road or highway because of flooding or slides, Seto said.

The storm is forecast to bring 2 to 4 inches of rain to the coasts and valleys starting Tuesday evening and 4 to 6 inches along foothills and mountains. Some mountains could receive up to 8 inches of rain between Tuesday and Thursday, Seto said.



WORKERS jackhammer holes for explosives used to split giant boulders deposited by the mud flows in Montecito in January. (Al Seib Los Angeles Times)

OP-ED

Livable city

Let's go local on water



EARTHQUAKES could cut Los Angeles off from the Colorado River Aqueduct and disrupt the city's water supply. Relying on local water also causes less environmental harm. (Irfan Khan Los Angeles Times)

By Mark Gold
LA Times 3/19/2018

Despite another hot and dry year with less than four inches of rain in the Los Angeles area, we are back to our water-wasting ways. Two years ago, Californians were using 24% less water compared with 2013. This year, we're hardly conserving at all — just 1%.

Clearly, our earlier successes were more behavioral than structural. If lawn removal and new efficient fixtures and appliances had saved all that water, we wouldn't be seeing this momentous backslide. Meanwhile, our sources of imported water — from the Delta, the Colorado River, and the Los Angeles aqueduct — have all been revealed as vulnerable to politics, drought, climate change and crumbling concrete in recent years.

Los Angeles sorely needs to transform its water infrastructure. In a proactive move, Mayor Eric Garcetti and the city of Los Angeles this month released the Resilient Los Angeles plan, which outlines 96 steps to strengthen the city. Among the smartest moves: reduce our reliance on imported water from the current 85% to less than 50% by 2035.

Right now, if an earthquake severed our connection to the L.A. Aqueduct, the State Water Project or the Colorado River Aqueduct, we would quickly be in dire straits. With a local supply portfolio — balanced between recycled water, captured stormwater, and groundwater — the city will survive catastrophes. Pumping less water from faraway sources has environmental benefits too. Moving water across the state uses huge amounts of energy. Leaving more water in the Delta, Owens Valley and the Colorado River watershed would reduce ecological impacts and the carbon footprint of our water supplies.

The bigger question is could Los Angeles become entirely water self-sufficient by 2050? Even as we face climate change and population growth? The answer is yes, but it will require a modern, integrated approach to water management.

Currently, only 1% to 2% of the city's water supply comes from recycled water, but that could supply roughly 40%. All the wastewater going to the Terminal Island Treatment Plant gets recycled, but that's not the case at the Tillman, Glendale or Hyperion treatment plants. Those three dump treated wastewater into the L.A. River and Santa Monica Bay.

If all the treatment plants were upgraded, their recycled water could be injected or filtered into our local groundwater basins. This highly treated wastewater could be pumped directly to the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power's drinking water filtration plant for distribution to customers — providing the state establishes regulations for direct potable reuse — within a decade.

Stormwater is another local source we haven't adequately tapped. Based on a DWP study, urban runoff can provide an additional 58,000 acre-feet of water, or about 11% of current annual use. But the potential is there for much more: In an average rainfall year, 270,000 acre-feet per year of stormwater ends up flowing down the L.A. River into the ocean. Funding for green stormwater infrastructure could come from the L.A. County Safe Clean Water Measure, which is expected to be on the ballot this November.

The final piece of the puzzle is our local groundwater basins. If Los Angeles can improve rainwater absorption with green streets and alleys, infiltration basins, biofilters and other nature-based solutions, local aquifers can provide approximately 114,000 acre-feet per year. An essential first step is already underway: the remediation of the San Fernando Valley aquifer. Our primary local aquifer, it became so contaminated with industrial chemicals that it's a Superfund site. But the city, with support from the state, has begun a \$600-million project to clean it up. By cleaning the groundwater, DWP could provide residents and businesses with up to 20% of local water supply.

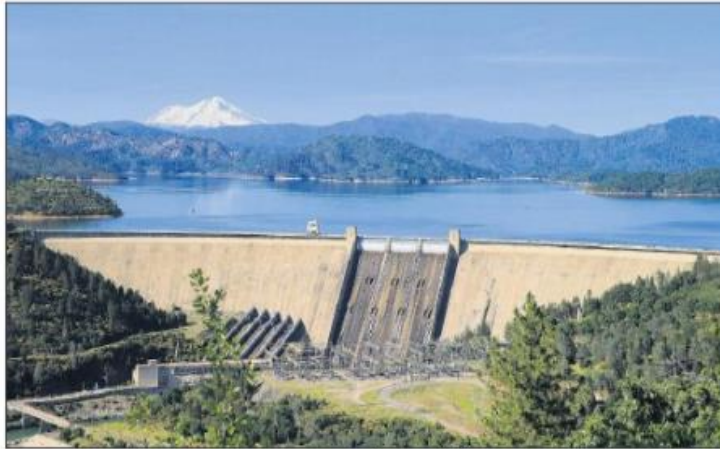
If we tally all those sources — recycled wastewater, captured stormwater and new groundwater — Los Angeles has about 372,000 acre-feet of local water that it could bring online by 2050. That's still not quite enough for a population likely to be 4.5 million.

