

Opinion: Ferrari gets almost too much right about Calif.

By Joe Mathews

When I got the keys to California, I floored the accelerator until I was driving 100 mph.

I felt exhilaration—and fear. This speed was totally unfamiliar to someone who has spent his life driving beaten-up Toyotas. In California we like to think we can go as fast as our imaginations can take us, but this shiny red convertible named California moved too fast for me.



Joe Mathews

Ferrari let me drive the Ferrari California T for four rainy January days. I requested the loaner because I thought it might provide some escapist fun at a difficult time for our country, and because I'm old enough to deserve a mid-life crisis. But for journalistic purposes, I wanted to know whether a car could really embody California. I suspected the folks in Maranello, Italy, where Ferrari makes its cars, might just be using our state's name to sell a pretty automobile.

My suspicions were wrong. The Ferrari California is as wonderful as our state's most kaleidoscopic dreams. The only problem is that Ferrari's California is so damn perfect it keeps reminding you of our state's imperfections.

The Ferrari California aligns with the state on the level of metaphor. California is famously the “Great Exception” among American states, as the 20th century author Carey McWilliams named it, and California is an exception among Ferraris. It is not the most expensive, glamorous or fastest Ferrari. Instead, Ferrari markets the California as practical and versatile.

The California is not a sports car, but a convertible grand touring car—with eight cylinders instead of the 12 of some other Ferraris—that is built for comfort, which makes sense if you’re a Californian often stuck in traffic. It’s got two doors, but also enough space in back to fit two children’s car seats.

“It is a little bit an exception,” Edwin Fenech, the president and CEO of Ferrari North America, told me by phone. “It’s able to be very versatile. You can go to the grocery store with your car.”

Fenech said that versatility shouldn’t detract from the car’s mystique, or California’s. He added pointedly that, as self-driving—or autonomous—vehicles emerge, Ferrari wanted to affirm its support for Californians determined to steer their own cars.

“We are the ones who are going to defend the right to drive,” Fenech told me. “Don’t brainwash the new generation with autonomous driving—it’s so beautiful, driving.”

Today’s Ferrari California draws not just on our love for driving, but on our infatuation with everything mid-20th century. Ferrari produced three different California models between 1957 and 1967. The car became such a valuable collector’s item (some have sold for \$20 million or more) that Ferrari revived the brand in 2008.

The newest iteration, the Ferrari California T, was introduced for the 2015 model year. It’s designed with a dual-clutch automatic transmission and a technologically advanced

suspension, which makes it easy to navigate through dense neighborhoods in America's most urban state. And the T stands for Turbo, as in the twin-turbo, 3.9-liter engine, which can still get the car to 196 mph, but uses less fuel and produces fewer emissions.

The Ferrari representative encouraged me to test its California-ness. So I drove it 90 minutes through bumper-to-bumper traffic to Santa Monica. I navigated potholes in downtown L.A. I went through the In-N-Out drive-through, complete with the requisite in-car consumption of a double-double. I chauffeured my kids to school, and secured in their car seats in the back. And I carted luggage and golf clubs in the trunk.

I felt far safer while driving the Ferrari in a rainstorm than I do with my usual ride, a 5-year-old Prius. With the top down, I loved the way that the car connected me with other drivers and pedestrians, who offered a thumbs-up and asked what the car was. And I've never had an automotive experience happier than driving up Angeles Crest Highway, with the radio playing R.E.M.'s "Electrolite" ("Hollywood is under me. I'm Martin Sheen. I'm Steve McQueen. I'm Jimmy Dean").

Of course, the car, like many wonderful California things, fails the core test of accessibility: the base MSRP of the Ferrari California T is \$198,973. The one I drove costs \$240,000. By Ferrari standards, that's a bargain (the hybrid La Ferrari sells for well over \$1 million), which is by design: half of Ferrari California buyers are new to the brand. But the car I was driving would cost this nonprofit journalist more than three years' take-home pay.

Which is another thing that makes the California very Californian. The good life is highly visible throughout our state. But only a few can afford more than a brief ride.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo

Public Square.

Opinion: Taxes not the cure for bad roads

By George Runner

California's roads are crumbling.

