

Calistoga Tribune

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PHOTO BY KIM BELTRAN

Resident Annette Betancourt stands next to the root ball of a massive conifer pine that fell over in the front yard of her Foothill Boulevard home Jan. 10 during the height of a pacific storm that, in addition to dumping several inches of rain, brought gusts of wind in excess of 60 mph.

Big trees succumb to wind, wet ground

■ Fire, city and arborist crews have been kept busy cleaning up fall-out of winter storms

By Kim Beltran

Tribune Editor

Calistoga resident Annette Betancourt was inside her Foothill Boulevard home the night of Jan. 10 when the massive conifer pine tree in her front yard fell over, lifting a 12-foot wide section of its rootball out of the ground and crashing down across a wooden fence that separates the property from the Calistoga Towing company lot next door.

If the tree, estimated to be 60 to 80 feet tall and 100 years old or more by the property owner,

had fallen any other direction, it would have either taken down a group of power lines to the left or done serious damage to the home on the right.

The giant tree was one of several very large trees that came down in Calistoga last week after a series of powerful winter storms dumped nearly 12 inches of rain on the area in a matter of days, wrapping up the night of Jan. 10 with wind gusts reported to be in excess of 50 to 60 miles per hour.

A huge elm tree on the Cottage Grove Inn property at 1711 Lincoln Avenue fell across the

roadway. Two more massive trees fell in the Rancho de Calistoga mobilehome park during the storm, one damaging a home and one blocking the road way into the park, according to Dylan Feik, Calistoga City manager.

Falling trees during severe California storms aren't a new phenomenon but it seems that an overabundance of the mighty giants -- all apparently healthy -- came down during this particular storm, one of the strongest to hit the area in many years.

Luckily, no one has been hurt in any of the incidents, although

power to the city was knocked out on Jan. 10 when a tree fell across lines on Highway 29.

According to Feik, as well as some local arborists and fire crews, five years of drought have stressed even healthy trees, making them susceptible to the elements.

In the case of the conifer at Betancourt's residence, the tree's roots were fairly shallow and spread out as opposed to being anchored deep within the earth.

The height and weight of the tree also made it vulnerable to

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City using eminent domain for bridge needs

By Kim Beltran

Tribune Editor

Over landowner objections – and under threat of court action – the City Council on Tuesday took steps it needs for legal authority to temporarily encroach on two private properties while it replaces the Berry Street bridge next summer.

The council also authorized the purchase of a \$120,000 steel footbridge that will allow pedestrian access while the new, permanent street bridge is being

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District keeping tabs on state budget talks

■ Governor urges schools to use caution in spending plans

By Kim Beltran

Tribune Editor

Although Calistoga Joint Unified School District doesn't rely on state funding for the bulk of its operating budget, trustees on Tuesday night got a brief report on Gov. Jerry Brown's 2017-18 K-12 education spending plan.

As he has the past couple of years, Brown and his Department of Finance are urging school finance officers to use conservative estimates when it comes to planning their budgets for the coming year.

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Spa looking at system to reuse geothermal water

■ Project will reduce harmful agents going into treatment plant

By Kim Beltran

Tribune Editor

The owners of Calistoga's Golden Haven Hot Springs Spa and Resort want to do their part to reuse precious resources and keep harmful chemical elements such as boron and antimony out

of the city's water supply.

They are pursuing a state grant that would pay for up to half the cost of a geothermal heat exchanger and reinjection well – an expensive system that returns geothermal water to the underground aquifer from where it came rather than discharging it into the city's sewer system.

On Tuesday night, the City Council was more than happy to approve a request from spa manager Barry Stern for a formal

resolution in support of the project.

Although the item was on the consent calendar and not discussed publicly by the council, city manager Dylan Feik made a point earlier in the evening to praise Stern and spa owner Bruce Kendall for their decision to help protect the local environment.

"This is being done through their own volition," Feik said.

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TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

Golden Haven Hot Springs on Lake Street is pursuing a state grant.