The mayor's plan uses a consumption rate goal of 98 gallons per capita per day. To achieve complete water self-sufficiency, Angelenos would need to decrease consumption to approximately 75 gallons per capita per day. Numerous Australian, Southeast Asian and Western European cities have managed that. For Los Angeles to join them, all properties within the city will need to replace turf with native, climate-appropriate landscapes. Residents will need to use water-efficient washing machines and dishwashers. Commercial properties will need to install water-efficient cooling technologies. Also, DWP customers should get individual smart meters that provide real-time consumption information.

Going local on water won't be easy and it won't be cheap. But it can be done. The city managed similar transformation once before when — in the span of a decade — it rebuilt the Hyperion Treatment Plant, replaced miles of old sewer lines and stopped dumping sewage sludge to clean up Santa Monica Bay. If that history can repeat itself, the benefits for Angelenos and distant ecosystems are enormous.

Marc Gold is associate vice chancellor of environment and sustainability at UCLA and the leader of the Sustainable LA Grand Challenge.

LETTERS



ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

THE TRUMP administration wants to raise the height of Shasta Dam, a plan state officials oppose.

State sabotage

Re “White House pushes for dam project,” March 15

I was struck by the juxtaposition of three articles in Thursday’s Los Angeles Times.

One was about the push by the White House to raise the Shasta Dam because some farmers want the increase in water storage capacity. Another, a column by George Skelton, suggested that President Trump tour California farms without his immigration officers around. Finally, an article reported on the deaths of two farmworkers in the country illegally fleeing from Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

It appears the White House is unable to recognize the irony and tragedy of its efforts to “punish” California. Cracking down hard on farmworkers leaves farmers and ranchers without sufficient labor to operate their businesses. Car chases that result in deaths will scare away farmworkers, as many of the workers here legally look just like those who are not.

Lastly, if this administration continues to threaten California and its farmworkers with legal and punitive actions, there will not be enough workers looking for or wanting to work the fields and ranches in our great state. Thus, there will be no need for more water and therefore no reason to super-size the Shasta Dam.

GENE E. SCHWARTZ
San Diego

SUNDAY, MARCH 18, 2018

2 survivors of dam break help mark anniversary

Claudia Boyd-Barrett USA TODAY NETWORK
Special to Ventura County Star 3/18/2018

Don Grainger and his now-wife, Virginia, were just 5 years old when a giant wall of muddy water and debris crashed through Santa Paula in the middle of the night, obliterating almost everything in its path.

Now in their mid-90s, the two still remember that fateful night in March 1928 when the St. Francis Dam above modern-day Santa Clarita ruptured, hurling 12 billion gallons of water into the Santa Clara River Valley and through the sleeping communities of Piru, Bardsdale, Fillmore and Santa Paula.

The two 5-year-olds and their families survived, but more than 400 people didn't.

On Saturday, the pair attended a ceremony in

front of Fillmore City Hall to mark the 90th anniversary of the disaster and dedicate a plaque in honor of the victims.

The event is one of more than a dozen being held this month to commemorate the flooding.

"The roar of the water, it's something you'll never forget when you've heard something like that," said Virginia Grainger, whose family escaped the devastation because their home was on an incline.

"Some people describe it like a thousand freight trains," said her husband, who evacuated to higher ground with his parents and siblings just in time.

The disaster caused the largest loss of life in California history outside of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Yet few people beyond those in the affected communities know about this catastrophic event. Even Fillmore, which suffered heavy losses from the flooding, had never commemorated the tragedy until Saturday, said Martha Gentry, executive director of the Fillmore Historical Museum.

"After 90 years, we decided it was time to do that," said Gentry, who helped organize Saturday's activities. "We needed to do something."

At 9 a.m., several dozen people — including a handful of survivors and survivors' descendants — gathered outside Fillmore City Hall. The ceremony included an invocation by Bardsdale United Methodist Church pastor Bethany Carpenter and a presentation of awards to Fillmore Unified School District students who won contests for essays and posters about the disaster.

