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Tourist horde, traffic jams return to Bixby Bridge

By CHRIS COUNTS

JUST NINE days after Highway 1 reopened and tourism returned to Big Sur, a traffic quagmire developed at Bixby Bridge last weekend. Marcus Foster of the group Keep Big Sur Wild was onsite Sunday to chronicle the traffic chaos and spark a conversation about what can be done to fix it.

Foster's video, which was posted online by Big Sur Kate, shows lines of vehicles backed up along Highway 1 in both directions while they wait to cross the bridge. To

the south, a steady stream of cars can be seen snaking its way up Hurricane Point.

The video shows cars parking along the Old Coast Road, where they routinely block access. According to Foster, the dirt road "turns into a parking lot where nobody parks parallel, creating a very narrow single-lane road where people cannot get in and out," including residents along the unpaved route.

"If there was some sort of emergency like a fire or a resident who needed an ambulance, this would only cause a delay," he warned. "This has become a public safety issue."

Selfie icon

While Bixby Bridge has long been famous for its beautiful design and memorable views, the bridge has somehow become an international tourist mecca.

"It is sometimes hard to believe that the most popular destination in Big Sur has become a man-made concrete bridge," Foster continued. "This, unfortunately, is the new reality because people want to take pictures and selfies — it has caused major congestion and traffic backups."

As many have previously done, Foster brought up the idea that Highway 1 has a limited carrying capacity. But others have long contended that setting a limit on how many people can visit Big Sur is impossible, either politically or practically, or both.

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SCREENSHOT FROM MARCUS FOSTER VIDEO

Hardly a week after Highway 1 reopened at Rocky Creek, crowds again have descended on Bixby Bridge and the adjacent Coast Ridge Road.

Roeck announces new version of film festival

By CHRIS COUNTS

SEVEN YEARS after the founders of the Carmel film festival called it quits, a pair of local producers are bringing back the event, and the new version of the Carmel International Film Festival is set for Oct. 2-6.

Offering a sample of what is coming to town, three film-related events are scheduled for this weekend, including two film screenings in Pacific Grove and a reception in Carmel.

Ended in 2018

Founded in 2008 by Tom Burns and Erin Clark, the Carmel Film Festival screened dozens of full-length and short films each year and drew as many as 20,000 people to the Monterey Peninsula, including actors Kate Bosworth, Ed Asner, James Franco, Emmy Rossum and Matthew Modine, not to mention composer (and Carmel Highlands resident) Alan Silvestri. But in early 2018, Burns and Clark announced the festival was ending.

A film producer and director who has lived in Carmel for much of his life, Lawrence Roeck told The Pine Cone that during the pandemic he and actress and producer Annette Anderson began discussing the idea of reviving the festival. They agreed its absence had left a void.

'Creativity and connectivity'

"There was a gap when the film festival left," Roeck suggested. "People love to visit Carmel — it's an incredible place for the world of film to be celebrated."

Also inspiring the revival were conversations on a Facebook page that Roeck and Anderson started. Titled "The Crowd," the page is dedicated to "creativity and connectivity in film, literature and the arts."

Some had urged Roeck and Andersen to restart the event, and "when we didn't see anybody step forward, we decided we had the resources and the connections to do it," he explained.

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'What am I waiting for?'

■ Carmel man recounts trip to space

By MARY SCHLEY

WHEN YOU'RE in space, the sun is really, really bright, and the rocket ride getting there is remarkably smooth. Those were a couple of the surprises Carmel resident Ken Hess experienced when he became one of six paying passengers aboard a private company's suborbital rocket May 19.

"It was like being in a glass elevator," he said of his trip on New Shepard, a rocket program developed by Jeff Bezos' space exploration venture, Blue Origin. "Just a really, really fast glass elevator that takes you up more than 60 miles at a speed of over 2,000 mph."

A mishap

A child during the Cold War-era space race and the son of an engineer, Hess had long dreamed of such an experience. He was in second or third grade when the

late astronaut Alan Shepard became the first American to travel into space in 1961 and was captivated by the first lunar landing eight years later.

"My dad was an engineer, I was an engineer, and I was super into it," said Hess, who lives at Torres and 11th with wife Connie. "Eleven years ago, when my dad passed away, there were opportunities emerging for people to get

Dale Byrne says he'll run for mayor

By MARY SCHLEY

THE FOUNDER of a nonprofit that has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of volunteer labor, organization and materials to accomplish a wide range of public improvement projects in town over the past four years, Dale Byrne announced this week he will challenge incumbent Dave Potter in the race for mayor in November.

"I care deeply about this place and have the creativity, knowledge, ability, energy and commitment to provide transparent, visionary leadership that will engage and serve the residents, business owners and visitors of Carmel," said Byrne, who is stepping down from the board of his nonprofit, Carmel Cares, and plans, if he wins, to dedicate himself to the mayorship full time.

"I have really strong skills in working with other people, empowering them and finding their skills — a one-plus-one-equals-three kind of thing," he said. "That works with me as mayor finding those people the city can leverage, but also there are skills in our existing and future council members that can be leveraged."

Byrne, 69, said he would encourage the council to be more active and dedicate more time and energy to the role. "I think they can be more powerful," he said. "I think they can do more."

Because of a dog, of course

Byrne and his wife, Margaret, began visiting Carmel more than 20 years ago after they became the owners of a miniature red poodle and searched for dog-friendly destinations they could visit from their home in Redondo Beach.

"Margaret found Carmel was the most dog-friendly town, so we started making regular trips," he said. After staying in hotels and vacation rentals for several years, the couple bought a cottage 11 years ago. They moved here full-time in 2017 and now live on San Antonio Avenue in a house he built. In addition to running Carmel Cares, Byrne has constructed five homes in town over the past decade.

Born in the San Gabriel Valley, Byrne earned a Bachelor



Dale Byrne

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(Above) A still from a video by Ken Hess shows an expansive view of Texas, Colorado and New Mexico, where White Sands National Park is seen at the lower left. (Right) Blue Origin staffer Laura Niles celebrates as Hess steps from the capsule.



PHOTOS/(LEFT) KEN HESS, (ABOVE) BLUE ORIGIN