



November 13, 2013

Greetings!

Once upon a time, there was a small country restaurant that was miles from anywhere. It started slow, but ultimately built a clientele willing to book reservations months in advance for an opportunity to dine inside. It's now considered one of the world's great restaurants. It's name: The French Laundry.

One of its (many) secrets is its 3-acre fruit and vegetable garden, directly across the street in Yountville. The French Laundry is especially proud of its cuisine's local provenance, and exploits this asset to the hilt. It doesn't hurt that its food is spectacularly well prepared, and that it lies close to many of California's finest wineries.

Hidden Valley Lake's Greenview Restaurant lies a scant 43 miles north of the French Laundry, in a region known for its superb agricultural produce and wine. Despite its picturesque setting, the Greenview's fortunes have been markedly different. Reservations are rarely required at any time of day or season, it's cuisine is rarely praised, and it doesn't get to charge \$hundreds for the mere privilege of dining.

Why is this so?

With garden fresh produce and mountain vistas, one would have thought the entire world (or at least Northern California) would be beating a path to the Greenview's door. With its value-priced meals and generous helpings, not to mention its congenial staff, the restaurant should be perpetually full of happy eaters day and night.

Alas, it has (so far) not come to pass. Those in favor of building a grander Hartmann Facility believe that the outlay of \$6 million will solve the Greenview's problems. With the wave of a magic bulldozer, the 45-year-old building will be demolished and a sparkling new structure, capable of seating a hundred or more eager diners, will arise from the ashes of the old Greenview.

Presto! Hordes of eager, affluent gourmets will trek across the Mayacamas to savor the culinary grandeur of Lake County cuisine at its finest. The \$millions spent on re-siting and rebuilding the Greenview will be recouped within a few years, and all will be well.

How likely is this scenario?

Not very, unless ...

Thomas Keller (of the French Laundry) or Alice Waters (of Chez Panisse) can be persuaded to direct the re-launch.

Although hope springs eternal, what's more likely to spring are many of our Community's residents for the gates if HVLA members are saddled with a \$6 million burden. Several have informed me privately of their plans to sell and move if HVLA assessments increase much more.

What can be done to head off this manic rush to build Hidden Valley Lake's version of the "Bridge to Nowhere"?

The answer is short and simple - a sound, detailed business plan, coupled with some creative thinking and marketing expertise. Fortunately, we already have many of ingredients required in our Community or close by.

At the November 2nd Community Center event "[The Path Forward for Hidden Valley Lake in the 21st Century](#)" several of the speakers described ways to make our Community richer, healthier and more enjoyable.

Two, Holly Evans-White and Kecia Stickney, have agreed to advise the Greenview, gratis, via this communication, in order to help the establishment prosper in the years to come.

Kecia established [Frontier Farm](#) a couple of years ago. On its grounds, which lie just beyond HVL's gates on SR 29, grow a wonderful assortment of fruits and vegetables.

Some of Frontier Farm's produce may wind up at the Greenview once Kecia procures the requisite insurance.

She has ambitious plans for Frontier Farm. Besides a produce stand, soon to be completed, Kecia will eventually create a "farm-to-table" dining establishment featuring organic produce, music and good company. A beer garden may also be in the offing.

In our discussion, Kecia suggested a clever way for the Greenview to procure most of its produce from within the gates of Hidden Valley Lake.

The HVLA currently owns 40+ plots of land distributed around the Community. Some of these could be transformed into organic vegetable and fruit farms, whose produce would be harvested for the Greenview - just like the French Laundry.

This way, the Greenview could market itself as a truly green Greenview, whose name applies to more than golf. It could also be a way to distinguish it from other restaurants in the region that have so far declined to hitch their wagon to the "eat local and green" movement that's sweeping Northern California and beyond.

Lake County produces some of the finest wine in California, and its grapes are used by a surprisingly large number of Napa and Sonoma Wineries. [Guenoc](#) and [Lily Lantry](#) are two local vineyards producing fine wine that could be featured at the Greenview. These wineries, owned by [Foley Family Wines](#), could also establish a wine-education corner at the Greenview, where customers could learn more about Lake County wine. The county, itself, might be interested in helping.