Bardsdale Cemetery Board President Scott Lee officially accepted the commemorative plaque, which will be embedded in a brownstone boulder and placed at the entrance to the cemetery. At least 28 people buried at the cemetery died in the disaster, he said, adding that the number is likely higher because some causes of death were not well-documented.

“We’ve never had anything in the city of Fillmore that matched that night 90 years ago,” Lee said, remarking on the hard-to-imagine scope of the disaster.

After the ceremony, author Jon Wilkman gave a presentation about the flood to a packed audience inside Fillmore City Hall. Later in the afternoon, the Fillmore Historical Museum scheduled a guided bus tour to the St. Francis Dam site.

Attending the commemoration ceremony was George Golden, pastor of First Baptist Church of Fillmore. He said he’d heard about the disaster from his congregants and was determined to learn more.

“The more I heard about it, the more I wanted to learn,” he said. “We need to be aware of it.”

Commemorative events continue Sunday in Piru and at Rancho Camulos National Historic Landmark. For more information, visit saintfrancisdam.com.



People bow their heads during Saturday’s commemoration ceremony in Fillmore in honor of the victims and survivors of the St. Francis Dam disaster.

PHOTOS BY CLAUDIA BOYD-BARRETT/SPECIAL TO THE STAR



Don and Virginia Grainger, who grew up in Santa Paula, attend the commemoration ceremony in Fillmore on Saturday. Both lived through the St. Francis Dam disaster as children.

Rain makes small dent in drought

Scorched hillsides are looking greener

Christian Martinez USA TODAY NETWORK
Ventura County Star 3/17/2018

Despite several storms in recent weeks, Ventura County appears to be on track for one of the weakest rain years since record-keeping started in 1957.

“We would need another inch of rain to tie the lowest rain year,” Arne Anselm, deputy director of water resources for the Ventura County Public Works Agency, said Friday.

The rain year runs from October through September, and as of Friday afternoon, Ventura has received 3.56 inches, with the majority of that total, more than 2.3 inches, coming in the past 16 days.

“It’s a definite drought year,” Anselm said.

From October 1989 through September 1990, the city of Ventura received 4.80 inches of rain, the lowest on record, according to Ventura County Watershed Protection District data.



The Sycamore Canyon Falls are covered in green foliage and the recent rains are making water cascade down a sandstone cliff. The waterfall is in the Santa Monica Mountains. PHOTOS BY JUAN CARLO/THE STAR



Rancho Sierra Vista/Satwiwa in the Santa Monica Mountains is getting green from recent rains. The ranch in Newbury Park is under the National Park Service.

While six months remain in this rain year, the months that typically produce the highest amount of precipitation are nearly done.

It also appears unlikely, based on historical trends, that rainfall would even reach the average amount of 15.76 inches.

“The drought never ended for us,” said Ron Merklings, public affairs manager for the Casitas Municipal Water District.

In recent weeks, those who live and work in Ventura County may have noticed hillsides, usually covered in dried vegetation, or blackened due to wildfires, become green due to a series of rainstorms that have passed through the region.

Portions of the Thomas Fire burn area, left blackened for months, appear from afar as if they are covered in a bright green moss.

The beautification of open spaces in the county seems to be one of the only substantial effects of recent rainfall.

Last year, most of California received record-setting amounts of rain after years of drought. Ventura County, however, got an amount that was only slightly above average.

According to Merklings, Lake Casitas is down 76 feet from its normal level.

The recent rainfall has done little to alleviate that, with storms not providing enough water to divert into the lake.

“There’s not enough water to do everything we’ve been doing for the last 50 years,” Anselm said, adding that continued drought could cause allocation cutbacks for agricultural and residential users.

“In terms of supply, it’s pretty minimal,” he said.

The county could see some relief in the coming days, as rain was expected Friday evening in addition to a stronger storm that is forecast to arrive in the middle of next week.

According to the National Weather Service, the first storm could provide between one-fourth to one-half inch of rain between Friday and Saturday morning.

Next week's storm, however, could bring up to 2 inches between Wednesday and Friday, posing debris-flow risks for recent burn areas.

“There’s not enough water to do everything we’ve been doing for the last 50 years.”

Arne Anselm

Deputy director of water resources for the Ventura County Public Works Agency



Climate Appropriate Plants for Beginning Gardeners

Wednesday, March 28th 6 to 7 p.m.

Laura Bauer, Landscape Designer and board member of the SoCal Horticultural Society, brings decades of experience and a unique perspective on the best plants for beginning gardeners.



