

## The Signal

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### Breathing Life Back into Historic Town

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On clear days, residents of the Santa Clarita Valley power-walk or sometimes jog along the gravel path past Pico Canyon Road into the historic oil town of Mentryville.

The town, which was founded after Alex Mentry struck black gold in 1876, had its own schoolhouse, a barn and residences for oil workers and their families.

In addition to smaller homes, Mentry and his family lived in a mansion they built, commonly referred to as the "big house."

Although many of the smaller homes are gone from Mentryville, the big house, barn and schoolhouse still remain alongside structures built by residents of Mentryville who lived there past the time it was an oil town.

Despite the families that have come and gone, the town has been ravaged by Mother Nature.

Recent fires, floods and even the 1994 Northridge earthquake took their toll on the structures in Mentryville.

"When the earthquake hit, the (big) house literally went up in the air and set itself a few feet (away from the original location)," said Rorie Skei, chief deputy director of the Santa Monica Mountain Conservancy.

Foundations were put under the barn and the big house, to help stabilize them. For the big house, it was enough to save it during future problems.

"Putting a foundation in - that and shoring it out - saved it from tumbling into the creek during the last big flood," Skei said.

Ranger Jodi Thomas, who oversees work on Mentryville, said the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy is in the middle of repairs from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, with the upper canyon completed, and with work planned around the parking area and around the creek.

Despite the repairs to other parts of the area, "The idea is to eventually restore (Mentryville)," she said.

Other plans include putting in a proper ranger's residence for the caretaker who lives in Mentryville, and stabilizing and repairing additional structures.

Thomas said there are no plans to build any other additional structures other than the ranger's residence.

However, there is one issue that the current restoration plans cannot tackle when it comes to

Mentryville.

The road into Mentryville is gravel, and efforts to pave the road for automobiles by the conservancy are futile, as there is a private owner for the road.

"The current owner doesn't want it open to the public," Thomas said of the one-lane road. "It's not safe."

However, she said that sometimes the road is opened for school buses to come in for field trips.

Skei said she hopes Mentryville will not only become a historical site, but also a site for public events.

Carol Lagasse, who lived with her husband and children in the big house from June 1967 up until the Northridge earthquake of 1994, put on parties and barbecues in the town and got people from Newhall involved.

"We just had a wonderful time," she said.

Skei said she wanted the big house restored both inside and out to be able to have events such as community meetings and weddings there.

Former residents, park employees and residents of the Santa Clarita Valley are looking forward to the day that Mentryville will be restored to its former glory.

"We hope someday that Mentryville will come alive again," Lagasse said.

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