

VALENTINE'S DAY REQUEST AWAKENS GENEROUS HEARTS

Couple's suggestion search online met with treasure trove

BY KARLA PETERSON

Between them, Anne O'Dell and Jim Hyslop have seven marriages, 20 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. They also have one great love, and on Valentine's Day, they will be celebrating in swellegant style with the help of a host of new friends.

Like many random acts of modern-day kindness, Anne and Jim's excellent adventure started on Facebook. A passionate foodie, O'Dell posted a query to her fellow members of the Eating and Drinking in San Diego group last month. She and her husband were looking for a reasonably priced place to have Valentine's Day dinner. Did anyone have any suggestions? And by the way, she is 70 and he is 82. And he has Alzheimer's.

All she wanted were some tips. What she got was treasure.

Touched by this story of love in the face of great challenge, the Westgate Hotel gave the couple a free Valentine's Day brunch. Blanc Floral Design offered up a wrist corsage for O'Dell and a boutonniere for her dapper beau. Members of the Eating and Drinking in San Diego group planned to send champagne and wine, and the Cueva Bar restaurant in University Heights is treating them to a three-course Valentine's Day dinner.

In the couple's sunny



NELVIN C. CEPEDA U-T

Alzheimer's affecting Jim Hyslop, 82, won't stop him and wife Anne O'Dell, 70, from enjoying a daylong celebration of love today. They live in Little Italy.

apartment in Little Italy, O'Dell was still trying to digest this lavish spread of generosity. She and Hyslop love nothing more than a night on the town, but she wasn't expecting the town to love them back.

"I am just stunned, really," said O'Dell as she and Hyslop sat knee-to-knee on their couch. "I'm usually an optimist, but I had no idea this would happen. I was gobsmacked. I don't know how else to say it."

A longtime member of the San Diego Police Department and an outspoken domestic-violence survivor and survivors' advocate, O'Dell is not easily gobsmacked. The response to her post was a huge surprise, but it shouldn't have been. Even in cyberspace,

people know a good romance when they see one.

"What struck me was the Alzheimer's and the love. They are so in love," said Westgate Hotel marketing manager Linda Karimi, who saw O'Dell's post and asked the hotel's general manager if they could help out. "And their honesty was so moving. People try to hide what is going on in their lives, and this was so truthful. It was very touching."

They met in October of 1992 after Hyslop read O'Dell's ad in the San Diego Reader's personals section and saw something he liked. She saw a man who wasn't put off by the fact that she called herself a "feminine feminist" and was intrigued. They met at the Rancho Bernardo Inn for drinks,

and 11 months later, they were at the County Clerk's office in Las Vegas getting married.

She loved that he was smart and intense and shared her passion for travel, food and dancing. And what did the dashing Australian landscape architect love about the outspoken Irish-American police sergeant? Usually, Hyslop struggles to get his words out. Not this time. "I never saw anybody who could handle anybody with anything," he said, his face beaming above his pink linen shirt.

In their 24 years together, there has been a lot to handle. Her back problems. His heart condition. Blending their two large families. Then there was the bag-

gage. Hyslop had been married twice, and O'Dell had the kind of trust issues that three unhappy marriages can bring.

But as they traveled the globe together; danced and dined together; and moved from San Diego to Brookings, Ore., and then to Ravello, Italy. O'Dell discovered that the only problem with their relationship was that it hadn't started sooner. That's where their Valentine's Day prom came in.

"I went to proms, but I never went to proms with Jim. We missed all of that stuff together, and we shouldn't have missed it," said O'Dell, who retired from the Police Department in 2012. "So one year in Brookings, we went to a Valentine's Day party, and I got a boutonniere for him and a wrist corsage for me, and I said, 'Let's pretend it's our prom.' I was afraid people would think we were kooks, but when you tell people Valentine's Day is your prom, they go out of their way to be sweet and accommodating."

If O'Dell and Hyslop's prom story was the cherry on top of her charming Facebook post, Hyslop's Alzheimer's was the bitter-sweet heart of it all.

