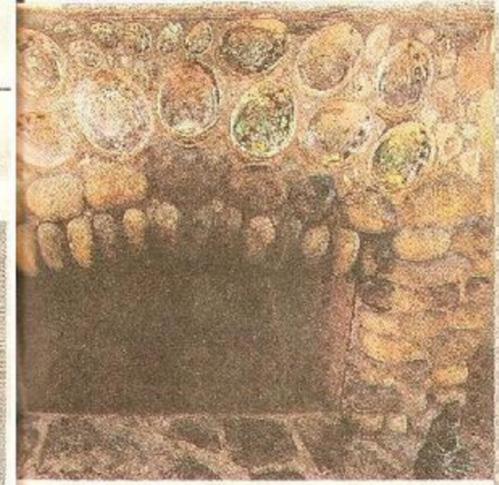


HERE COMES THE SUN

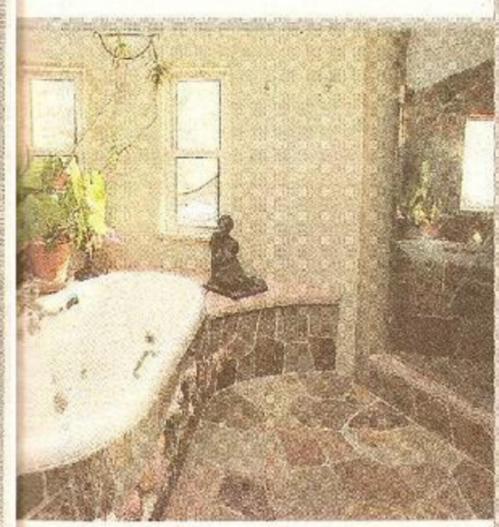


GREEN: Christopher and Becky Prelitz relax in the living room of their "green" solar-powered home in the Bluebird Canyon area of Laguna Beach. Prelitz used recycled materials, including roof beams of laminated wood, throughout the home. Top photo: A nautilus fossil caps the railing of the spiral staircase leading to the second story.

PHOTOS: SAM GANGWER, THE REGISTER



GAME: Abalone and other seashells are built into the downstairs fireplace of the Prelitz home.



EVENLY SURFACES: Curved walls and doorways are the norm throughout the house, especially in the master bathroom.

Builder uses solar power and other green features to dramatically lower energy bills in his own home.

By KELLY GARRISON
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Steps wind around a nautilus-shaped stairwell and down its sporadically angled walls. Each room of this house is coated in hues from cream to plum with nontoxic paint. It fully heats, cools and energizes itself with earth elements. Pipes rush hot water below the concrete floor, warming the surface and rooms above. Light reflects off of abalone shells fitted into rocks on the fireplace.

The kitty door – a paw-print-shaped hole in the kitchen wall – lets two cats meander outside at their leisure.

MORE ONLINE
For more on green living, see Page 6. To view a video of the Prelitz home, go to www.ocregister.com.

Christopher Prelitz and his wife, Becky, call this organic structure home.

"The solutions are easy and don't cost a lot," Becky says.

Their house was built into a funnel-shaped lot in Bluebird Canyon in Laguna Beach. A native and edible plant garden sits at the foundation of the three-story home.

In the master bedroom, a "truth window" exposes a patch of yellow plant fibers through a small rectangular opening. This material insulates a section of the house. "It cuts bills in half. A straw bale gives you triple the insulation of a typical home," Prelitz says, adding that his energy bills are less than \$10 each month.

The roof is topped by photovoltaic solar panels. Prelitz plans to add more solar panels to his roof soon. He says that should reduce his electric bill down to nothing. Solar-powered build-

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SOLAR

FROM PAGE 1

ings, he says, can cost the same as typical ones. Factor that in with lower monthly bills and there's a positive return on investment.

Through his company, Prelitz Build - Design, he's dedicated to finding financially and environmentally successful "green" building solutions. Prelitz designed Orange County's first solar-powered home 13 years ago, also in Laguna Beach. Since then, he's created hundreds of green buildings, including his own, and transformed existing structures into partial or "passive" solar-powered buildings.

