

Personal Best

A CLOSE-UP LOOK AT PEOPLE WHO MATTER

Children Have a Friend in Charitable Cop

By JIM CROGAN
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Making promises doesn't come easy to LAPD Deputy Chief Mark Kroeker. The Newhall resident remembers making only three. The first came on his wedding day, the second on the day he joined the Los Angeles Police Department. The third was made when a grieving but thankful mom, in the midst of transporting the body of her 11-year-old daughter home to Argentina, pleaded with him to continue his work and help other children get the organ transplants they desperately need.

"Promise me, you'll do it for Veronica. Make her death mean something," she implored.

The 30-year veteran, who commands the LAPD's South Bureau, says he was so moved by the mother's spirit that he agreed. He credits that commitment and the remarkable courage Veronica showed in fighting a battle she eventually lost for the inspiration to start the Encino-based World Children's Transplant Fund.

In many ways, the failed effort to save Veronica showed Kroeker how to move the dream forward. That journey began in Argentina, when Kroeker met the young girl on a business trip. With the help of a lot of committed people in Texas, California and Canada, Kroeker managed to raise \$100,000 and get enough in-kind donations to pay for travel, housing and three transplant operations for Veronica. But the experience also taught him that this was not the most efficient operating plan.

Five years and approximately \$1 million later, Kroeker and the WCTF he founded are still growing. A board of directors has signed on. Plans are under way to establish WCTF groups in Mexico, the Czech Republic, Colombia and Armenia. The organization already has centers in Los Angeles, Argentina, Costa Rica and Russia.

"We started out just raising money for transplant operations," Kroeker says. "Now, our strategy is focused on establishing centers, based on the three Ts: training, technology and teaching."

Since the group has developed the new philosophy, it has become impossible to count the number of children



Mark Kroeker

NORTHridge

Residents Want 75-Foot Tower Built Elsewhere

It was a letter of both praise and pleading, and Neil Fitzpatrick of AirTouch Cellular allowed himself a chuckle at the completeness of its irony.

In one sentence the writer expressed awe at the wonder of her cellular telephone—and in the next sentence she asked AirTouch to please not place a cellular transmission tower in her Northridge neighborhood.

"It was perfect," Fitzpatrick said of the letter. "People like the benefits but don't realize some of the things that go with it."

Neighbors of the proposed 75-foot tower—to be placed on land belonging to the Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, near the intersection of Balboa Boulevard and Plummer Street—say it's less an issue of fickleness than concern for the neighborhood.

"I use all the modern conveniences [including a cellular phone], so I know that we need the utilities," said Goldie Weis, who lives less than a block away from the proposed site. But "we would like to keep this a residential neighborhood," she added.

AirTouch says a tower is needed in the area to improve service and keep up with the boom of cellular phone users.

Residents say there are plenty of other places to put it, including commercial sites outside their quaint neighborhood.

Weis and neighbor Patty Perry have sent other residents letters encouraging them to oppose the tower—the subject of both an upcoming Los Angeles Planning Commission hearing and an informational meeting at the church.

Perry said there is a "myriad of reasons" to be concerned about the proposal. Residents fear the tower would lower property values, as well as open the door to more commercial operations in the residential area, she said.

And, she added, "We don't know what the health risks are."

Cellular phones can be operated on the move because their signal is picked up by one "cell" and passed to another as a dialing driver, for example, heads down the road. If the caller moves into an area without a cell, or with a cell loaded to capacity, the signal is lost.

Fitzpatrick said the tower proposed for the Northridge site, a 60-foot mono-

WEST VALLEY FOCUS

- Agoura
- Agoura Hills
- Calabasas

- Canoga Park
- Chatsworth
- Encino

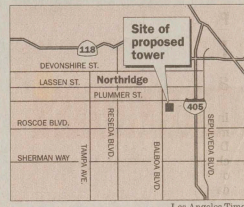
- Granada Hills
- Hidden Hills
- North Hills

- Northridge
- Reseda
- Tarzana

- West Hills
- Westlake Village
- Woodland Hills



JULIE MARKES / FOR THE TIMES



Los Angeles Times

Goldie Weis, left, and Patty Perry stand on the site proposed for an AirTouch Cellular phone transmission tower in Northridge.

pole with attached antennas that will extend to 75 feet, would not be a gargantuan metallic eyecore, but more like a large light pole one might see at Dodger Stadium.