Reports routinely show our state has some of the poorest pavement conditions in the country, with high-tax liberal strongholds of San Francisco and Oakland leading the way. The culprit? Misplaced spending priorities.



George Runner

If you spilled your latte when hitting that huge pothole on the way to work, thank your elected leaders.

Gov. Jerry Brown says he has a fix for it – a 42 percent gas tax hike, plus a new \$65 vehicle registration fee that includes hybrids and electric vehicles. He claims the increases are needed because repairing California's highways can't be funded with existing revenues.

Why not?

Budgets are about priorities and the governor and legislative leaders have a say on how tax dollars are spent. State revenues have grown by roughly 50 percent in just under 10 years. And, apparently, Brown thinks the state can afford a \$68 billion – and growing – high-speed rail project that still hasn't found a way to deal with the Tehachapi Mountains.

In addition to about \$7 billion in annual fuel tax revenues, the state also collects a carbon tax from oil companies that brings in about \$2 billion. Oil suppliers pass the tax on to us at the pump. The Legislative Analyst's Office estimates this adds, at minimum, 11 cents per gallon to the cost of gasoline.

Where is all the money going?

Huge amounts go to projects that don't improve roads. Much of the carbon tax revenue will end up funding high-speed rail. The Democratic-controlled Legislature rejects every bill to direct these dollars toward reducing emission-generating traffic gridlock.

If Brown's plan to raise the gas tax passes – which seems likely given the new Democratic supermajority – Californians could end up paying as much as 80 cents in combined federal and state taxes for each gallon of gasoline – a rate far higher than any other state. Not to mention we already have some of the highest gas prices in the nation.

It isn't the elite who are squeezed by these costs. It is the less fortunate who struggle to find affordable housing and often must travel further to their workplaces.

Sadly, this is all by design.

Many Democrats envision a society where everyone is reliant on public transit. This "green" vision is attractive to Millennial voters, who tend to be issue-driven idealists. They believe we should all pay a little more to save the planet.

That's troubling, given the findings in a new report that shows Millennials are poorer and less employed than their Baby Boomer parents.

There are alternatives to raising taxes. The public should call upon the governor and Legislature to first consider the following ideas:

- Audit the California Department of Transportation for savings. Experts agree Caltrans has wasted billions of taxpayer dollars in recent years, not counting the new Bay Bridge.
- Use cap-and-trade and existing revenue streams to target traffic gridlock and tackle deferred road maintenance.
- Enact legislation to ensure transportation dollars are spent on actual transportation projects, and require the California Transportation Commission to prioritize projects that provide the greatest economic benefits.

High taxes do not guarantee good roads. If our leaders have failed to properly prioritize and manage our existing tax dollars, is it really wise to give them more?

George Runner is a member of the state Board of Equalization.

Opinion: Opportunities for Al Tahoe reopening

By Rebecca Bryson

At the last Lake Tahoe Unified School District board meeting, board members pondered the question of whether to reopen Al

Tahoe Elementary School and if so to what purpose. The proposal on the table was to reopen it as a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics) center and theme school.

As I read the proposal, I got excited. It sounded very forward thinking and state-of-the-art. I appreciated the inclusion of a daycare option for school employees and focusing STEAM – starting with all the preschoolers already there. However, I couldn't help but think, isn't there a way all of our elementary kids could have access to the science and technology resources described in the plan? Technology, robotics and engineering jobs are the wave of the future. These skills will be necessary for future jobs. All of our students should have the opportunity to engage in innovative science and tech activities that engage their minds, promote analytical thinking, and prepare them for the future.

In addition, hands on robotics and coding programs are the kinds of activities that get many kids excited about learning. They provide a different type of learning opportunity where kids can be collaborative, inventive and work with their hands. It is intrinsically exciting. We need that. Teachers have told me that even their lower performing students can get excited about that.

I recently led a Girl Scout meeting where the girls were earning their home scientist badge. The Environmental Magnet school kids were quick to point out that they had all done all 15 experiments already in class – whereas the Bijou kids had only ever seen one. I know the teachers at Bijou try to fit science in where they can, but they don't seem to have many resources or much support. This incident emphasized for me how deep the divide has grown. And I wonder, will another magnet school – especially one with a STEAM focus – further stratify the divide between our kids and pull science and technology resources and attention from our other schools at a time when we need them most?