Here was a couple whose love was steadfast even as life rattled around them. After Hyslop was diagnosed with Alzheimer's three years ago, the couple who used to travel the world began sticking close to home. The wife who was the light of her husband's life is now the caregiver who bathes and dresses him. The couple who could talk circles around each other

have to depend on something other than words. Even for people who don't know them, O'Dell's post said it all.

"I think people always respond to love," said Gloria Baker of Alzheimer's San Diego, which runs a support group O'Dell attends and also helps provide her with a respite caregiver. "I think everyone realizes that this could be the last Valentine's Day that they have a good memory of, and people want to be a part of that. They discovered each other late in life, and they are going to hold onto it and celebrate it to their last breath."

Before their special date, O'Dell will take Hyslop to the barber for a proper shave. She will make sure he has a freshly dry-cleaned Italian linen shirt and one of his dashing caps. They will enjoy their meals down to the last crumb, as they always do. If there is music, Hyslop might get up and dance, as he has always done. And when O'Dell tells people about their prom tradition, her fellow diners will raise their glass to a love that makes its own rules and keeps its own promises.

"Maybe people don't believe it, but you can keep love alive through all of this," O'Dell said, taking Jim's hand. "As long as Jim can get dressed up and go out to eat with me, that's what keeps us going. We can have a glass of wine and a great meal. We can't do as much as we used to do anymore, but that's OK. We've had a hell of a ride."

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NOD TO NATURE WITH MARSHLAND RESTORATION PLANS IN MISSION BAY

Two planning efforts launched, targeting the park's northeast

BY DAVID GARRICK

SAN DIEGO

San Diego's iconic Mission Bay Park is on the verge of a partial transformation that aims to enhance its recreational appeal while also helping fight climate change, sea level rise and water pollution.

Two recently launched planning efforts are studying how to turn back the clock several decades to when much of Mission Bay was a giant saltwater marsh instead of an aggressively dredged haven for sailboats and water skiers.

Most of the park will remain just as it is today, but environmentalists, city officials and community leaders are analyzing and haggling over how to restore as many as 170 acres of marshland in the park's northeast corner near Pacific Beach.

Marshland filters carbon dioxide from the air, boosts the quality of water that passes through, and can act as a sponge to mitigate rising sea levels expected as ongoing climate change accelerates.

Marshes, sometimes called wetlands, are also crucial to the survival of many migratory birds that connect marine life with land-based animals and plants.

The new planning efforts, one led by the San Diego Audubon Society and another led by the city, were prompted by two newly available properties in crucial locations for marsh restoration: the 76-acre De Anza Cove Mobile Home Park and the 50-acre Campland on the Bay RV Resort.

The two properties are near the path that environmental experts say La Jolla's Rose Creek should take to connect with the bay's 40 acres of remaining wetlands, a fenced-off area near Crown Point Drive known as the Kendall Frost Marsh.

During the bay's environmental heyday before mass dredging from 1850 until just after World War II, its biologically rich marshes were sustained by water and sediment from Rose Creek and the San Diego River.

The creek now flows into the bay near Mission Bay High School instead of the remaining marsh, and the river has been channelized to avoid the bay completely.

"They transformed what they thought was a useless swamp into Mission Bay Park," said Rebecca Schwartz, conservation program manager for the local Audubon Society chapter. "People didn't really understand the importance of wetlands and ecosystems, and now we have this really broken system."

While no firm decisions



JOHN GIBBINS U-T

The Kendall Frost Marsh near Crown Point Drive would benefit from restoration of adjacent eastern acreage where Rose Creek flows into Mission Bay.

have been made, most of those participating in the local planning efforts say they expect Rose Creek to be connected to the Kendall Frost Marsh through the Campland site, which may be completely restored to marshland.

The De Anza site is farther east and not as ideally located for marshland, so many expect only a portion of it to be restored.

The size and location of that portion are expected to be key decisions along the way, because many community leaders want to see the bulk of De Anza become an iconic recreation destination with aquatic activity areas, sports fields, tented camping and other amenities.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to re-plan a piece of property as gorgeous as that is and as important as that is," said attorney Paul Robinson, chairman of a city committee that began gathering public input in December.

