PORT COSTA CONSERVATION SOCIETY

September 2026 Newsletter

Chairman's Say

By Janet Wood

Summer is winding down and it has been a busy one here at the school. The Wild Ones Adventure Club's residency at the school was both successful and delightful. The sounds and sight of little ones ages 3-8 enjoying the school yard brought a smile to everyone's face. We are hoping they come back next year.

We also had an acting and musical theater drama camp for high school students using the school for a week ending in a great well-attended performance (see article and photos). Again, students, in a school – what a concept!

We celebrated 4th of July with a pot luck picnic where kids, adults, and dogs gathered to enjoy good food and good company. It should be noted that Port Costa has a long-established reputation for great food at pot lucks. This was no exception. Of course, the town parade topped off the day! (see article and photos)

Construction of our new website continues. Advising on appearance and layout, and doing the behind-the-scenes technical stuff are formidable tasks being tackled by volunteer Matthew Kane, with content from board members Michael and Suzanne. Look for the launch of the new site by the end of September.

Also, under construction – a spruce-up of the play area at the school. Thanks to a grant from Crockett Community Foundation, we are: paving the dirt area around the front steps for safety and ease of access, raising 3 benches along the fence (for ease of sitting and getting up!), putting in new wooden borders around the sand play area (replacing rotted wood), weeding and tilling the sand play area, and adding new sand. We were able to work out a schedule which allows for the schoolyard to be open for public use Friday thru Sunday, and closed for construction the rest of the week. This work is being done by Grateful Gardens and Outdoor Construction, with bricks donated by the Crockett Improvement Association.

We are waiting to hear if our request for a Phillips66/CBA grant for school kitchen remodel has been approved. Fingers crossed! A new kitchen would be such a big plus for the school and community. Think cooking classes … Yum!

Sadly, in July founding member of the Port Costa Conservation Society Theresa Jurik passed away (see article in this issue). A 73-year resident of Port Costa, she will be greatly missed. A warm family and friends gathering at the school for remembrance was well attended and complete with wonderful photos of her life with a soundtrack of her favorite music. Her decades of dedication to Port Costa and its community will leave a lasting legacy.

Our goal is to include a historical article in each newsletter. In this issue we have an article about the Mercantile Building written by life-long resident Joe Surges. Give it a read!

Drama on the School Stage

By Suzanne Statler

Early in August, the theater company Stand Your Ground Productions, took residency at the Port Costa School for their week-long Acting and Musical Theatre Drama Camp 2026 for high school students.

The Director, Jennifer Oertel, said "We loved having use of the whole upstairs; the separate rooms allowed for different pairs to rehearse their scenes and duets. And the stage was perfect for our Friday night showcase production, for an audience of about 70 friends, families, and town neighbors."

Stand Your Ground Productions serves students in 6th-12th grades. For more information, visit them at the following website: sygproductions.com or contact Jen at jen.oertel@sygproductions.com.

Port Costa Celebrates the Fourth in Grand Style

By Sheller Clark

Port Costa celebrated the Fourth of July in the only way Port Costa knows how: with good food, great neighbors, music and plenty of hometown spirit.

The festivities began with a potluck barbecue at the school with the celebration soon spilling into the streets for our occasionally annual Fourth of July Parade, a once in a while tradition for more than 15 years.

Aemon led the parade twirling a gravity-defying baton, accompanied by Stephen, who generously provided all the instruments for their merry band of revelers.

John's yellow vintage pickup followed, festooned with flags and filled with local kids waving from the truck bed. Motorcycles, scooters, bicycles, roller skates and Tom's Morris Minor joined the procession. There were imaginative costumes, a festive riding mower, tons of balloons bobbing overhead and even Cecil the Goat pulling a little red cart.

Every parade deserves a good audience, and the Greene household rose magnificently to the occasion. Their party was encouraging as they cheered each passing participant with enthusiasm.

The procession returned to the school, where the day concluded with an awards ceremony on the steps. Honors were bestowed, applause rang out and another perfectly Port Costa Fourth of July came to a close: homemade, whimsical and full of character.

Mourning the loss of Theresa Jurik (1928 - 2026)

By Suzanne Statler

Theresa Jurik passed away on July 5th at the age of 97. We pause to honor her as a significant member of the Port Costa Community, a woman deeply committed to her family and church, a founding member of the Port Costa Conservation Society and a keeper of Port Costa history.

Theresa and Frank Jurik moved to Port Costa from Texas in 1953. Frank worked as a telegrapher for the Southern Pacific Railroad while Theresa raised their 5 children. She was an accomplished seamstress, a devoted member of St. Patrick's Catholic Church, a singer (in Czech and English) and loved a good laugh. After her children were school age, she became Port Costa's Postmaster for 20 years. One can only imagine the inside scoop she knew about everyone in town as their mail passed through her office. Fortunately, she was also a discreet woman!

Theresa was actively involved in the social fabric of Port Costa. If there was a Potluck at the Church or School, Theresa was there with a dish to share. She created beautiful quilts for raffles and baby shower gifts. Even in these past years when she was mostly homebound, she would attend town events and support fundraisers.

As a town historian, Theresa collected and preserved newspaper articles, announcements, obituaries and important letters dating back to the 1960s. She worked with friends to organize them chronologically into 12 big binders. In 2019, she donated the collection to the Port Costa Museum where each page was archived and now available to explore.

