\textbf{In This Edition:}

- County employees find their inner Spartan
- Natividad relaunches Matter of Balance workshops

\textbf{County Notes}

- Meet Barbara Siebeneick, a local author who weaves local landmarks into her mysteries. A book talk and signing is set for January 26th at 2 p.m. at the Seaside Library. Details on the Libraries' Facebook page.

\textbf{The Spartans Among Us}

Some County employees are finding their ‘inner Spartan’ and have joined this growing national and international athletic participation experience of the same name.

Spartan races have become quite a phenomenon, with more than 200 events a year in 42 countries. Monterey County’s Toro Park has played host to several of these grueling challenges.

\textit{(L-r) Craig Spencer, Josh Stratton, Kelly Donlon and Bora Akkaya raced as a team at a Spartan race.}
What draws people to the Spartan experience? Find out from six county employees who took part in one recent challenge, an intense obstacle course.

The setting: AT&T Park. The course: 3.7 miles with 20 different obstacles such as climbing walls up to 8 feet tall, climbing rope, monkey bars and crawling up stairs under wires.

**The County Team**

“We ran all over the stadium including through the dugout and player’s locker room. There were a lot of stairs to climb,” says RMA-Supervising Planner Craig Spencer. “The atmosphere at the races are fun and energetic. It is a great excuse to compete, get exercise and visit with friends and co-workers.”

Spencer’s team includes Kelly Donlon, Deputy County Counsel; Bora Akkaya, RMA-Permit Technician and Josh Stratton, Chief of Staff for Supervisor John Phillips.

“Josh got us all involved in the Spartan races, he had done them previously and suggested we do one together,” says Donlon. “We did San Francisco last year, Toro Park this past June and then San Francisco again this year. The competition aspect of the race is fun; to try to finish with a good time.”

Donlon says the race schedule is a real incentive to stay in shape. The four Spartan comrades occasionally trained together at Toro Park and on their own.

Bora Akkaya took advantage of his office location at Schilling Place.

“I could not join those team trainings at Toro Park but I used the gym here at Schilling Place,” says Akkaya, who touts the benefits of training. “You’ll become stronger mentally and physically, more disciplined and focused.”

Stratton, the team’s instigator, did his first Spartan race in 2015 and has now done a total of nine including what’s called a ‘trifecta,’ one of each of the three distances the schedule offers within a year. He says he’ll keep encouraging his team to compete because they push each other well.

“Exercise and good health effects every aspect of life,” says Stratton. “I’ve found that most all Spartan racers at all levels of fitness are supportive of others.”

**Her Own Team**

You’d think Melissa Pouch, the County’s Wellness Program Coordinator, would get enough of this
type of thing at work, but she ‘walks the walk’ when it comes to healthy activities.

“I like to participate in at least one big fitness-type event each year to challenge myself,” says Pouch. “In the past I’ve done ‘Tough Mudder,’ a few half marathons and a two-day breast cancer walk. I decided to try the Spartan series this year.”

Pouch put together her own team, giving them a name that is the antitheses of the grueling, sweat-producing events they signed up for: The Sparkle Squad.

“We prepared by doing HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training) workouts, lots of burpees (squat thrusts) and running - especially stairs!

Pouch says having a race scheduled is a good incentive to maintain her exercise routine and to set new fitness goals. She may be catching the ‘Spartan fever,’ she is considering doing the San Jose Spartan race in March or a Toro Park event.

Competing Solo

Maegan Ruiz-Ignacio, Administrative Assistant in the County Administrative Office, took the leap from dance fitness instructor in her off hours to Spartan athlete.

“I needed more strength training and to increase cardio into my fitness regime. My son Mason has completed five Spartan races and encouraged me to do one,” she says. “So at the age of 53, I signed up to do my first Spartan Sprint. I dedicated my race in loving memory of my Dad; I wore a shirt with his picture knowing he was with me each of the more than 10,000 steps.”

It’s not like Ruiz-Ignacio is any couch potato; she has run the Wildflower Triathlon, marathons like the Big Sur Marathon Relay and Outrigger Canoe racing was her extreme sport for five years.

To prepare for the event, she studied race course videos and talked with other competitors. Her training: distance
running, stair climber, running up and down bleachers, pullups, core training, lots of squats and side lunges. Even with all that, you can’t prepare for everything,

“It rained during my race which added a thrilling element of danger and a childlike excitement to run in the rain!”

Like so many others who gave these challenges a try, she will be going back for more.

“I’m hooked on the thrill and challenge of the Spartan Race and will continue to train and compete. AROO!!!!”

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**Natividad Continues its Matter of Balance Workshops**

If you or a family member have increasing concerns about falls, Natividad’s workshop series on the topic is back.

The next round of ‘A Matter of Balance’ classes begin next month at Natividad.

These workshops are aimed at older adults who are experiencing concerns about falling and restrict their activities. The workshop course emphasizes practical strategies to manage falls and runs over eight weeks.

Classes are free of charge and are offered every Tuesday from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. at Natividad. Refreshments are provided.

While the workshops are free, registration required. Call Lorraine Artinger, RN, Trauma Prevention and Outreach Nurse at 772-7357.