

guest speaker

ST Were we mistaken?

Sept 1 1988

by Peter M. Henriksen

In response to the mayor's editorial in the *Times & News* Aug. 25 it seems clear if you look at the record surrounding the Laguna issue "nothing" would be an improvement over what is being done. In the last two city council elections many of us out here who feel strongly about saving Sebastopol's country image and about preserving the Laguna were heartened by what we perceived as allies on the new city council.

In February headlines read "City says Laguna is worth saving." A Laguna advisory committee had worked for over a year to formulate recommendations on land use surrounding this unique natural resource. Each of the members received a neatly printed certificate for his efforts. Two strong suggestions came from the report - no new development in the flood plain (below 76 feet) and no net fill for flood control.

The Aug. 18 *Times & News* reported City Manager Mel Davis' attitude. He was at that time allaying developer's fears before the Rotary Club by announcing "The dire things suggested in the Laguna study will probably not take place or become part of city policy. About the same time a fleet of bulldozers began their demolition of the corner of Morris Street and Highway 12, a stone's throw from the Laguna main channel well into the flood plain and well below the 76 foot guideline. After a week of work an endless caravan of trucks has raised the area 8-10 feet. For six years I have been able to look out the examination room window at my veterinary clinic over the Laguna and feel the warmth that comes only from the natural beauty of trees and open space. Now I get to look forward to another in a string of tastelessly designed modern shopping complexes that continue to sprout upon the landscape of this once charming and peaceful town.

And yes, I was here on Feb. 14, 1986, during the flood. For three days I paddled to my clinic in a canoe - moving my animals upstairs not knowing how high the water would rise. It reached four feet in my front yard. My neighbor, John, chained his business trailer to a tree so it wouldn't wash away. When the water from the next flood surrounds our new shopping center it will be just a little deeper around the Animal Kingdom Veterinary Hosopital.

So it is very clear to me where the mayor and the council stand on this issue. Much worse than "nothing" is being done. We citizens do not have the time, energy or expertise to follow the bulldozers.

That is why at all the recent elections we have clearly and consistently voted for people we perceived to have careful, tasteful plans for Sebastopol - Plans that could keep us from losing our identity. Were we mistaken? or misled?