The district is working to integrate the New Generation Science Standards into our curricula. This is very positive, but the students' curricula are seemingly jam packed already. The teachers will likely need extra training, resources and support. Now is the time to commit to taking our science programs to the next level for all our students.

To their credit, when these issues were raised at last week's school board meeting, the school board members and staff addressed it. They discussed how STEAM resources from the Al Tahoe project could be brought to the other schools. And, if AL Tahoe is reopened, it would free up space at the other schools to create technology centers or hands on makerspaces at each school. Another suggestion was to make Al Tahoe more of a training center to support to teachers and staff across schools. Finally, they also discussed how to make it a strong neighborhood school as well as a theme school.

We have a good group of new board members. I trust that Superintendent Jim Tarwater, the board, and staff will come up with a thoughtful plan for Al Tahoe. I hope they will continue to reach out to the public and families likely to be impacted to get input. Perhaps a survey, special session, or other type of community outreach strategy would be useful to garner public input. If you have positive solutions or options, get involved. Contact your school board representative, attend a PTA or Cafecitos meeting, or volunteer for your school site council group.

No matter what they do at Al Tahoe, however, the larger question of equity and access to opportunity for all of our kids still remains. It is a concern of many parents I know. This issue is obviously very delicate and bears further research and discussion. But we – as a community (not just as a school district) – need to grapple with it in order to ensure that we enable all our children to thrive. But that is perhaps a topic for another article. As they say, full STEAM ahead (but in a way that all can participate).

Rebecca Bryson is a member of Tahoe's Small World parent group. The mission is to create a global community of parents and families committed to ensuring a peaceful, livable, just planet for all children on Earth.

Letter: Beach Retreat takes turn at B&B

To the community,

Nikki Verdile, one of the incredible sponsor volunteers from Beach Retreat & Lodge, was really happy to be helping at the Monday meal at Grace Hall on Jan. 30.

“This opportunity was educational in so many ways,” commented Verdile. “I met new people, heard wonderful stories, and best of all, everyone was so thankful for the food and help provided. This was so rewarding and the Beach Retreat is so happy for the opportunity to give back to this beautiful community.”

Verdile, along with fellow Beach Retreat co-workers Lori Cramer, Erik Cramer, and Emily Sabbato arrived at 3pm to begin their volunteering to help at the Beach Retreat's sponsorship dinner. They began by packing food giveaway bags with fruit, veggies, milk, eggs, butter, canned goods and breads/pastries; moved on to serving fried whitefish with homemade tartar sauce, zucchini, potatoes wedges, coleslaw and a side of garlic bread and ended their evening helping to clean and clear the dining hall area.

B&B thanks the Beach Retreat & Lodge for sponsoring their first Adopt a Day of Nourishment, and for the hard working and

happy team that they sent to assist the B&B volunteer team.

The help and support that B&B receives from our sponsors, donors and volunteers is overwhelming and has such a positive impact on the lives that we touch and care for.

For more B&B program information, go online.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Editorial: Demanding reporters' notes is a bad idea

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Feb. 6, 2017, Reno Gazette-Journal.*

If prosecutors, defense attorneys, the police or any other agent can come into a newsroom and take a reporter's materials, journalists cannot do their jobs independently.

Yet that is what an attorney in a local drug case demands.

Theresa Ristenpart represents Braden Riley, one of nine defendants arrested as part of a federal investigation into a Reno opioid distribution ring.

She served *RGJ* breaking news reporter Marcella Corona and the *RGJ* with subpoenas for any materials involving contact with a former Washoe County jail inmate that she thinks might help her client.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Why we shouldn't hate VHRs

By Jim Wire

I've lived on the South Shore of Lake Tahoe for over 34 years, which qualifies me as a longtime local. As a local, I'd like to give my humble opinion regarding a controversial subject that continues to fester in our community. All too often we are subject to negative opinions that often overlook the positive. I'd like to change that by giving a perspective that is not expressed enough. My objective is to outline the issues that have contributed to the hatred of vacation rentals and balance that with a more positive perspective.



