Honoring Veterans at Valentine, Carver

Students at Valentine and Carver elementary schools showed their appreciation to those who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces during Veterans Day celebrations at the schools in recent days. At Valentine (top photo), family members who are service veterans were invited to the campus on Friday, and the entire school dressed in red, white and blue. Honorers, who were presented with flowers, included (front row, from left) James Phelan II, James Phelan III, Warren Saeta, Daniel Mackinash, Bob Mason and Harry Sayers. Back: Victor Davila Sr., Tim Griswold, John Morris, Robert Donaldson and Dr. John Golding. Carver marked Veterans Day with a special all-school flag ceremony Tuesday morning (photo at right), where participants included Cub Scouts (from left) Luke Rios, Marcus Meng, Ela Truong and Zachary Feng.

See additional Valentine photos, page 15.
See additional Carver photos, page 17.

Super-Speed Internet Comes to Crowell

By Nick Ostiller
The Outlook

Accessing information online has become increasingly common in the digital age. Connection speeds have escalated and libraries all over the country now feature computers alongside traditional bookshelves. The Crowell Public Library is no different, except patrons at San Marino’s information hub will now be placed directly at the forefront of this technological trend, thanks to a new Internet system.

The California Research and Education Network, or CaliREN, is a noncommercial, high-bandwidth scheme specifically designed to meet the Web-intensive requirements of universities. Recently installed at Crowell, CaliREN is 67 times faster than the previous Time Warner Cable and AT&T services offered at the library.

“It’s a light-fiber cable that transmits the Internet at gigabyte speeds,” said City Librarian Irene McDermott. “...Previously, we

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Attired in Their Finest for HMS Winter Formal

Huntington Middle School 7th- and 8th-graders were dressed to the nines for their recent Winter Formal, including (front row, from left) Joseph Sunak, Matthew Li, Thayer Tolt, Ela Chuong and Claire McDonald. Back: Jonathan Fung, Payton Tolt, Ethan Chang and Ethan C. Chen. See additional photos, page 16.
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— $33,292 through late October. He threw a wide net, raising money from supporters throughout Southern California — Chino, Diamond Bar, Irvine, Long Beach, Redondo Beach, Walnut, Woodland Hills — also primarily in amounts under $500. His largest single contribution was $2,000, from the wife of San Marino, a real estate developer.

Huang wound up raising about $28 per yes vote. Tall $21.

Among their opponents, Scott Kwong had nearly $20,000 cash on hand for his campaign, coming entirely from his own pocket, according to disclosure documents. Kwong filed a short form with the city clerk declaring that he would receive less than $1,000 for his campaign. Scott said the same, but ultimately formed a committee late in October and reported a campaign fund of $2,668, self-financed.

Joining Tall and Huang in a successful campaign effort were the proponents of the idea to limit utility tax measures. The public safety tax, needing a two-thirds majority, pulled down a 74.6% affirmative vote but failed to pass. A supportive bill to handle the utility tax, needing only a simple majority, won convincingly with 72.9% of the vote. The two bills that occurred in spite of what campaign committee co-Chair Jerry Hawk termed "four headwinds": the fact that the committee was on the ballot at the same time, the firefighters' union going public with its contract standoff with the city, some residents' concerns about the taxes to constrain city spending, plus a Pasadena Tea Party group urging their defeat.

Hawk referred to the latter opposition as "considering us into our community without an understanding of the calculus we have made and the risks we face." Hawk declined to say if people vote no, without regard to the consequences of those cuts. He added, "For almost 20 years, the no voters reflect very well on the people in the community who made that choice for quality services. People were because of the two tax measures and the intrigue that marked the council race, voter turnout for the election was a little higher than usual. Of San Martinos 8,419 registered voters, 2,594 cast ballots — or 30.1% — according to the office of the Los Angeles County Registrar. That is up from the 29.8% voter participation in the City Council election of 2011 and the 21.3% figure recorded in the School Bond race of 2013.

Tall and Huang are expected to take their seats on the City Council at the start of its regularly scheduled meeting of Dec. 9. The registrators office will first have to certify the election results, which should be accomplished by the end of this month. The city Council does not have a meeting on the final Friday of November because it falls on the day after Thanksgiving. Mayor Eugene Sun, who is currently out of the country, could call a special council meeting for the first week of December to formally seat the new members, but officials believe Dec. 9 is more likely. At that time, the council will also reorganize. Dr. Allan Yung is next in line in the rotation for mayor, Dr. Richard Sun for vice-mayor.