The De Anza property's availability is the result of recent legal settlements that will lead to the closure of the site's 500-slip mobile home park this fall after many years of litigation.

For its planning process, the city has added the 18-hole Mission Bay executive golf course and some other nearby land to the 76-acre mobile home park to create a 120-acre study area.

Meanwhile, the Audubon Society is studying a larger area that also includes the Kendall Frost Marsh and the Campland RV park, which has a lease due to expire in November 2017.

City officials say they might grant Campland a short lease extension while restoration plans are firmed up, but nothing long enough to interfere.

The Audubon Society's effort, called ReWild Mission Bay, is expected to conclude first and help guide the city's effort, which won't be complete until 2018 at the earliest.

Schwartz said her group plans to release multiple wetlands restoration scenarios in June and then, after public input, narrow them down to three specific op-

tions in October.

"The city is mandated to consider wetlands restoration as part of their process," said Schwartz, referring to the Mission Bay Park Master Plan's guidelines for De Anza. "We're helping them answer the question of how they can do wetlands restoration there. It's a technical question."

Robin Shifflet, a city planner, said the two separate-but-related planning efforts seem likely to work well together.

"We should be able to use the information they come up with to make informed decisions on the ultimate plan for De Anza," Shifflet said. "Through their study we may find out we have to do more or less. We're going to learn more about what's really needed."

Many officials and community leaders are participating in both efforts to help them stay compatible.

Brian Curry, chairman of the Pacific Beach Planning Group, said he's confident

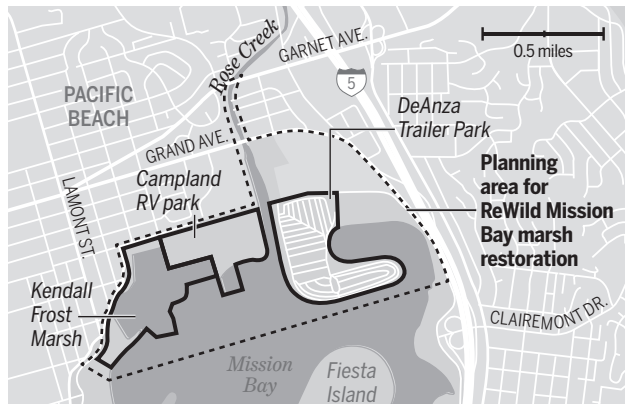
the separate efforts by Audubon and the city will lead to positive results.

But he said the future of the bay and a new trolley line under construction just east of Pacific Beach near Rose Creek have divided people's attention with so many public meetings.

"It's quite exciting, but there's a lot of moving parts," Curry said. "We frankly would have preferred joint workshops because the public gets workshop burnout."

Schwartz said the ReWild proposals won't just be where to locate wetlands, but how they can be recreated in ways that make them user-friendly recreation areas unlike the fenced off Kendall Frost property.

"Right now the marsh exists behind a chain-link fence, and a lot of people in Pacific Beach don't know they have a wetland in their own backyard," said Schwartz, explaining that the small size of the remaining marsh makes it risky to



Source: ESRI

BETO ALVAREZ • U-T

allow people in. "By expanding it, we can put in things like boardwalks, overlooks, a nature center and even have activities like kayaking."

Public use of Mission Bay's marshland may also increase awareness of its importance and greater support for maintaining and expanding it, she said.

"It's a biodiversity hotspot," said Schwartz, adding that nine endangered or sensitive species of bird use the Kendall Frost Marsh. "It's a key stopping point on the Pacific Flyway, a major north-south migrational route from Alaska down to the tip of South America."

Birds play a key role in the survival of many other

parts of the ecosystem, she said.

Marshes do a lot more than support birds.

"Wetlands, on an acre-per-acre basis, draw down more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than a rainforest," she said. "They also provide a really great buffer to sea level rise by acting as a sponge that cushions the blow."

Details on the two planning efforts can be found at rewildmissionbay.org and deanzarevitalizationplan.com.

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