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thermal

County approves race track project

BY DEBRA GRUSZECKI
The Desert Sun

Thermal Motorsports Park & Club, a private 4.5-mile race track facility proposed near the Jacqueline Cochran Regional Airport, gained a lap this week.

The Riverside County Board of Supervisors voted 4-0 to amend the plot plan for Kohl Ranch, a residential lifestyle development dating back to 1999, to allow a country club-styled track facility to be built on 330 acres of the 2,133-acre site.

Supervisor John Benoit described the project as an exciting opportunity to spur the economy.

It will invigorate and diversify tourism, Todd Keefer, general manager of PGA West, said.

The \$70 million project is pitched as a club where owners of high-performance cars can exhibit and race their vehicles. Lots will be parceled out, and sold, for construction of loft-type garages on and off the track.

Limited to day-time use, the private track would be used for car shows and events, movies, photo shoots and testing by auto manufacturers.

Now moving into its project approval phase, investor Blake Miraglia said he has set a goal to get permits to begin grading in July. The first race, ideally, could be held in 2012.

Consider putting it into the “fast track” program,” Coachella Valley Economic Partnership chief executive Tom Flavin suggested before the vote.

Flavin said the track would bring diversity and development to the airport.

“We view it as an anchor around a potential automotive job cluster,” Flavin said. “Its uniqueness will attract

related users and vendors.”

“The housing element will be some time down the road, as the economy dictates,” Benoit said, but the economic advantages of living near an amenity like that could make that date come sooner.

The Kohl Ranch community, designed for year-round residences, envisions a place for families with a school, public services, trails and lifestyle amenities.

Besides car owners with high net-worth, Benoit said the plans include a public kart track — with 19

possible configurations — that would appeal to a middle-of-the-road demographic. It would be a spot where kids could learn how to drive, or become a professional driver in the future, he said.

“It’s not going to be easy, but we think this is the start of something unique,” Miraglia said. “By being creative, we think we can kick-start development again.”

Debra Gruszecki covers tourism, CVEP and Indian gaming for The Desert Sun. She can be reached at debragruszecki@thedesertsun.com or (760) 778-4643.

ANSWERMAN



colin atagi

Medians still bare on Fred Waring

It’s time to revisit an issue that has sparked interest among many residents, particularly those in La Quinta.

Someone inquires monthly about the underdeveloped medians on Fred Waring Drive, just east of Washington Street.

Residents have complained that the medians need landscaping, which they say was supposed to happen a long time ago.

City officials said a few months ago they were going to discuss the medians at a March City Council meeting as part of a capital improvement project, and that’s exactly what happened.

The process will begin July 1.

“It takes usually about six to eight months to put the project together so it can be bid,” La Quinta Public Works Director Tim Jonasson said. “So this time next year, if I had to make an educated guess, (development) we’ll either be out to bid or we’ll have started construction.”

Officials try to make medians around the community similar to each other, and Jonasson compared the Fred Waring landscaping to work being done on Miles Avenue.

He added work on those medians, as well as others on Palm Royale Drive, are budgeted for about \$1.1 million.

Whom to contact

La Quinta City Hall,
(760) 777-7000

Got an issue?

The Answer Man column appears in the valley section every Monday — and it’s fueled by your questions and concerns.

If you’ve got one, contact Colin Atagi at (760) 778-4645 or send him an e-mail at colin.atagi@thedesertsun.com.

palm springs



PHOTOS BY GERRY MACEDA SPECIAL TO THE DESERT SUN



Art & Crafts

TOP: Palm Springs Art Museum staff Andrea Calderon (right) shows an example of assemblage art to children before starting a workshop during Free Second Sundays at the Palm Springs Art Museum.

CENTER: Amanda Doty, 6, Jacquelynna Ladd, 7, Jaszmine Ladd, 8, and Christina Ladd, all of Palm Desert, work on assemblage art.

BOTTOM: Palm Springs Art Museum staff Alex Norris (right) speaks to the A’Hearn family of Palm Springs about an art piece titled “Tunnel” by artist Chul-Hyun Ahn.

See more photos from the weekend at mydesert.com.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...?

Volunteer medical staff expands at free clinic

Patients seen at temporary facility near JFK Hospital

BY XOCHITL PEÑA
The Desert Sun

It’s been seven months since the Volunteers in Medicine free clinic opened its temporary facility along Dr. Carreon Blvd. in Indio.

It was a sluggish start, but now with an influx of volunteers, more patients are being seen.

“We now have whittled that waiting

list down to almost nothing,” said Bruce Yeager, executive director of the clinic.

“If someone calls now, they will likely get an appointment within two weeks, which is good by free clinic standards,” he said.

The clinic is a no-pay facility run by volunteers, either current or retired from the medical and administrative profession.

Its temporary location is 81-880 Dr. Carreon Blvd., Suite B 103, across from John F. Kennedy Memorial Hospital. A much larger permanent facility is in the works along Avenue 48

in Indio, west of Jackson Street and the Coachella city border, and is expected to open next year.

Patients are seen by appointment only and must be Coachella Valley residents.

The clinic provides health care and dental services for adults who do not have insurance and are not eligible for any type of health care coverage.

They must also meet certain low-income requirements.

As of January, the clinic operated with two doctors and one nurse practitioner.

Among the medical volunteers,

there are now eight physicians, two dentists, 10 nurses and three nurse practitioners.

In addition to that staff, Yeager said he expects to add three more physicians and one dentist in the next 30 to 45 days.

He also anticipates four to five new nurse volunteers and three to four new clerical staff members.

One of the new physician volunteers is Dr. Joseph E. Scherger, vice president of primary care at Eisenhower Medical Center/Eisenhower Argyros Health Center in La Quinta.

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INSIDE VALLEY

Temporary new digs

Library moves summer programs to space at Westfield mall. **B3**

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corrections

We correct errors of fact promptly and courteously. If you have a correction or clarification, please contact Senior Editor Jim Kelly at (760) 778-4767 or at jim.kelly@thedesertsun.com