Jim Wire

For the last couple of years, the South Lake Tahoe City council has been consumed with creating more regulations for vacation home rental permits. This has been driven by a small group of older folks that just aren't happy until they have effectively eliminated vacation rentals all together. What began as a noise nuisance complaint has grown into something larger that encompasses a wider range of issues. The other

issues include unfair competition, neighborhood character, housing shortage, health and safety, mini-hotels, zoning and more. What should have been a quick and easy fix to the noise nuisance issue instead turned into a perpetual and unrelenting attack on VHRs.

When you ask almost any local about their feelings regarding VHRs, they will almost always say that they hate them. Their reason is based primarily on the noise nuisance issue. Almost everybody has a story about their sleep being disrupted in the middle of the night. They are further frustrated that there has never been an immediate remedy. Nobody likes to lose sleep, but with the added regulations the city has more tools to provide the remedy. Regardless, this is a stigma that still sticks in the minds of many locals.

Within the last couple of years more regulations have been created to give law enforcement more tools to abate the noise issue. Rental management companies are more sensitive and more responsive than ever before. They have become late night minutemen and respond to noise complaints. If their property owner receives more than two police citations, then the VHR permit is revoked. Despite the more stringent enforcement and proactive rental management, they are still pushing to make the VHR process more restrictive than it already is.

While most locals hate the noise nuisance from VHRs, they love the dollars that it brings to our town. After all, tourism is our economy. It always has been and it will continue to be so. We all benefit when the tourists fill our town whether it is directly or indirectly. If you aren't touched by a tourist dollar, then you aren't looking close enough. Even if you are retired or unemployed, you still benefit from the government services that it contributes to or the property values.

Not long ago, the city of South Lake Tahoe was faced with a budget deficit. Thanks to the surge in the tourism the TOT (transient occupancy tax) tax that VHRs had generated amounted

to something close to \$2.2 million. At that time, it was an unanticipated gift. Nobody had complained about the VHRs then.

Property values have benefited from vacation rentals. Locals care about real property values because eventually, everybody sells their home, income property or vacant lot. For buyers that may not be able to afford the higher price, a vacation rental income may give them a little edge. As a real estate agent, I can attest that most property owners that use their homes or condos as VHRs are not motivated to make it a profitable venture. It is primarily an investment in lifestyle. It's a place to park their money and have a place to stay in Tahoe.

It has been argued that vacation rentals have depleted the rental housing for locals. Squeezing the VHRs with regulations will not result in a conversion to more long term rentals. Contrary to belief, many owners will choose to keep them vacant to allow for their own personal usage. If the loss of VHR income results in a hardship, the owner may choose to just sell, which may go to another second home buyer that intends to acquire it for personal use. It is a weak argument to say that less VHR homes will translate to a larger long term rental inventory. I believe that there are better solutions to providing more long term rental housing and it doesn't involve squeezing the VHRs.

It has been said that VHRs have negatively impacted the character of the neighborhoods. I'm assuming, that they are objecting to having nicer homes that are rarely occupied. Personally, I like that my neighborhood is vacant about 70 percent of the year because it's more tranquil. I don't like to admit it, but some of those VHR homes are better kept than mine. To be competitive in the market, a VHR must be better kept. That means that they are using local contractors, maintenance services and buying product and materials in Tahoe. They are also paying for services that they don't use all the time such as mandatory garbage pickup.

Another objection is what the city has labeled "mini-hotels". I don't know of many homeowners that haven't maximized the allowable coverage on their land. If your lot is large, then your home will most likely be large. Owning the smallest home in the neighborhood isn't such a bad thing. You will most certainly benefit from higher values which are influenced by larger homes. The impact of larger homes is that they have a higher number of bedrooms which can accommodate larger families or groups of people. For some neighbors this can be an intimidating experience but they too must comply with the same rules as a small home.

Some of the motel and hotel owners have expressed a concern that VHRs are unfairly taking their business away. In an effort to level the playing field, the city had increased fees and regulations. Most notably homeowners with VHR permits are now subject to a building inspection. This is to ensure health and safety code and check for unpermitted improvements.

