

**ATTACHMENT F**  
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## Building a school is hard sell

### Owner says offer to buy Rancho Murieta property is too low.

**By Elizabeth Hume -- Bee Staff Writer**

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Something is missing in Rancho Murieta.

The community of 6,000 in eastern Sacramento County has a grocery store, a pizza parlor and a coffee shop. Security guards man the gates, and pricey homes overlook two golf courses.

But there is no school. Residents send their children to Cosumnes River Elementary, an overcrowded, aging school that nestles up against Jackson Highway three miles away.

Rancho Murietans want it replaced.

"People have been fighting to get this school going for 10 years," said parent Bonnie Shewchuk, standing in front of Cosumnes River. "But they just give up on it because they know their kids won't benefit from a new school by the time it gets built."

The Elk Grove Unified School District wants to build a school on 15 acres to the west of the gates of Rancho Murieta along Stone House Road. But in trying to end one controversy, the district has stirred up another.

The property owner, Paul Frank, has rejected a \$650,000 bid to buy the land, calling it too low. The district is preparing to make him another offer, but is threatening to take the land through eminent domain if the parties can't come to terms.

Frank and Brian Myers, a member of the Elk Grove Unified school board, have used a community-based Web site to snipe at each other over the issue. Myers claims Frank is trying to raise the bidding price by stirring up emotions "with his spin."

Frank says the dispute has become so personal he may never agree to a sale. The two have never met.

Meanwhile, any attempt at construction could come to a grinding halt if the Rancho Murieta Community Services District is prohibited from offering new sewer services because of problems with its water treatment plant. The Central Valley's Regional Water Quality Board is scheduled to take up the issue in January.

Kids in eastern Sacramento County have been attending Cosumnes River since 1948. Everything is quiet until about 7:40 a.m., when buses and cars pour in.

"They all pull in within a few minutes of each other," said Principal Michael Anderson. "There's 20 minutes of intense traffic congestion and then it's beautiful again."

The school's boundaries extend 85 square miles, but more than 80 percent of the students come from Rancho Murieta.

Ten years ago, Elk Grove schools planning chief Constantine Baranoff met with Cosumnes River parents. He promised that when the school reached 450 students, the district would open a new facility. Enrollment is now 515. Every square foot of available space is filled with portable classrooms.

Land adjacent to Rancho Murieta, called the Escuela site, was to be home to that new school. But plans were dropped in late 2003 when a handful of Rancho Murieta residents said they would sue Elk Grove Unified to block the project.

"The majority of the people who live here are adamant about not wanting change," said Michael Schieberl, former president of the Rancho Murieta Association. "The people on the north who are affluent golfers, for the most part, they're not really that interested in a school and they aren't interested in children."

The residents argued that the proposed site was too close to the gated community. They said they were concerned about potential noise - and about non-Rancho Murieta members gaining access so close to the entrance gates.

Baranoff still has a half-inch-thick folder of letters for and against the Escuela site. He and Myers said they didn't want to fight with the residents. At the time, the district was in a battle over a high school-middle school site in east Elk Grove that ended up costing hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees.

"There was a considerable outpouring of disapproval for doing a school here. The point that I could not guarantee was that this site could be exclusively for Rancho Murieta children," Baranoff said. "They didn't want the other children trespassing on the property."

At the school board's request, Baranoff pulled away from the Escuela site. The property owner, Brian Vail, donated the land to the Washington Monthly magazine, a nonprofit entity headed by developer Angelo K. Tsakopoulos' son-in-law, Markos Kounalakis.

Plans now are under environmental review to build 60 residences on the Escuela property, according to Sacramento County officials.

Tsakopoulos spokesman Steven Capps said the magazine would not be involved in development at the site, but would sell the property. He said the land is appraised at \$4.48 million and is available for the school district to purchase. Myers said Elk Grove Unified isn't interested.

As the school district was sparring with Rancho Murieta residents over the Escuela site, Paul and Cindy Frank purchased 220 acres of land across from it at the corner of Stone House Road and Jackson Highway.

That was two years ago. Today, on the northern end of the property, an enormous shell of a

house has risen. There, the Franks hope to raise their son and daughter.

When Baranoff approached Frank, the landowner said he didn't want to sell. But he said he also didn't want to upset his neighbors by blocking a school. For the community's sake, Frank said, he allowed school district representatives onto the property to evaluate the land.

The offer to buy it came April 11. Frank rejected it. Soon Internet sniping began between Frank and board member Myers.

"The children on that school site deserve a modernized school," Myers said.

Frank contends his land is worth \$1.4 million, not the \$650,000 the district wants to pay. More important, he said, the district would have to overcome too many obstacles to build a school, including running water and sewer lines on the property, improving the nearby roads and figuring out a way to get students safely across Stone House Road from the gated community.

Jan Mendoza, spokeswoman for the state Department of Transportation, said her agency would require improvements to the road and sidewalks. Sacramento County officials say those changes would be the school's responsibility.

The sewer issue may pose a bigger problem. Rancho Murieta's water treatment plant isn't big enough to handle additional construction. District officials have a second appraisal on Frank's property ready - but they won't meet with him until they understand better how the plant's capacity affects their plans.

Sitting in his pickup near where his home is being built, Frank looks out across the seamless expanse of his 220 acres. He said he's worried about losing the good will of his neighbors as the controversy drags on.

"It's been unbearable," he said.

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