Holly Evans-White is a local wine industry expert who lives in Hidden Valley Lake. She currently works as a marketing consultant for a Napa County wine shop, but has broad-ranging expertise in marketing food and wine.

Holly's advice for the Greenview is pretty direct:

(1) Ensure the menu is appropriate to the existing kitchen, and prepare the menu with consistency.

(2) Stabilize the Greenview's hours of operation and post these hours everywhere. Stick to the posted hours for many months, and spread the word that it is open and reliable.

(3) Train the staff to conform to a high level of customer service. Details like dirty wine glasses, water served in plastic cups, etc. matter greatly as they play an important role in repeat business.

(4) Improve the wine-by-the glass program. This could be a lucrative profit center.

(5) Clean up the place now (regardless of whether it will be remodeled or demolished) and freshen up its décor.

(6) Once the consistency and quality of cuisine is stabilized at a high level, begin spreading the word that the Greenview's offerings are something to be excited about. Use social media (Facebook, Twitter, Website, Constant Contact email, Views) to communicate the revamping of the restaurant's cuisine and look.

(7) Increase the prices by 10% to 20% (and use whole dollar or 50 cent figures).

Holly is firmly of the opinion that the Greenview's fortunes can be markedly improved without a new building. What draws in clientele is not the structure so much as the food and customer service.

Many in our community have suggested that a detailed business and marketing plan be completed before any architectural and construction plan is considered for the Hartmann Facility.

Herb Fish made a cogent case for this business-before-construction plan at the September 28th event "Democracy in Hidden Valley Lake," as has Jack Worster at several public forums. Until such a business plan is written, discussed and revised based on Community feedback, it makes no sense to proceed with an expensive construction plan that may be Hidden Valley Lake's version of the "Bridge to Nowhere."

Surely, none of us wish for the Greenview to be known as "The Restaurant to Nowhere."

Instead, we should work together, as a Community, to ensure that the Greenview thrives as a culinary venture, one that all of us can be proud of, and that contributes to the HVLA's coffers.

Much of the expertise and knowledge to create a really good restaurant lies close by. The HVLA should call upon these experts (who include, beside Holly and Kecia, Julie Hoskins of Chic Le Chef and Channing Rudd, who has extensive experience in the wine industry) to help guide the transformation of the Greenview and Mulligan's bar.

Lake Wildwood, our sister community in the Sierra Foothills, is beginning to plan the renovation/rebuilding of their Clubhouse. Their planning process differs from ours in a number of ways. Lake Wildwood will hire a firm to conduct the first stage of the process, which is to determine what the Community "wants, needs and can afford." Afterwards, the entire community is surveyed to provide an opportunity for all residents to "voice their preferences and priorities with regard to a new clubhouse."

The full process takes 6 to 8 months to complete and entails 10 separate stages. This is before any architectural plans are drawn up. The conceptual design will be put up to a community-wide vote. Details of the Lake Wildwood planning process can be found in the October 11, 2013 edition of the Wildwood Independent.

Tomorrow night (November 14th) is an important HVLA Board Meeting, beginning at 6:30 PM in the Activity Center of the HVLA Admin Building. The agenda is posted online.

If you haven't voted by now, please do so by this Saturday, noon. It's probably too late to mail in your ballot (because it has to travel to Robertson and Associates in Lakeport). Instead, hand-deliver the ballot to the HVLA administration building (18174 Hidden Valley Road). Photo ID is required. When delivering your ballot, make sure to ask for a receipt. To those who have already cast their ballots - Thank You!

Even though your ballot has been cast, you can still request a receipt to ensure that it was received and counted.

Please call the HVLA - (707) 987-3138 - between now and Saturday morning to request a receipt.

In case of a close vote, your receipt may be important.

Sincerely,

Steve Greenberg,
Candidate for HVLA Director

HVLaRising | steven@hvlaring.org | <http://www.hvlaring.org>

Believe in Steve! For HVLA Director
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