From my observation, the plight of motel and hotel owners has more to do with vacation trends and lack of investment. For decades, I've seen motels and hotels neglect to maintain and improve their properties. They have relied on reducing their room rates which crippled them financially to make the much-needed reinvestment.

More than that, vacation trends have changed on a national level. More tourists are choosing homes over motels or hotels because they are seeking a different experience. Homes have space for people to mingle and gather. They can share more activities together. Be closer to the outdoor activities that they enjoy such as paddle boarding, mountain biking, hiking and snow riding. Being embedded in a neighborhood allows them to feel like a local and fit in.

However, hotels are still competitive and are hugely successful. The Grand Marriott and Heavenly Village is proof that a large tourist population prefers the walkable access to

a wide variety of services and experiences. A couple of the top grossing restaurants in the city of South Lake Tahoe are in the Heavenly Village. Edgewood has recognized this and they have built a new hotel which is opening this spring.

I may not have persuaded you to love VHRs, but at least you may recognize that are positive impacts as well. They contribute to a significant portion of our local economy. You might say that VHRs have evolved from home sharing and that is a concept that is old as the homes in our community. It's also a concept that you cannot regulate away. We can save a lot of city's time, energy and money by learning to accept and embrace VHRs. The current rules and regulations has had a significant impact on the behavior of VHRs. Rental management companies and home owners have learned to become more responsible and accountable. My suggestion is to give it time. Most of these rules and regulations are still new. Both the city and stakeholders are still in the process of adapting to it. More time is needed to recognize a measurable impact. Before you cuss out the tourist for driving too slow on the highway, keep in mind that they are the ones putting food on your table and a roof over your head. Be patient and welcome our tourists with a smile.

Jim Wire is a real estate agent with Chase International.

Editorial: That's not anarchy, McClintock, it's democracy

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Feb. 6, 2017, Sacramento Bee.*

President Trump's chaotic first weeks have generated wide disapproval, and not all the protests have been placid. But Rep. Tom McClintock needs to stop insisting that the seniors, families and middle-aged picketers at his town hall this past weekend were an "anarchist element."

As the *Sacramento Bee's* Angela Hart reported Saturday, the unhappy crowd that greeted the Sierra Nevada's man in Congress was anti-Trump and noisy. But McClintock's claims to outside media afterward that "anarchists" had gathered to "disrupt" his meeting was true only if by "anarchists" you mean "neighbors and grandparents."

Interviews revealed a lot of gray-haired retirees worried about Medicare and workers fearful of the Republican plan to dismantle the Affordable Care Act. Some said they had driven hours through the Sierra to hear the congressman speak in downtown Roseville; others said they had never demonstrated before, but wanted to register their dismay at Trump's ban on travel from seven Muslim-majority countries and his efforts to roll back environmental rules.

Read the whole story

Letter: Questioning lack of Measure T defense

Publisher's note: *The following letter was read to the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Feb. 7, 2017, by city resident Tami Wallace and is republished with permission.*

Honorable mayor and City Council. I must admit that I'm glad

that I get to talk and you can only listen. I wish marriages and children came with that feature.



Tami Wallace

Last summer a varied group of citizens circulated an initiative petition that was meant to allow all the voters a chance to vote regarding the proposed loop road; 1,400 signatures were found to be valid.

Then, Measure T passed by a very large 20 percent margin. Almost 4,000 of your constituents voted for Measure T giving you, the City Council, what we believed was clear direction.

But a council candidate had sued the citizens, the city and El Dorado County to keep the voters from having input.

Many were suspicious when the county and the citizens were excluded from the lawsuit by the plaintiff and his expensive Sacramento law firm. Only the city remained as a defendant. Why was that?

Also, to this day we don't know who paid the legal expenses on a lawsuit against the citizens of our city.

In reality most people aren't against some version of a loop road, but many have had individual reasons for wanting to have a say based on the current proposal.

Some were concerned that over a dozen businesses would be moved or worse removed.

Some were concerned that traffic would be backed up for four

years of construction.

Some were concerned that a planned shopping complex in Nevada would be waiting at the end to take away California sales tax dollars.

