

Idyllwild Town Crier



Covering the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains from Twin Pines to Anza to Pinyon

ALMOST ALL THE NEWS — PART OF THE TIME

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IDYLLWILD, CA

THURS., MAY 10, 2007

Placing first

Two Idyllwild Arts Academy employees win firsts in 24 Hours of Adrenalin mountain bike race.

See page 9.

Director Banks?

Is Idyllwild Water District trying to reseat Timm Banks?

See page 12.

Chamber re-election

Technicality sends ballots back out for members to vote again.

See page 12.

Weed law in court

Conservationist group sues Riverside County over hazard abatement ordinance.

See page 10.

Fire season update

The drought is expected to bring a bad fire season to Southern California.

See page 13.

Spring Challenge

Third year of Idyllwild's mountain bike race is this weekend. Moms get bonuses for Mother's Day.

See page 15.

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When he's not playing a bass, **Alex Watson** is busy making them in his workshop, a converted three-car garage. PHOTO BY GARY SQUIER

Idyllwild is home to Scottish craftsman

BY GARY SQUIER
STAFF REPORTER

Alex Watson, 50, of Idyllwild, loves to play the bass. You can see it when he plays. His whole body moves to the music, and his ease of playing is that of a trained musician. He also loves to make basses — custom basses and guitars.

Alex and his wife, Tere, (pronounced Terry) run Watson Guitars out of their home in Idyllwild. Alex makes the instruments in his workshop, their converted three-car garage; Tere runs the business upstairs in their home office. Telephones are in every room. "We always answer our phones," Tere said. "It's one of our business links."

"Tere does the hard work of purchasing, sales, marketing, taxes
See Alex, page 28

New center on hold

BY GARY SQUIER
STAFF REPORTER AND
J.P. CRUMRINE
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Work on the new Idyllwild Community Center (ICC) has stopped, according to Pete Capparelli, a member of the Idyllwild Community Recreation Council (ICRC) Steering Committee, because of environmental concerns.

Last week, he and Kent Steele, also a Steering Committee member, met with a group of local residents about two environmental issues relating to the site of the proposed ICC. Jeff Smith, Chuck Stroud and Sue Nash requested the meeting. Their agenda included two topics — green tree removal at the ICC site and the approaching stream of remnant underground contaminants from the Shell Station.

"We don't know how far [the leak] is spreading out," Capparelli told the ICRC board Thursday evening. "It is going down Highway 243 and toward the ICC property. We have to see how far the plume has spread on the ICC property."

Capparelli said he would ask Joe Tranti, on Riverside County 3rd District Supervisor Jeff Stone's staff, to check with the county Health Department, since it is an environmental issue. Meanwhile, all work, tree removal and razing the remaining structures is in abeyance until these issues are resolved, he added.

In addition, the three residents raised questions about whether adequate permits had been obtained to remove green trees from the property. Robert Priefer, the third member of the
See ICC, page 26

TC receives awards

BY GARY SQUIER
STAFF REPORTER

Town Crier reporters, a photographer, the editor and production staff have received several journalism and design awards from the California Newspaper Publishers Association (CNPA) and the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ).

The contests were for 2006 pages in front page design, page layout and design, local spot news photography, business news and local

breaking news. Publisher-Editor Becky Clark, Operations Manager Jim Crandall and Photographer Dr. Michael Erlich were given a CNPA certificate of achievement for the Dec. 7 and 21 front-page design and layout for tabloids. The Dec. 7 front page features a photo entitled "It Takes a Village," and the Dec. 21 issue features a photograph of Buzz Holmes and Mezzo-Soprano Adrien Raynier performing the Idyllwild Master Chorale's 31st performance
See Awards, page 27

Alex

Continued from page 1

and everything else that leaves me to making sawdust in my workshop," Alex said.

Alex was born in Tomatin, Scotland, "The home of the biggest malt distributor in the world in a town of maybe 500, not far from Inverness," he said.