Register at LVMWD.com/Garden-Classes

DROUGHT GARDENING

Dry landscape is still lush



HOMEOWNERS David and Christine Ramirez thought their Woodland Hills home needed a new landscape and then were spurred to change it by a rebate program, so they removed the thirsty lawn in front of their house — photo at top — and replaced it with a bench, path and a variety of drought-tolerant plants, including English lavender, feathery cassia, red fountain grass and lantana. (Photographs by David Ramirez)

By Lisa Boone
LA Times 3/18/2018

At the height of the California drought, David and Christine Ramirez started to question the practicality of their Woodland Hills lawn. ¶ When the Metropolitan Water District started offering customers \$2-per-square-foot payments as part of their lawn-replacement program, the couple decided to trade their turf for a low-water alternative.

“We wanted to lower our water bill and change the landscaping, so it prompted us to act,” Ramirez says.

In the spring, the couple hired Sam Caldera of Sam’s Landscaping in West Hills to dig up the fungus-plagued lawn in front of their 1959 ranch house. By July, the couple had a beautiful new drought-tolerant habitat.

On the Ramirezes’ wish list were colorful drought-tolerant plants in a variety of textures. They also wanted to attract wildlife such as birds and butterflies including the state’s dwindling monarch butterflies.

Following some expensive landscape design bids, the couple decided to fashion the garden themselves, adding plants in wide gaps initially and then filling in as plants matured.

For color, they planted four different types of salvia, English lavender, Russian sage, Mexican petunia and two types of lantana.

Fortnight lilies and kangaroo paw add height, while dwarf rosemary, feathery cassia, dwarf bottlebrush, sun-loving gaura, red fountain grass and other miscellaneous grasses add texture.

A new bench and path paved with decomposed granite breaks up the yard and allows for meandering. "I like to walk around to see how the plants are doing," Ramirez says. "I wanted to feel like I'm wandering in nature."

Like any evolving garden, there have been some surprises. There hasn't been as much wildlife as they had anticipated. Recent cold weather killed off all of the lantana. Some plants that were supposed to stop at four feet are now seven feet tall. "I do spend more time on maintenance than I had anticipated," Ramirez acknowledges. "But it gives us some privacy."

The entire project cost just under \$10,000, a total that got a big assist from the \$5,000 turf rebate the couple received.

Three years later, Ramirez is happy with the results. He is also happy with his water bill. "I run the water for six minutes once a week," he says. The result? "It has lowered my water bill by \$100 a month."





Series of storms bringing rain and snow to state

John Antczak ASSOCIATED PRESS
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LOS ANGELES – Bands of sometimes heavy rain rolled over Southern California Thursday and unleashed a mudslide that trapped cars and shut a key canyon highway through mountains along the coast near Malibu.

The front was the latest in a series of storms that have been bringing much needed rain and snow to California, which has seen a belated spate of wet weather in an otherwise largely dry winter.

The 2:30 a.m. slide blocked State Route 27 for the third time since a brush fire burned away vegetation in Topanga Canyon in January.

Mud, boulders, debris and ash flowed down a steep slope, clogged a drain and spilled onto the roadway in three locations within a span of about 1,000 feet (305 meters), the California Department of Transportation said.

Authorities closed 4 miles (6.4 kilometers) of the road north of Pacific Coast Highway where several cars were mired in muck.

“It was raining really hard so it caught us by surprise, didn’t expect it,” Ivan Contreras told KTTV. “It was pretty horrible. Just got stuck, couldn’t drive, couldn’t even get out of the car.”

His companion, Jennifer Cruz, said she thought they might go off the edge of the road and fall down the canyon.

“I got scared,” she said.

Rescuers freed them, but the cleanup was not expected to be so quick despite the arrival of earth-moving equipment.

With more rain expected, Caltrans planned keep

the road closed through at least Sunday night. It’s one of just a handful of routes through the Santa Monica Mountains that connect LA’s San Fernando Valley with the coast.

Smaller mud flows occurred elsewhere in Los Angeles County but were cleared quickly.

Since the deadly Jan. 9 debris flow that smashed the Santa Barbara County community of Montecito, the region has so far avoided further major storm damage despite a number large despite large wildfire burn scars.

Statewide, periods of rain and snow were expected to continue into the weekend. A winter storm warning was in effect in the Sierra Nevada and a winter weather advisory covered a large portion of far northern counties.

Los Angeles-area forecasters said there was a decent chance of even more rain next week but a low-pressure system over the Pacific had slowed down and it would take a few days to determine when a new storm may arrive.



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*Rain on the garden means
money in my pocket.*



My sprinklers are OFF for a week!



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