Theresa is lovingly survived by her sister, five children, fifteen grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. Three generations of her descendants still call Port Costa home, ensuring that Theresa's memory, spirit, and contributions to the community will live on for generations to come.

Port Costa's Mercantile: A Quiet Landmark That Fed a Town Through Its Wildest Changes

By Joseph Surges

In a town once defined by grain dust, railroad ferries, and a waterfront that rarely slept, one building offered something far more enduring than the chaos around it: groceries, conversation, and continuity. The Port Costa Mercantile Building, standing today as one of the last survivors of the town's industrial past, owes its legacy not to architecture but to the people who kept its doors open through decades of change.

From the 1940s through the early 1970s, the Mercantile proprietors were the unofficial caretakers of Port Costa. Their names rarely appear in official histories, yet residents remember them as the people who kept the town fed, connected, and grounded while the world around them shifted.

A Post-War Anchor | The Mercantile modern story begins with Vern and Bee Reynolds, who ran the store during the 1940s as Port Costa transitioned from a bustling grain port to a quieter residential community. With ration books still in use at the time and supply chains recovering from World War II, Reynolds became a stabilizing force.

"He knew what every household needed before they asked," one longtime resident recalled. The Reynolds family, related to the Robinsons who lived in town for generations, helped maintain a sense of normalcy as Port Costa's industrial identity faded.

A Name Remembered, A Story Fading | After the Reynolds era came Josephina Zespanfi, a proprietor whose name is remembered more clearly than her timeline. Oral histories place her somewhere between the late 1940s and early 1950. What remains is the memory of a woman who ran the store with quiet competence as the town continued to shrink. She was followed in the 1950s by Ernie Haden, another steady presence in a community, where the population — and the number of open businesses — was dwindling.

The Parsons and the Last Years of a Town Grocery | By the early 1960s, Ralph and Zelma Parsons were running the Mercantile. Port Costa's school had closed, the grain warehouses were nearly gone, and the once-rowdy waterfront had grown still. Yet the Mercantile remained a lifeline.

The Parsons sold staples, produce, canned goods, and whatever else residents needed. Their decision to sell both the store and their home together underscored how deeply intertwined the business was with daily life.

A Grocer Who Became a Story keeper | In 1966, Jim Thomas took over the Mercantile — and became its final grocer. Under Thomas, the store evolved into a community gathering place. Older men would sit inside swapping stories of Port Costa's wilder days: bordellos, grain ships, fistfights, and characters that have been long gone.

Thomas became the accidental archivist of these tales simply by listening. One of those storytellers, known only as Mac (McCarthy), accompanied Thomas on weekly produce runs to Richmond. Mac wasn't interested in the produce; he wanted the drive, the scenery, and the ritual of stopping for lunch. Their trips became part of Port Costa's unofficial oral history.

But when owners Bill Rich and Jim McGuire raised the rent, the business could no longer survive. Thomas closed the store in 1972, ending the town's last grocery store and one of its final communal spaces.

An Era Ends | After Thomas, the Mercantile became an antique shop. Commercial life in the Mercantile ended. In the early 2000s, the building found new life as The Village Haberdashery, which operated until closing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Building Full of People | Today, the Port Costa Mercantile stands as one of the few remaining structures from the town's waterfront heyday. But its story is not simply architectural — it is human. It is the story of grocers who kept a shrinking town fed. Of families who relied on them. Of old men telling stories in a store that doubled as a community living room. Of a building that survived because people cared enough to keep it alive.
In a town famous for its wild years, the Mercantile owners were the quiet heroes — the ones who stayed.

Editor's Note: *The saga continues! New resident Steven Emerson has created a space in the Mercantile called The Portal, open on odd Wednesdays for community gathering and creativity.*

Upcoming Events

- **Bingo Tuesday September 8:** in the School auditorium (beneficiary John Swett Education Foundation), doors open at 5:30 pm.
- **2nd Sunday at the School Sundays September 13, October 11, November 8 and December 13:** Coffee and Conversation 10 am - 2 pm in the community room.
- **PCCS Board meetings Mondays September 21, October 19, November 16:** at 7 pm in the School community room, open to the public.
- **Halloween event Sunday, October 11:** 10 am - 2 pm in the School building, sponsored by the Community Garden. Pumpkin carving fun, with costumes encouraged. A combined event with 2nd Sunday Coffee & Conversation.
- **Bingo Tuesday, October 13:** in the School auditorium (beneficiary John Swett Band Boosters), doors open at 5:30 pm.
- **Port Costa Museum Open House Wednesdays October 14, November 11, December 9:** 12 - 3 pm
- **Town Christmas party Wednesday, December 2:** with lighting of the flagpole Christmas tree.
- **Weekly:**
    - **Mondays:** Ballet Class 10:30 am - 12 pm
    - **Mondays:** Yoga Class 5:00 - 6:00 pm
    - **Wednesdays:** Stretch and Strength Training Class 7:30 – 8:30 am ($15 per class)

PCCS Board of Directors
Chairperson: Janet Wood • Vice Chairperson: Suzanne Statler • Secretary: Michael Domagalski
Treasurer: Anne Mann • Financial Secretary: Sheller Clark

Port Costa Conservation Society
PO Box 36
Port Costa, CA 94569