That's where Alex attended Inverness Royal Academy. Most of his classmates came from wealthy families and could afford expensive instruments. He couldn't, so he made his first guitar — mostly from his grandmother's washboard and random pieces of wood.

Several classmates loved it and asked him to make one for them or repair stringed instruments they already had.

Later, he attended a technical college in Inverness where he studied engineering.

Although he's been in the

U.S. since 1985, his brogue is still detectable, but not the thick, back-of-the-throat Scottish that makes it a foreign language to most of us.

For many years, Alex worked in the corporate world as a manufacturing engineer and Web designer in Bethel, Conn., and in California. He and Tere met in Pasadena, married in the highlands of Scotland in 1997, and bought a home in Laguna Niguel when the market was low. They both worked at Dreamworks for several years, raising their teenage sons from a previous marriage, and commuting from Laguna Niguel.

Then he learned that Dreamworks would be downsizing, and he would be part of that. He and Tere decided to work on their own dream. The boys were nearly on their own by then, so they started looking around for a place to fulfill their dream of a cottage industry, building custom basses and guitars.

Luckily, the housing mar-



Alex and Tere Watson have a well-established division of labor in their business. Tere takes care of the business end and Alex makes the sawdust.

PHOTO BY GARY SQUIER



One of Alex Watson's custom-made basses made of exotic woods with beautiful inlays and knobs.

PHOTO BY GARY SQUIER

finishing. When it returns, the strings, electronics, etc. are installed.

In their first year of doing business, they have sold a half-dozen basses and guitars.

While the instrument is being made to order, they update their Web site every day so the buyer can see the step-by-step progress.

"Our short-term goal is one instrument a month," Tere said. "Since really hitting the market last December, we've had five instrument orders in four months."

They have a world market for Alex's instruments. They've sold to people in South America, Japan and the United Kingdom. "It's hard work," Tere said, "but so much easier than raising teenagers!"

"It's inspiring here," Alex said about Idyllwild. "There's a real community of people who have come here for similar reasons. In one year we have made more friends than we did in 10 years living in Orange County. We hope to put Idyllwild on every musician's map."

Gourd artist at Saturday Art Café

The Art Alliance of Idyllwild's (AAI) Saturday Morning Art Café from 10 a.m. to noon, June 2, will feature gourd artist Nancy Fletcher. Fletcher will demonstrate her techniques in gourd painting at Four Corners Gallery, 54967 Pine Crest Ave.

Coffee will be served and The Bread Basket Restaurant & Bakery will provide fresh pastries. The event is free and features a drawing for a piece of artwork. For more information on the Art Cafés, visit AAI's Web site (www.artinidyllwild.com) or call 1-866-439-5278.

'Congo Project' at the Rustic Theatre

The "Congo Project" will be presented at the Rustic Theatre at 4:30 p.m. Sunday, May 20. It is a benefit theater piece to help Congolese victims of sexual torture and orphaned children all over Africa rebuild their lives. One hundred percent of the proceeds will be donated to Women For Women International and Left To Tell Charitable Fund.

ket for sellers was going through the ceiling, and they were able to sell their home and make a good profit.

On their way to Big Bear to look for a home, they swung by Idyllwild.

"We knew right away that this was the place," Tere said. "No more cubicles for us; it wasn't a happy or healthy life." They bought their home on Marian View, moved in March 27, 2006, and went to work — their own dream work.

It took a while to organize the precision power and hand tools in Alex's workshop, but today, it has the look of a master craftsman's shop, complete with an ornamental

mill, a drum sander, a scroll saw for intricate cuts, a lathe and a computer numerical control machine.

One of his power tools is connected to his computer where he uses his knowledge of the CAD/CAM software system that architects and building designers typically work with. Alex uses the system to cut narrowing slices or jigs for inlays.

He uses exotic wood from Madagascar and Surinam, South America; Hawaiian koa; and maple. When he's completed the basic construction and all the grooves are routed for installing the electronics, the instrument is sent off for staining and



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