

Wes Chesbro to Speak at Grand Opening Celebration C. V. Starr Community Center, Fort Bragg, August 22, 2009, 11 AM

Assemblymember Wesley Chesbro (*D-North Coast*) will be one of the key speakers at the Grand Opening Celebration for the Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District's C.V. Starr Community Center at 11:00 AM on Saturday, August 22, 2009 at Maple and Lincoln streets in Fort Bragg, CA. The grand opening of this long-awaited aquatic and recreation center will be a joyous celebration of the tremendous accomplishment of a small north coast community that used its history to tap the generosity of its highly successful native son and generous residents.

The 43,000-square foot facility contains the Sigrid and Harry Spath Aquatic Facility. Community members who have been treated to pre-opening tours describe the interior as "breath-taking", "stunning" and "spectacular". The primary feature is the John and Marcia Clark Natatorium, which is housed within the Spath Aquatic Facility. This is comprised of a dazzling, state-of-the art 8-lane competition pool with a diving board, a colorful water-slide that empties into a 3-foot splash-down pool after an eleven-second ride and a 'running river' al la the *Caracalla Therme* in Baden Baden. All of these features are linked to the large warm-water leisure pool which has a zero-degree "beach entry" that will be a boon for folks of limited mobility. This pool has water play features that provide a good dousing. The pool will be the new home for the very popular Adaptive Aquatics program that is jointly sponsored by College of the Redwoods and the Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park District (MCRPD).

The Center houses three multi-purpose rooms, a fitness room, a dance and aerobics room and sports outstanding locker rooms and other appointments. The walls of the foyer are lined with photos and biographies of the major donors who helped make this dream a reality. The theme of the 36-year campaign was "Make the Dream a Reality" and this small community that dared to dream big has done exactly that.

Funding for this facility came primarily from the C.V. Starr Foundation in New York. This organization was founded by Cornelius Vander Starr who was born in 1892 on what is now South Harbor Drive in Fort Bragg. The Foundation granted over \$16,600,000. Mr. Starr's close friend T.C. Hsu and his cousin Marion Breen each donated \$250,000 to help build this much needed and appreciated facility in Mr. Starr's hometown.

Harry Spath gave new life to the fundraising drive when he made a series of gifts that amounted to \$1,200,000. He made the first gift in 1996 and MCRPD began to increase the pace of the fund-raising drive that had gone on for 23 years at that point. In the past ten years the District has raised \$22,000,000. Assemblyman Chesbro was the first public official to demonstrate his considerable faith in the project by securing a \$300,000 budget appropriation from the State of California in 2000. The State eventually has invested over \$1,000,000 through a series of grants and 'per capita' allocations from Revenue Bonds. The County of Mendocino under the leadership of Supervisors Patti Campbell and David Colfax teamed up with Supervisor Richard Shoemaker to award \$1,000,000 of Tobacco

Settlement money to the project in 2001. The City of Fort Bragg stepped forward and invested over a million dollars from a variety of sources.

The Grand Opening will focus on the history of the work that was done by the community to raise the funds to make the dream a reality. Supervisor David Colfax, Vice-mayor Dave Turner, MCRPD Board chair David Yeomans and Tessie Branscomb, the abiding force behind this drive, will tell the history of this enormous accomplishment. Gladys Thomas, retired vice-president of the Starr Foundation, will make the closing comments. Ms. Thomas has been involved in the funding of this project since she first visited in October of 2001. Lin Barrett, who will M.C. the event warns that the presentation will take longer than usual. Barrett states, "After all, this is a seminal moment in our community's history. It took 36 years to build it. You can bet, it will take more than 36 minutes to tell you how it came to be.. and it is important to honor the folks who helped to give us this treasure."

The Friends of the Mendocino Coast Recreation and Park district are sponsoring the Grand Opening. Tours of the facility will follow the presentation and the Center will open to the public at 3:00 PM that afternoon.