

Northern Exposure: Dispute on Turtle Bay hotel boils over

Published: Sunday, Apr. 6, 2014 - 12:00 am

REDDING Redding residents are caught between REVIVE and REVOLT.

A years-long dispute over construction of a \$20 million hotel complex has flared into verbal warfare as opponents take to shopping malls and social media with signs, slogans and petitions.

Turtle Bay Exploration Park proposed the for-profit hotel to create revenue for its nonprofit museum complex, an internationally acclaimed cultural center that includes the Sundial Bridge.

REVOLT (Residents Entitled to Vote on Land Transaction) formed last month after the Redding City Council approved selling 14 acres of city-owned land to the McConnell Foundation, an independent Redding-based charity and major funder of Turtle Bay.

The vote circumvents a state ruling that required paying prevailing wages during construction if the proposed hotel complex were on public land, said REVOLT spokesman Tom Curato.

In a strange-bedfellow alliance, tea party loyalists and union activists are gathering signatures to force the City Council to either overturn the sale or put it before voters in November.

Pro-hotel citizens, angry over the “outsiders” paid to gather signatures, formed REVIVE (Redding Empowered to Vote for Increased Visitors and Employment). The proposed four-star hotel will bring jobs, new groups and new life to Redding, said Rocky Slaughter, self-described quarterback of the group.

The Turtle Bay hotel dispute has been roiling for so long and the arguments have shifted so much that people don’t even remember what they’re angry about, said James Theimer, an architect and 30-year Redding resident: “They’re just angry.”

Wool is catching on in Sonoma County

SONOMA COUNTY Wispy white, fist-size balls bouncing around in a handful of North Coast dryers are harbingers of an industry warming up in the rolling hills along rural Highway 1.

Wool is making a comeback.

Sheep ranchers who used to throw away their sheared fleece are instead converting it into practical everyday products. Wool-fiber yoga mats and infant “puddle pads” are entering the locavore market alongside artisanal cheeses and organic vegetables.

Driven by interest in locally grown and natural products, the fledging wool movement is introducing a product unfamiliar to most Americans, said Amy Chesnut, who runs Sonoma Wool Co. with Joe Pozzi, a sheep rancher.

Take Casey Mazzucchi. He grew up on a sheep ranch but only recently realized how healthy wool is: “No chemicals, natural fire resistance and wonderful to sleep on.”

Mazzucchi decided to start a wool mill “just like that.” The 15,000-pound needle loom he brought from [North Carolina](#) and installed in a barn is now the centerpiece of Valley Ford Mercantile & Wool Mill. Mazzucchi processes wool from his own herd, which includes 13 endangered Navajo Churro sheep, and from neighboring ranchers. He also makes felt and other wool fabrics.

For a generation raised on plastic and throw-away imports, wool holds an alluring charm. “Once people hold it in their hands they don’t want to let go,” said Chesnut, whose wool products include ironing-board pads, dish-drying mats and dog toys.

Stay tuned for designer jackets fashioned from coarse wool.

City unveils [tsunami](#)-resistant harbor

CRESCENT CITY No one in this coastal city is looking forward to the next tsunami, but the harbor will be ready when it hits. The Crescent City Harbor District reopened the marina last month after a \$54 million reconstruction that makes it the first tsunami-resistant harbor on the West Coast.

Offshore geology makes Crescent City particularly vulnerable to tsunamis. The 1964 “Good Friday earthquake” in Anchorage, Alaska, destroyed the harbor along with much of the city, killing 12 people.

In 2011 the tsunami off the northeast coast of Japan hurtled across the Pacific to break the Crescent City pilings, jamming them into a corner of the harbor and claiming its only U.S. victim.

Engineers designing the reconstruction looked at how those waves – as high as 20 feet – flowed into the harbor. They built a breakwater to absorb and redirect the force of the incoming water, said Charlie Helms, the newly appointed harbor master.

The new pilings are twice the normal 12-inch diameter and driven deeper into the bedrock. In combination with new docks made of concrete and designed to slide off the pilings instead of shattering in place, the harbor should withstand 50-year tsunamis, said Wes White, president of the harbor district.

“We’re going to find out whether this baby really holds up,” he said.

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