Many worried that new taxes would be needed for the \$90 million 1-mile project when we have hundreds of miles of city streets that are broken and filled with pot holes.

Some were concerned that no new parking would be included.

Many were worried that up to 87 families would be displaced with no funds yet identified for their replacement. How does a Chicago style high rise apartment complex built next to the highway or moving those families into the old middle school in Nevada effectively solve the issue?

An almost unspoken reason has been the racial overtones of dividing a mostly Hispanic community, while no other part of town would ever allow this to happen.

Another concern is that TTD (Tahoe Transportation District), the loop road proponent, is responsible for the poorly run, underfunded bus system that does not have enough sheltered bus stops to protect the riders from the weather with such late arriving buses.

Why were the county and the citizens removed from the lawsuit?

Was it so that the city could pretend to defend but intend to lose the lawsuit against Mr. [Jason] Collin, a fellow councilmember?

I have in my hand the transcript of the court proceeding where your attorney says and I quote:

“With respect to the petitioner, Jason Collin, the City does not oppose a preliminary injunction and/or a permanent

injunction under the theories of statewide concern.”

Needless to say your legal counsel either did this on his own or the City Council directed him to sell your constituents down the river. Which was it?

The language of the measure could have easily been amended by agreement with the citizens.

I’m here to tell you how disappointed we are and that this is not the end of this matter.

Opinion: Beekeepers and the art of urban rebirth

By Juan William Chávez

The plight of public housing projects conceived with the best of intentions and then failing horribly is by now well-known in communities across America. Less known—and still unfolding—is the story of what happens next, both to the people who lived there and the physical spaces those projects inhabited.

As an artist and cultural activist in St. Louis, Mo., I’ve long been interested in the relationship between physical space and the needs of people and communities—in what works and what doesn’t. About a decade ago, I began focusing this question on the site where once stood Pruitt-Igoe, one of America’s most notorious public housing failures.

The project, named for Wendell O. Pruitt, an African-American fighter pilot in World War II, and William L. Igoe, a white former U.S. congressman, was completed in 1954. It was located

just two miles northwest of the Gateway Arch, and envisioned as one of the nation's most ambitious attempts to address urban squalor. Its 33 high-rise apartment buildings, with 2,870 units, were designed by Minoru Yamasaki, who went on to design the World Trade Center in New York City.

But the project was plagued with problems from the start, both in its design and in its profound inadequacy in addressing the economic, social, and demographic needs of residents. By the early 1970s, most of the buildings were uninhabitable, their hallways vandalized and their windows broken. In 1972, they were demolished via a spectacular, widely televised implosion that soon came to epitomize the failed trajectory of public housing nationwide.

Over time, and years of neglect, the vast vacant lot that was once the Pruitt-Igoe projects transformed into what I came to think of as the Pruitt-Igoe forest. In 2009, I was working on community-based art projects in North St. Louis. On my drive to work, I regularly passed the Pruitt-Igoe forest. Viewing it from the street, I daydreamed about what might be inside. At first, the forest seemed intimidatingly abandoned and potentially dangerous, but before long it beckoned me. I entered on foot to take photographs. I walked on weather-worn asphalt and saw overgrown weeds sprouting from dirt mounds, with bits of gravel, brick and crushed concrete. Mosses revealed the vague outlines of old streets. There were a variety of native plants, and oak and hickory trees. I saw hawks, owls, rabbits and deer. I had thought I would find the remains of a past civilization, but to my surprise I saw the beginning of a new community. This undisturbed vacant lot had become a sanctuary for an entire ecosystem.

I started thinking about Pruitt-Igoe's mission. The development had been created to foster community. Could it somehow return to that function? Did any community exist at Pruitt-Igoe now? One day, as I photographed some bees pollinating a patch of native flowers, it hit me: these

buzzing insects were Pruitt-Igoe's new community. Bees and St. Louisans were in a similar situation. St. Louis's population had fallen to its lowest in a century. At the same time – for reasons ranging from the use of pesticides and industrial farming to the loss of native plant habitats to illness caused by parasites—bees were dying off. This posed a threat to humans, since bees pollinate our food. Perhaps Pruitt-Igoe could provide a place to reinvigorate the partnership between bees and humans, creating a kind of sanctuary for both. Its story could end on a positive note, with one of the worst failures of public housing becoming a leading example of revitalization.

