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Jane Braxton Little: Northern Exposure

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12/06/2014 3:00 PM | Updated: 12/07/2014 12:00 AM



Scientists monitoring radiation in the Pacific Ocean following the 2011 accident at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant detected cesium-134, a radioactive isotope released during the explosions and meltdowns. It measured 1,000 times below the acceptable limits in drinking water set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. ANONYMOUS / ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

EUREKA – Don't melt down over fears of radiation

Radioactive fish. Contaminated beaches. And now: Swirling plumes of irradiated water headed for the California coast.

Holy Fukushima! What's a panicked public to do?

Relax, say the scientists monitoring radiation in the Pacific following the 2011 accident at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

Last month they detected cesium-134, a radioactive isotope released during the explosions and meltdowns. It measured 1,000 times below the acceptable limits in drinking water set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

So low, in fact, that the levels are only detectable by sophisticated equipment able to discern minute quantities of radioactivity, said Ken Buesseler, a Woods Hole marine chemist who is leading the monitoring effort.

The samples were collected 100 miles west of Eureka. The Woods Hole researchers have found no sign of cesium-134 in coastal waters.

Scientists have busted other myths about the effects of Fukushima radiation on California. No worries for surfers and swimmers, they say. Open ocean currents dilute radioactive concentrations within four months of their release, and it takes years for seawater plumes from Japan to reach U.S. shores, said oceanographer Eric Van Sebille of the University of New South Wales.

Fish caught along California's waters are safe to eat, and researchers agree that the risk is extremely low in Pacific seafood.

And if you fancy the kelp found in deep-water forests lining the coast, Kelp Watch 2014 scientists found no detectable traces of cesium-134 in the samples they took through August. Another round of sampling just started so 100-foot fronds of glowing radiation are still possible.

Residents make sure library is here to stay

When it comes to reducing citywide crime, the proactive solution is obvious to some: Close the library.

“Whatever it takes,” said April LaFrance, a Redding business owner who spearheaded a three-month study of how to reduce Redding’s burgeoning crime rate.

An aghast public, which fought hard for the facility with solar panels and a rooftop garden, quickly rebuffed the proposal. Even Redding Police Chief Robert Paoletti, at the center of the search for solutions, distanced himself: “Her suggestion, not mine.”

But indignation over potential library closure may be serving a purpose. It struck a nerve. The weeks that followed LaFrance’s Nov. 13 presentation – to an audience of 1,000 – have seen a surge of innovative brainstorming.

The dilemma is how to combat a double-digit percentage increase in robberies and vehicle theft with depleted police staff, limited jail space and an influx of inmates from state prison sent to county facilities. Everyone agrees funding is the issue, but a quarter-cent city sales tax to raise \$5 million a year for law enforcement failed to garner the required two-thirds approval of voters Nov. 4.

With shuttering the library discarded, suggestions for how to pay for crime reduction run the gamut from eliminating city positions to another sales tax initiative with a campaign to muster support.

Paoletti is leaving funding to the City Council, but he’s clear about Redding’s future: “We’ll get there eventually.” And he’s certain it will happen with the library intact.

Couple give up a little slice of Eden on the river

Eden is where you find it. For Lorraine Paloma and Fred Leidecker, it’s Pulga, a secluded haunt in the Feather River Canyon graced by a burbling stream, a canyon lush with fiddlehead ferns and enough natural enchantment to attract a grove of druids.

Never mind that multiple freight trains lumber through daily carrying crude oil; that its only access is a treacherous one-lane road clinging to a cliff; and most of its 20 buildings are careening into the sides of mountains that block sunlight for all but a few hours in winter. Or that Pulga means “flea.”

“I wouldn’t give up a single day here,” said Paloma, who bought the place in 1994 for \$200,000.

But after 20 years and six months, she and Leidecker are giving it all up. They put the entire town on the market: 62 acres, a schoolhouse and four habitable buildings.

It's not the forest fires, the floods or the fear of train derailments that compelled their decision.

"Time goes faster at 76," said Leidecker, Paloma's partner and childhood friend. "And the upkeep," said Paloma, her voice trailing off.

A Southern California family of 18 bought Pulga for \$499,000.

Along with the land, they are acquiring the solitude, the serendipity and the karma Leidecker and Paloma created through Mystic Valley Retreat, which offered hypnotherapy and deep healing.

"I will miss everything," Paloma said. "I would live here forever if only I could."

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