"We are creating buildings that are giving rather than sucking (energy)," Prelitz says. "Clients want it to look really good, but they don't ask, 'How does it work?'" he says.

He's happy to explain. Buildings with overhangs that provide shade on windows to the east or west and those that use compact fluorescent light bulbs help save a tremendous amount of energy, he says.

"Our homes are a bigger contributor to global warming than our cars are," Prelitz

says. "If we make our homes efficient, we'll be doing a lot more than if we stop driving a Hummer. People are starting to realize they can do the same thing with their houses."

Prelitz learned about environmentally friendly homes during his apprenticeship in Japan, where "they're always passive solar-oriented."

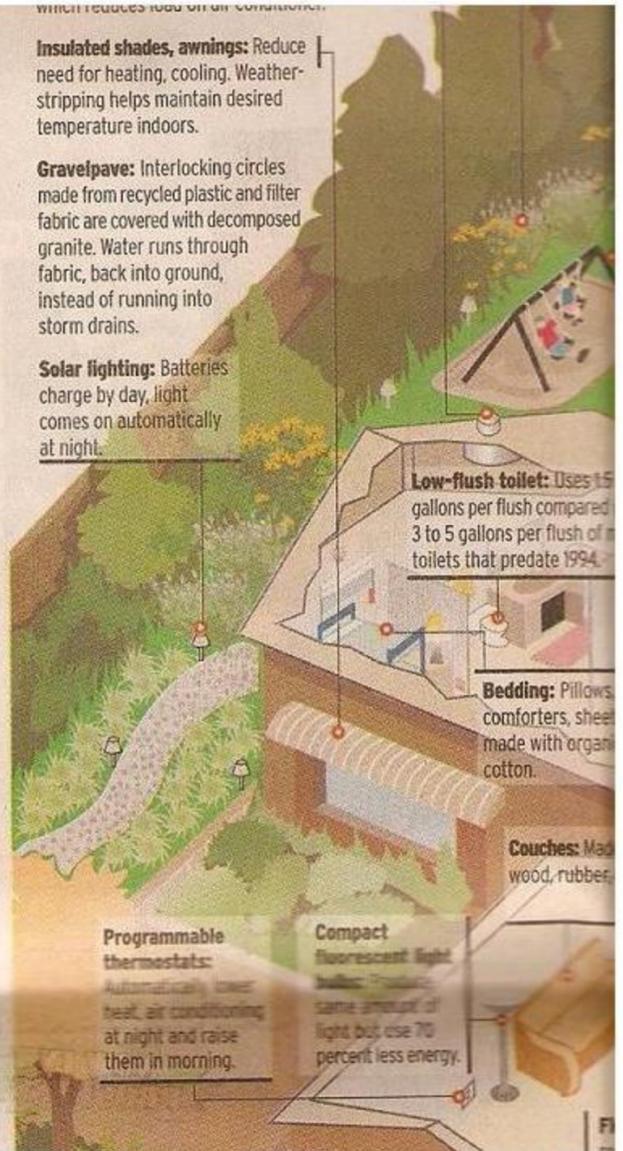
"I've always studied (natural energy)," he says. "It's always been my passion."

Prelitz gets his inspiration for these homes from his grandfather, who built an earth-friendly home in southern Illinois. He kept cool in his day-lighted basement.

"When it was 110 degrees outside, we'd walk downstairs and it'd be 68," he says. Prelitz learned that a few feet below the Earth's surface, the temperature stays a constant 55 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit. That's a good reason to connect buildings directly to the ground, he says.

"This planet is paradise. It is ideal for human habitation, but we've taken some of this for granted and could be better stewards of what we've been blessed with," Prelitz says.

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Swift Water Crews On Patrol

By Kelly Garrison

Features Editor

Robert Hamilton drives a red, four-wheel drive pickup truck loaded with lifejackets, helmets, bodysuits and other gear.

