Sonoita Residents Rally Against Dollar General

by Robert Dorney

A donkey draped with the slogan, “I Only Shop at Mom & Pops” was at the Sonoita crossroads on Saturday morning, Nov. 19, along with nearly a hundred other demonstrators on foot and on horseback. They chanted, “No Dollar General!” and “Buy Local!” as they marched outside the chain link fence surrounding the construction site of the chain store’s proposed 9,100 square foot building on the northeast corner of the intersection.

Protests and a petition drive had begun in earnest on a windy election day, Nov. 8. The demolition of the old Long Realty building blew clouds of dust and shreds of pink insulation to the west and north, a cold slap in the face to petitioners at a table located outside the fire station. “It’s really horrifying isn’t it,” said Judy Schofield, looking at the corner location as she began collecting signatures at 10 a.m. A voter walking into the polling station at the firehouse, Scott McDaniel, had already signed a petition at one of the local stores, but wondered, “Is that really going to work since they tore that building down?”

Over at the Elgin Community Club, Ann Buhl began her stint of collecting petition signatures outside the polling station at 10 a.m. Buhl was at the first meeting of angry residents on Nov. 5, after construction equipment appeared on the site. She described the organizing meeting as passionate. “I think it is fabulously we have a very strong community trying to keep our town (Sonoita-Elgin) quaint.”

On Thursday afternoon, Nov. 10, members of the Dollar Store opposition gathered at The Steak Out Restaurant. They approved a letter to the CEO of Dollar General written by James G. Small, to be attached to petitions with more than 700 signatures (the number of signers exceeded one thousand later in the month). The letter essentially said that the community would not patronize the store. “It will not be commercially viable. It will fail.” Small had spoken out earlier about the store’s proposed location being on State Route 83, a designated scenic highway. “This would be like putting a chain store on the Blue Ridge Parkway,” he said at the first meeting. “It will outrage many people.”

Jesse Drake, Santa Cruz County’s director of community development, attended the Nov. 10 meeting and said Dollar General has agreed to reduced signage and all signage lights will be turned off after closing at 10 p.m. Drake also encouraged the local residents to create a committee to review future building plans. She said it was possible for an unincorporated area to create design guidelines for commercial areas. While the present construction may be grandfathered in, Drake said it is possible for the community to prohibit other national chain stores if it has proper regulations in place.

The largest community meeting took place Nov. 16 in Pioneer Hall at the Santa Cruz Coun-

**AMI Withdraws Request to Drill On Forest Service Land**

PRT Staff

According to the US Forest Service (USFS) website, Arizona Mining Inc. has withdrawn their request to expand exploratory drilling onto Forest Service land. That request was the subject of public comments sent in to the USFS by many local residents a few months ago. The PRT learned of this development just before going to press, and we expect to know more about the reason for AMI’s withdrawal, and to report on it, in our next issue.

A gathering of concerned citizens meet at the Steak Out on Nov. 5.

Photo by Teagan Kaley

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