"If you had a large gathering of people, you'd get more energy than you would from this," he said, noting that the human body produces a small electrical field. He added that many basement-run ham radios operate at higher power levels.

The Planning Commission will hear arguments on a conditional use permit for the tower July 25 at 1 p.m. at the Sherman Oaks Women's Club, 4808 Kester Ave. Officials from both the church and AirTouch Cellular will meet with residents Tuesday at 7 p.m. at the church, 9400 Balboa Blvd.

—ERIC SLATER

NORTHridge

Child-Care Center Guidelines Urged

Prompted by a neighborhood dispute over a proposed day-care center in Northridge, Los Angeles Councilwoman Laura Chick recommended Wednesday that city officials draft guidelines to help determine when a child-care center is appropriate for a residential area.

The Chick motion was prompted by an emotionally charged dispute over a proposal to allow a day-care center for 36 children in a residential area on

Devonshire Street in Northridge.

Neighbors of the proposed center opposed the project, calling it a "commercial intrusion." Upon Chick's recommendation, the council voted unanimously last week to permit the center for 24 children.

Under current zoning codes, a child-care facility with more than 12 children can only be allowed in a residential area after a public hearing is conducted and a conditional-use permit is approved by city zoning officials.

Chick's proposal instructs the city's zoning administrator and child-care coordinator to draft a set of guidelines "to assist Planning Department staff and Council members in making decisions" on child-care facilities.

Chick's proposal will be considered by the council's committee on planning and land use sometime in the next month.

—HUGO MARTIN

GRANADA HILLS

Judge Allows Group to Videotape Landfill

A citizens' group was given court approval Wednesday to videotape the Sunshine Canyon Landfill site to assess the destruction at a forest the group is fighting to preserve.

A judge granted the North Valley Coalition of Concerned Citizens a court order allowing its members to videotape and photograph the forested area north

of Granada Hills, where an estimated 1,000 California live oak trees were cut down recently to prepare for the dump's expansion.

Terry du Soleil and another coalition member were kept from videotaping at the site Friday by employees of landfill operator Browning-Ferris Industries, du Soleil said. In response, the group sought a court order allowing members to enter and make a visual record, coalition attorney Rosemary Woodcock said.

A forester from the group and du Soleil, a professional filmmaker, are scheduled to visit the landfill with cameras Saturday.

The same Los Angeles Superior Court judge who made the ruling on the videotaping also halted the tree-cutting last week at the landfill, just four days after it began.

In preparation for a long-sought expansion of the landfill, crews immediately began leveling the trees after a Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission panel gave approval to the plan June 23. The coalition quickly filed suit and Judge Diane Wayne issued a temporary injunction. The judge will decide Tuesday whether to leave that injunction in place or lift it and allow the deforestation to resume.

Although BFI argued against allowing the group to videotape the site, BFI spokesman Arnie Berghoff said Wednesday's ruling was not a major setback for the landfill.

—ERIC SLATER

Valley

Los Angeles Times
F/CC1 THURSDAY, JULY 7, 1994

ALSO: LOS ANGELES COUNTY NEWS, EDITORIALS, WEATHER

HIGHLIGHTS

VALLEY NEWS

CHARGES FILED: State officials have filed charges against a Burbank-based charitable fund-raising business, accusing it of illegally soliciting donations for charities that do not exist or which never received the money. The civil complaint was filed against Valley Fundraisers and its president, Thomas Galambos. **B1**

CHILD WITNESS: A 4-year-old girl called to testify against the alleged attacker of her twin brother says, "I don't want to tell." The judge excluded the testimony of the child, who was the sole witness to what caused her brother's severe injuries. **B1**



VIOLENCE: Nerves are rattled at Palmdale's Antelope Valley Mall in the wake of the fatal shooting of a 16-year-old youth. Security has been stepped up at the shopping center, a hub for the high desert community. The attack at the 4-year-old complex has left some shoppers and merchants jittery. **B8**

SCOTT HARRIS

A Santa Clarita congressman is urging the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to remove religion from its new guidelines on workplace. **B1**

Jackson and Arson Cases Now in Limbo

■ **Grand jury:** Panel disbanded without bringing indictments against pop star or firefighters suspected in Calabasas Malibu blaze.

