

Peninsula

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Pat Dillon

Unplanned trip, courtesy of INS

SIX DAYS ago, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service sent the Farrar family of Liverpool, England, a surprise Christmas present.

With "can do" efficiency more like the 49ers' two-minute drill than a federal bureaucracy, the INS detained their 21-year-old son, Peter of Sunnyvale, packed him up and sent him home the very next day so that he could apply to return.

That his application for permanent resident alien status was approved before his plane left on Friday is beside the point.

The point is that Peter Farrar had overstayed his initial welcome.

And that was that, even though a top INS official says Farrar should be welcome as soon as he fills out the proper forms and abides by the proper procedures and waits his turn.

James Meehan of Sunnyvale, Farrar's father-in-law, sees a different point to this.

"The whole thing's ridiculous," he says. "It cost us \$664 for a plane ticket. They told us if we paid his way, he would not be classified as 'deported,' and it wouldn't be held against him," says Meehan, a 64-year-old Liverpool native, who's lived as a resident alien in the United States for two years. "But he has been deported."

Not officially, says the INS, adding that this case should be considered a model of efficiency, a showcase for the reform that was designed to clear a path through the immigration labyrinth.

IN 1986, Congress passed a law allowing "visitor visas" on demand from certain countries, primarily the United Kingdom and other Western European nations.

"This was because we had so many requests to visit friends and family," explains Philip Waters, deputy district director of the INS office in San Francisco.

"The idea was to cut down on the wait." Peter Farrar held a 90-day visitor visa when he arrived last July at the Meehans', who are family friends from Liverpool. He especially wanted to see Caroline Meehan, 18.

Within two months, they were married. She applied for permanent resident alien status for her husband and he applied to the INS to extend his visitor visa, pending approval of his resident alien application.

Huge water tank bursts

No one hurt by crash

By Maria Puente
Mercury News Staff Writer

A 34-year-old wood water-storage tank, apparently damaged in the Oct. 17 earthquake, collapsed in East Palo Alto on Wednesday, hurtling hardware, large pieces of timber and 40,000 gallons of water through a chain-link fence and into the yards of nearby homes.

No one was hurt in the 1 p.m. accident, and nearby homes did not appear to be damaged significantly from flooding, residents and Menlo Park firefighters said.

Residents compared the sound of the collapse to an explosion or an earthquake.

"I heard a rumbling sound, and it blew up and the water started gushing out," said Jeffrey Williams, who lives across the street from the tank at 2190 Addison Ave., which is owned by Palo Alto Park Mutual Water Co.

Heavy metal bolts and jagged, shattered pieces of timber were thrown into yards and along the sides of the streets as far as a block away. Some of

See TANK, Page 2B



ALL THAT REMAINS — Thomas Smith, a Menlo Park firefighter, walks through rubble where tank stood.



Guadalupe Ibarra, second from left, and children move a tank timber out of her driveway

David Hornback — Mercury News

P.A. firm chosen

Council moves on Hwy. 101 area

By Stephen Robitaille
Mercury News Staff Writer

Making yet another grab for a bright but developer-driven future, the East Palo Alto City Council on Wednesday chose a Palo Alto firm to be its partner in developing prime property along the Highway 101 corridor.

The council chose Mozart Developers to fund studies that would set up a redevelopment district. That district could become the site for a major auto and retail mall — but might also displace thousands of residents.

Luring businesses

Council members said such a development could attract the kinds of retail businesses that East Palo Alto lacks and put millions of dollars annually into city coffers.

"The issue for me is how we come through with our commitments to improve the quality of life; this is the only tool we have," said Mayor William Vines. "I'd rather hang for doing something than for not doing anything."

The vote came over the objections of area homeowners and residents, who charged that they would be swept aside in favor of commercial development. The area has at least 2,000 residents.

Housing consideration

"We have the question of how are these people going to be treated, how are they going to be relocated," said resident William Webster. "Housing must be provided in all this; otherwise, housing will be impossible to provide elsewhere."

Vines, Vice Mayor John Bostic and Councilwoman Barbara Mouton voted in favor of Mozart; Council

Neighbors unhurt as water tank bursts

TANK, from Page 1B

the water was soaked up by the grass in the company yard; some rushed down side streets, turning them into muddy tracks. Several small shacks housing pump works in the yard were destroyed; a larger pump building tilted crazily, with part of its foundation ripped away by the water.

"That's a third of a million pounds of water, you could go surfing on that water," joked Craig Dremann, assistant manager of the small, customer-owned water company, which serves about 600 families.

Officials said customers did not lose water service after the collapse because electric pumps continued to pump water directly from the wells that supply the company.

Although the tank could hold 100,000 gallons, it had been out of service and only partly full since the earthquake, which caused several leaks, company officials said.

The collapse occurred on a day when water company officials expected federal emergency aid officials to inspect the redwood tank to determine if it should be repaired or replaced, paid for by federal dollars.

Dremann said the company had been negotiating Federal Emergency Management Agency officials since October. Because of the tank's collapse, the agency visit was postponed until Thursday.

"We had a few cracks here

and there but nothing you could take a picture for them to see," Dremann said, as he surveyed the rubble and mud left in the company yard after the wooden tank exploded under thousands of pounds of water pressure.

"But at least we've got a picture now. A picture is supposed to be worth a 1,000 words, but is it worth a new tank?"

He estimated that replacing the tank could cost up to \$85,000.

The water company, established in 1924, has recently been criticized by customers and stockholders who alleged mismanagement, financial problems and an unplanned-for, pre-quake \$1 million repair bill.

Dremann said the tank was built in 1955.

Wilfred Loudd, 23, a water company employee, said he had been working on the tank for days, including Wednesday, and had just left to buy some parts when it collapsed.

Although no one was hurt, fire department officials were on the scene along with Pacific Gas & Electric officials, checking for downed power lines and ensuring that water was under pressure in fire hydrants.

A small mole was reported to have suffered major damage to his underground home in the company yard.

Firefighters moved him to higher ground, where they said he appeared very unhappy about both the flood and his forced relocation.

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