Next to him in the passenger seat, Scott Mitchell rolls down his window to a gaunt man in frayed clothes standing beside a rusty shopping cart.

"You need to find somewhere else to go," he says to the homeless man. "It's dangerous to be down here."

The man nods as Hamilton presses his foot gently on the accelerator, the truck steadily climbing up the narrow bike path adjacent to the San Gabriel River flood channel, which on this day runs a few feet deep between two steep, angled cement walls.

"Most of the speed is in the center of the river," says Mitchell, who wears a red protective bodysuit in case he needs to jump into the channel. "The bottom of the water is (slippery) like ice. It's slower along the edges, so that benefits us."

Several storms blew through Long Beach last week, prompting these swift water rescue



PRACTICE — THIS TIME. Firefighter Scott Mitchell tosses a rescue rope into the San Gabriel River while partner Robert Hamilton watches.

—Gazette photo by Kelly Garrison

team members to patrol the area for people who may have fallen victim to the river. It's a regular protocol for these Long Beach Lifeguard and Fire Department professionals, even though it puts their lives at risk.

So far this year, there have been 25 "advisals," warning people away from the rivers, but no water rescues.

Using their equipment, which includes flotation gear, helmets and other water rescue devices,

the team uses every method possible to extract the victim from the water before actually entering the water.

"You're looking for movement — something out of the ordinary," says Mitchell, whose rescue experience includes helping pull a man who was under the influence of drugs out of the Los Angeles River in an earlier rainy season.

Rescuers wear body suits to keep toxins as far from their

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Swift Water

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skin as possible, although their hands and faces are still exposed to the water. Most of them get infections or sicknesses after being submerged in a flood channel, but "take that as part of the job," Mitchell says.

They typically attempt at least 12 rescues per year, whether in or outside of their vehicles. And while the good news for storm surge victims is that rescue is available, the disheartening part is that, for many of those recovered, help arrives too late.

"People like to come see the water flowing, and with the homeless situation, it has become a place to live," Mitchell says. "Our concern is to make sure all of these people are up high enough or out of the river channel completely. The idea is to prevent people from going in."

And once rescue workers are in, they occasionally find out that what appeared to be a per-

son in danger is just floating debris.

"We get objects, like livestock, carts and trees," he says. "The water comes mostly from the gutter and the streets — it's full of fuel, dust, lead and all these bad things."

Water levels are regulated through large holding basins, but even with that system, hundreds of thousands of gallons still surge through the flood channels each minute. Signs posted near the waterways warn the public of such hazards, Mitchell says.

"The rivers fluctuate rapidly," he says. "It's a very complicated system, and when it gets overwhelmed, it rises quickly. People don't understand that there's going to be a release, followed by a big wall of water."

Major flood control areas include the San Gabriel River, the Los Angeles River, Compton Creek and Coyote Creek. Teams usually staff up once rain levels reach a half of an inch within 12 hours.

Rescuers began using the technique, Mitchell says, after the 1970s when they discovered that they could use the same method for river rescue in man-made flood channels. The first Long Beach team formed in 1994 and has since become part of the state's Office of Emergency Services. The 36-member team was one of the first groups in California trained for this type of rescue.

"During Katrina, we had eight teams there, and not enough to respond to calls here," he says. "The state made three new river flood rescue teams (in response)."

Hamilton, who helps conduct rescues for the Fire Department, says that most of the members of the team boast similar backgrounds. Most of them, he says, went to high school in Long Beach and graduated from Long Beach State.

"We all came from life guarding," he says. "We all swam and played water polo and we all went to college together."

The DOWNTOWN GAZETTE

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Pier Daze Kicks Off Annual Sea Festival

By Kelly Garrison
Features Editor

Watch out for pirate fights and ship battles during the third annual Pier Daze this weekend at the Belmont Veterans Memorial Pier.

