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Meeting Thwarted by Protest Signs

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY MARY-JUSTINE LANYON
Editor

Several months ago, when a resident expressed concerns about the drug treatment facility operated by Above It

Fire Near Silverwood Contained

BY MIKE HARRIS
Reporter

Cool weather and a lack of wind helped fire-

All in Skyforest to owner Kory Avarell and his son, Kyle, the director of operations, the Avarells decided it was time to hold a community meeting.

That meeting, Kyle Avarell said, was set for

fighters attempted to drive Engine 25 down the dirt road, Bryan said, but stopped well short of the fire for fear

last Wednesday, May 29, at 7 p.m.

"We posted a notice of the meeting in the post office and asked local residents to spread the word," Avarell said.

But at 6 o'clock that night, while working in his office, Kyle Avarell heard a great deal of honking. "I went outside and noticed a group of people with signs that read 'Honk No Rehab' and 'Save Skyforest'." He told his father, who was also working at the office, what was going on.

"We decided to go out and Kory would make an announce-

Please see MEETING/A12



Suzee Miller makes a point to Kyle Avarell while a protester holds up a sign.

Meeting

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ment," the son said. "Kory told the people the meeting was going to be canceled because of the tactics used.

"We wanted to have a conversation."

Kyle Avarell repeated those words when he came out at about 7 p.m. to talk with the crowd, which had grown to more than 30 people.

"All we asked was to have a conversation," he said. "We wanted to get some feedback. All I requested was for you to put down for your signs for 30 minutes. That was not done.

"Even as we're speaking, everyone has their signs," Kyle said. At that moment, a car passed, its horn honking in response to a sign being held high by one protester.

Later Kyle expressed disappointment that the meeting was not able to take place. People had been making general statements about displeasure with the facility; he was hoping to get some specifics.

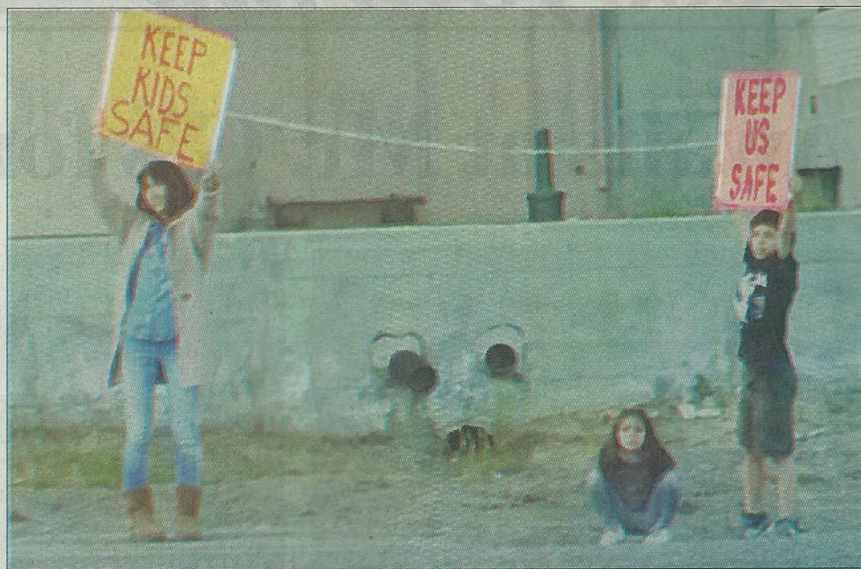
"The sad thing is," he told the *Mountain News*, "there were people there who wanted to talk." In fact, one man gave Kyle a typed list of concerns. "I'm meeting with him later this week to discuss them."

The bus stop located in front of the drug treatment facility was on the list, he noted. On Kyle's "to-do" list is having a conversation with the school district about the bus stop and what can be done about it.

Pauline Romero, who moved into her Skyforest home last December, said her "heart sank when I found out there was a drug rehab by the school bus stop." Her two children, 8 and 12, wait for the bus in front of the building.

"I can understand people's concerns," Kyle said. "I was raised here and am emotionally tied to this mountain. But I was so disappointed. This is not the mountain I remember."

As the crowd milled



This Skyforest resident and her children participated in the protest at the Above It All facility last week.

about on both sides of Highway 18, Captain Rick Ells of the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department arrived, as did two CHP officers. Their concern: People bearing protest signs kept walking over the white fog line into the traffic lane. Kyle Avarell noticed this as soon as he crossed the street and begged people to take a step back.

"We don't want anyone to get hit," he said.

"Rim Family Services has been here years with no complaints," Hugh Campbell said as he stood in the turnout across from the Above It All facility. "Why do we need this one?"

That point was reiterated by John Wood, who was at the protest with his wife, Cheryl, and 3-year-old granddaughter, Ella.

"Rim Family Services is less than 100 yards away and no one has complained about them," Wood said. "These people are being brought in because they have a court order to go to rehab or jail. It's a lucrative business."

Above It All is operating under the "professional services" category, Campbell said. "It makes no sense why the county has not come in and done something."

That professional services category, as defined in doc-

uments provided by Campbell, includes "establishments that provide advice, designs, information, medical treatment, commercial education, consultation, travel, job placement, advertising, finance, insurance and real estate services...."

The medical services-rehabilitation center category is defined as "a facility providing skilled nursing and/or medical care to persons recovering from injuries or dependencies."

While Above It All does have counselors to work with its clients, it does not provide "skilled nursing care"; therein lies the difference, said Lewis Murray, mountain field representative for Supervisor Janice Rutherford. In addition, he noted, the Skyforest treatment center offers only outpatient services, which qualify as professional services.

Supervisor Rutherford had visited the Skyforest facility as well as other facilities on the mountain "to get a better understanding of the operation of sober living homes and drug and alcohol treatment facilities as they relate to unincorporated San Bernardino County," Murray said.

Zoning was not an issue with the California Depart-

ment of Alcohol and Drug Programs, through whom the facility is licensed, Kyle said.

Murray said Land Use Services has checked Above It All's status and found it to be in compliance with the county code as currently written. Murray noted that Land Use Services is continuing to monitor the office space to ensure no codes are being violated.

"We all know someone touched by addiction," Kyle Avarell said. Above It All, he noted, has taken in local people in need of help who can't afford treatment on a scholarship. And, he added, "we employ an enormous number of local people."

Above It All does have an after-care program for its clients but Kyle said it's impossible to measure their success rate. "You could have two or 10 years of sobriety but every day is a challenge with wanting to take a drink or use."

He added he still has hopes of holding a community meeting but, Kyle said, "we don't want to do this to people again." What he meant, he clarified, was he does not want people to be inconvenienced again.

Following the aborted meeting, organizers Dave Arnold and Suzee Miller urged people who are opposed to the presence of this facility to submit a formal complaint to ADP. They are also talking with Assembly-

man Tim Donnelly about what changes can be made at the state level to "put a stop to unlicensed, uninspected and illegal sober living houses and alcohol and drug rehabilitation centers," Miller wrote in an e-mail.