By JOSH MEYER
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Lawyers in two high-profile cases—the investigation of sexual molestation allegations against pop superstar Michael Jackson and the probe of the deadly Calabasas/Malibu arson fire—said Wednesday that Dist. Atty. Gil Garcetti should charge their clients or exonerate them now that a grand jury investigating both matters has disbanded.

The county's 23 grand jurors ended their

term last Thursday without bringing criminal indictments against Jackson, who was accused last year of sexually molesting a 13-year-old male acquaintance. The grand jurors also took no action in the case of Steven Shelp and Nicholas Durepo, two firefighters whom sheriff's officials have accused of setting one of the most damaging arson fires in Los Angeles history. A new grand jury has been impaneled and could take up the work of its predecessor, although officials would not confirm that either case is now before it.

No charges have been filed in either

case, and defense lawyers said they are frustrated that their clients have been left under a very public cloud of suspicion for so long—almost a year in Jackson's case.

The firefighters, like Jackson, have denied wrongdoing.

The allegations against Shelp and Durepo, their lawyers contend, have prevented the men from advancing their careers as firefighters. Shelp has been taken off active firefighting duties and placed on administrative duty by the Los Angeles Fire Department while the investigation continues. Durepo, a volunteer with the Manhattan Beach Fire Department, has been placed on unpaid leave.

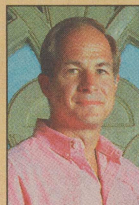
"I'm upset. They have to either fish or cut bait," said Donald Calabria, a lawyer for

Durepo. "They have to let us know so we can defend these guys. If they have something, I want to see it."

Sheriff's officials named Shelp and Durepo as suspects late last year, asking Garcetti to file a criminal case against them. But the district attorney balked at immediately filing criminal charges, sending the case back to sheriff's homicide detectives for more investigation. Several months later, prosecutors began presenting witnesses to the grand jury in an effort to obtain an indictment.

Sheriff Sherman Block, while not mentioning Shelp and Durepo by name, has said he believes they started the fire so they could put it out and be heroes, and increase

Please see JURY, B5



Burbank's new mayor learns the ropes. **B3**

In Your Community

Northridge: Residents Fight Tower

Valley: Breathing a Little Easier

Pacoima: Schools Start Food Program

Arleta: Woman Dies in Freeway Accident

Glendale: Parking Ticket Amnesty

SEE FOCUS PAGES B2, B3

Bigger Than Life



ROSE HOWERER / Los Angeles Times

Ines Leske, 22, at right, balances on a ladder to clean part of the mural The Great Wall of Los Angeles on the Tujunga Wash conduit at Oxnard Street and Coldwater Canyon Ave.

nue. The student from Berlin is an intern with Social and Public Arts Resource Center, a nonprofit center helping to catalogue, maintain and restore the murals of Los Angeles.

Fund-Raising Firm Charged in Fraud Case

■ **Courts:** Judge bars Burbank company from soliciting charity donations until a July 20 hearing on the state charges.

By DOUG SMITH
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Alleging "an enormous fraud," state officials have filed charges against a charitable fund-raising business, accusing it of illegally soliciting donations for charities that do not exist or which never received the money.

A civil complaint filed in Los Angeles Superior Court alleges that Valley Fundraisers and its president, Thomas Galambos, defrauded the public in a telemarketing operation that has reported raising \$2.6 million over the past four years.

In declarations filed with the complaint, Deputy Atty. Gen. James M. Cordi alleged that the Burbank-based firm failed to report donations it received fraudulently.

Cordi said Galambos has declined to turn over his financial records, invoking his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.

At Cordi's request, a judge on Wednesday froze the firm's bank accounts and barred it from soliciting charity donations. The judge's order was issued July 20.