Events will help kick off the city's 76th annual Sea Festival and will include buccaneer-themed food, entertainment and activities from noon to 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. Known as the Seafood and Pirate Festival and Pier Daze Seafood and California Classics Festival, the weekend celebrates the history of the pier —

"one of the city's long-forgotten treasures," Festival Organizer Fred Khammar said.

"You can be transported back to the 17th Century," he said. "You're out on the water with pirates, eating, drinking and enjoying the beautiful Southern California weather. It's a very fun and festive day."

This year, for the first time, pirates will take a number of guests "hostage" on pirate ship rides throughout the afternoon on Saturday. These shipmates — who sign up in advance for their

(Continued on Page 23)

Duchess Begins McDonald House Effort

By Kelly Garrison
Features Editor

Families of children with serious health problems soon will have a place to stay while their loved ones undergo treatments at nearby medical centers.

Plans to build a new Ronald McDonald House on Atlantic Avenue will bring "a home away from home," to the families of ailing children, Chief Executive Officer Nicole Rubin said. Duchess of York and Global Ambassador Sarah Ferguson announced the plans last Monday among a throng of project supporters during a conference at Miller Children's Hospital.

"At the end of the day, \$10 million isn't that much to give a child a hug," Ferguson said. "...The house will do for this area what it does for every area — offer inspiration, warmth, love and a chance for life."

Plans for the house so far include a

three-story, 26,000-square-foot building with at least 20 rooms. Play areas, kitchen and laundry areas, communal rooms and more will be provided for patients and their families.

"It's interior will literally be very house-like in character," said Michael Bohn, Studio One Eleven architect and design director. "There will be individual rooms, but we want to try and pull the families out. There will be living room areas at the end of each hallway so that if people can't sleep at night, they can meet up with other people who are going through the same struggles."

The facility will cost \$10 million to build and \$1 million each year to maintain after its inception. Guests will pay, at most, \$25 per night to stay there.

"This means so much for the families of patients who need to be nearby," said

(Continued on Page 28)



HELPING HAND. Three-year-old Violet Estrada, along with her mother Laura, talks to Duchess of York Sarah Ferguson (right) last Monday morning at Miller Children's Hospital.
—Gazette photo by Kelly Garrison

GAZETTE PICKS



WEDNESDAY:
Movies in the Park, "Charlotte's Web," California Rec Center.

SATURDAY:
Shakespeare Festival opens, Aquarium of the Pacific lawn.

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DOWNTOWN GAZETTE

McDonald

(Continued from Page 1)

Terry Belmont, chief executive officer of Miller Children's Hospital. "It's a wonderful service and the Ronald McDonald organization has been great to work with."

The project coincides with a \$151 million expansion project, currently underway at the hospital.

Bohn, who said he has helped with numerous city projects, said the house "will bring economic lift and vitality to a part of the city that can

really use it." City officials contacted the organization about two years ago with a request to have the facility built in Long Beach.

"It fits into the nature of the redevelopment along Atlantic Avenue," Rubin said.

Groundbreaking may hap-

pen in 2008, with construction beginning in 2010. The city plans to donate three-fourths of an acre of land for the house, which will be built at the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Vernon Street — two blocks from the Miller Children's Hospital.

"I'm definitely glad to be a part of it," Mayor Bob Foster said. "We'll make sure it gets built and provides services to the families."

Doug and Nancy Davis said they traveled from Anchorage, Alaska, to support the plans. The couple lost their 3-and-a-half-year-old son, Sean, to lung and heart problems in 1998 after staying in the Los Angeles

Ronald McDonald house for more than a year.

"We didn't realize at the time what it would mean to us," Doug said. "We're very happy about this. It will undoubtedly help many families."

"Hopefully in several years, you'll have another parent talking about the wonderful experience they had at the Long Beach Ronald McDonald House," Nancy said.

Project organizers saw their first donation at the conference with a \$250,000 check from Beckstrand Cancer Foundation.

"All the stars have lined up for us to have a successful campaign," said Lindsay Hughes, McDonald's restaurant owner.