Tall, who has lived all but a few of his 57 years in San Marino, described his candidacy as "the evolution of someone who had been involved in the Housing Element, protecting our neighborhoods and had been a victim of crime ourselves. I'm looking at the issues that I care most about and that has been my focus in my work as a council member. These issues are the most important and it's important that we move forward in a way that is consistent with the vision that we have for our city."

The city was moving in a direction that made me uncomfortable sitting around doing nothing. I love this community. It's the only place I really felt was home, even when I moved away. It wasn't about places for me, it was about people and places."

For his part, Huang said the joy of his victory has been tempered by the enormity of the responsibility that stretches out in front of him. "I feel stress," he said, "because I feel it's going to be a very challenging next four years. There are a lot of things we need to address ASAP."

His front-burner issues include the teardown trend in San Marinoss new construction projects, the budget, reducing the crime rate and transparency. On the budget, Huang is in favor of the City Council proposed ad hoc committee, "so we don't rely on the staff too much and can utilize all these experts we have in the city."

In the area of transparency, he wishes "to have a better way of working with the website, so people can see us when they want to." Tall also cited the budget as foremost among his issues — "implementing a new budget decision-making process, and looking at ways to reduce the budget and reduce the unfunded pension liability." He also wants to urge a change in the application process for design review of new construction, and would further like to see the city create a vacancy registration list for San Marinoss homes, so "we can contact people about an issue, whether they're in Pennsylvania, Taiwan or Hawaii."

For proponents of the tax measures, the campaign was considered uphill from the start, because both pleas for residents' money were side-by-side on the ballot. The public safety tax was about to lapse. The utility tax had another year to run, but a vote on its renewal must coincide with a City Council election. So the city was facing with letting it lapse in early 2017 and bringing it back as a new tax in the City Council election in November of that year. Thus, the decision was made to put them on the ballot together.

Oddly, this may have given a boost to the utility tax. It had achieved 58.2% support in its last renewal, in 2006. This time, it passed overwhelmingly, "I think there were a lot of voters who voted yes for both," said Tom Santry, a co-chair of the committee. "All except 35 voters. That's shocking, frankly."

Proponents of the measures are quite aware of local discontent with the city's fiscal circumstances. They're just relieved that neither tax was sacrificed in the bargain.

"People understand the revenue to our city, and we know there is some concern about the expenditures of our city," said co-Chair Linda Sun. "But we really believe there are two separate issues. This is a big chunk of revenues for our city, and it's important for maintaining the level of services. After we have this money, we need to figure out how to streamline the budget of the city."

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had a consumer-grade connection, which was 15 megabytes per second — on a good day, that was about a half of what people were used to... People were really unhappy. So much information — since we're an information place — you have access to the Internet, it's not a joke. We're really kind of wondering what we were going to do."

The solution arrived when the California State Library's public benefit group, Califa, was authorized to negotiate with the organization that operates the faster California@Internet — a body called the Corporation for the Education Network Initiatives in California.

Since Crowell is affiliated with the California State Library, it was eligible for CalIREN. City Manager John Schaesler brought the idea to the City Council in February and the plan was adopted. The total cost of setting up the CalIREN router and establishing connection inside Crowell was approximately $18,500, although the library qualified to receive the service at a discount of almost 72%. An $8,638.25 chunk of the cost, accounting for setup and monthly fees, is also expected to be returned to the city in the form of refunds.

"There's money in the budget now to supplement and to support and to give us rebates for this amazingly fast connection," said McDermott, who has worked at Crowell since 1997.

The state provided additional grant money to help cover the cost of the router, which is hidden from sight inside a closet. Installation lasted several months and involved underground cabling, but didn't interfere with patrons' daily experience at the library.

CalIREN went live at Crowell on Oct. 30, and the free network will be nearly invisible to users, save for a terms-of-service agreement screen when logging on from one of the 36 public computers or a personal device.

How have patrons responded to the new and improved Internet connection?

"The response has been the lack of complaints," said McDermott with a laugh. "I think people just expect fast Internet. When they weren't getting it — and really it was very slow — they rightfully complained about it. But now that it's super-fast, it's not only going to help our patrons, it's going to help us."

Crowell is planning to enhance the overall Internet experience by using a camera to record library programs and then streaming the footage online. McDermott also hopes to offer tablets that people can use for voice-activated language translation among other high-tech features.

"This really, really leverages our ability to deliver information to our patrons," she said.

"I really want to thank the City Council and City Manager John Schaesler and also the state of California for allowing us to get this fast Internet connection. It's really what we needed and it's going to solve a lot of problems around here."