I thought I would transform the urban forest into a public preserve, cultivating community through on-site beekeeping and urban agriculture. The aim was to memorialize the past and provide opportunity for the future. But with Pruitt-Igoe's fate tied up with controversial development plans—construction for a new “urban village” planned for the site still hasn't begun –I and my scientific and artistic colleagues decided instead to initiate a one-acre pilot program that I called the Living Proposal, in the adjacent neighborhood of Old North. A Guggenheim fellowship and a Creative Capital artist's grant provided funding to construct a sanctuary.

Working on a feral property surrounded by other vacant lots, we built our bee-friendly environment. We designed an apiary with two hives and garden beds, where we planted pesticide-free, pollinator-friendly native plants, vegetables, fruit trees and berry bushes so the bees would have a variety of food sources. Flowers bloomed, the pollinators arrived, and our beehives began to produce honey. Every season, the Living Proposal became more established, with strong and healthy hives. It became part of a bigger movement of urban beekeeping, committed to rebuilding the dwindling bee population. Scientists have found surprisingly high numbers of bee species in cities that are absent in nearby rural lands.

According to St. Louis University's Sustainability Science Lab, St. Louis is currently providing habitat for a third of Missouri's bees.

As the bees flourished in the sanctuary, it became time to incorporate our human neighbors into the hive. We developed the Young Honey Crew, a summer youth program that teaches students the importance of bees to our health. The students wear bee suits to inspect the hives, maintain the garden from seed to harvest, follow recipes to prepare food from the garden for lunch, and create artwork celebrating their connectedness to bees, the environment and each other. The Young Honey Crew became especially meaningful in 2014 after the death of Michael Brown, the unarmed teenager who was killed by police in nearby Ferguson. With overwhelming tension and protests throughout the city, our students sought space to think, create, and talk. The Living Proposal became their sanctuary, a place for constructive contemplation.

From that point forward, our workshops focused more on community and collective thinking. In 2015 we invited our North St. Louis neighbor, Paulette, to initiate a senior women's support group, the Wise Women. These queen bees of the community gather weekly to share a meal, support and celebrate each other. Last year, with backing from Artpace San Antonio, we built the "Honey Trailer," a vintage trailer designed for bee advocacy, health education, and job training. Starting this summer, the Honey Trailer—which is outfitted with solar panels, a grow room, a small kitchen a flat screen TV to provide information about bees, cooking, and our program—will visit schools, parks, festivals and farmers' markets around St. Louis and other cities.

Back in 2009, soon after I first started venturing into the abandoned forest, I made a sculpture, stacking defunct beehives to create a scaled-down version of a Pruitt-Igoe building. There were pheromone residues in the hive boxes, and they started to attract new bees. I was surrounded by the time

the sculpture was completed. Not wearing any protective clothing I moved with hesitation, but my nervousness dissipated as the bees became less curious about my activity and more focused on the sculpture itself.

I saw the bees work as a group, build a haven, and use ideas to make honey: the alchemy of the studio within an ecosystem. The experience led directly to building the bee sanctuary. By creating a healthier environment for bees, we're making a better environment for ourselves and our neighborhoods.

Juan William Chávez is an artist and cultural activist who creates and shares space in the built and natural environment to address community-identified issues. He lives in St. Louis.

Editorial: Nev. must make background checks work

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the Jan. 15, 2017, Las Vegas Sun.*

Christmas just kept coming last year for the NRA crowd in Nevada.

Three days after the holiday, Nevada Attorney General Adam Laxalt gave them another gift when he announced that the November ballot measure on universal background checks had hit a roadblock.

Cue the Charlie Brown music. Based on the chorus of smug comments about how opponents of the initiative had warned voters all along that it was flawed, the types who can't drink

enough NRA Kool-Aid had quite a celebration.

Here's hoping they had plenty of fun, because now it's time to get back to the important job of reducing gun violence in Nevada.

Read the whole story