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Photo Zoë Strickland

SNAKE WHISPERER — Roy Blodgett will be leading the Hearth Folk School's series on snakes. Blodgett grew up around the reptiles and is hoping to help promote a better understanding of snakes.

Learning to love snakes

Four-part class aims to dispel fears and educate

By Zoë Strickland Staff Writer zoe@sonomawest.com

As the weather warms up, snakes will slowly but surely begin to come out of hiding. When this happens, some people may have the gut reaction to panic or run.

Each class, led by Roy Blodgett, will take place in a different location around the county and will address a different aspect of snake history and culture.

Each location was chosen to show a different type of environment that the creatures exist in.

"I feel that Sonoma County is this

incredible place that offers multiple different ecological communities," Blodgett said of his decision to have the class sessions jump around to different locations.

The classes will tackle topics primarily related to both a snake's role in the environment as well as the species' cultural presence, history and impact.

While the classes will likely build on each other in some respects, going to every session isn't mandatory. Blodgett said that his intention is to have each respective session stand alone, but he believes that attending the entire arc of classes will create a "more comprehensive and holistic experience."

By participating in different discussions and studies of snakes, he hopes people will begin to understand snakes and view them in a different light.

"I've partnered with a lot of people in overcoming their fear of snakes and helping them to have a more empowered relationship with

them that is not so reactive," Blodgett said. "I really feel that though there are definitely aspects of the fear of snakes that are innate, there are also other aspects of a fear of snakes that are really damaging."

Blodgett continued, saying that though in some cases a fear of snakes is justified, he also believes that there's a cultural way to look at those who may fear the reptiles, especially when it comes to people in the western world — and by trying to conquer their fear of snakes, people can apply their experience elsewhere.

"I think by approaching things we're afraid of with curiosity and reverence ... it's actually really empowering and there's potentially changing and softening that can occur," he said.

While Blodgett doesn't have formal education when it comes to snakes, he grew up in a household that kept them as pets and has continued to educate himself on the reptiles, as well as observe them.

"I think for long periods of my life, particularly through my formative years, I spent a lot more time with my animals and with snakes both at home and in the wild than I did with people," he said.

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Will Sebastopol ban unhosted vacation rentals?

By Laura Hagar Rush Sonoma West Editor laura@sonomawest.com

At the last city council meeting on May 21, the Sebastopol City Council waded into the national debate about online vacation rentals and their effect on local housing stock by requesting that the city staff prepare a moratorium on unhosted vacation rentals.

This request came as the council took the unusual step of overturning the planning commission's approval of a use permit to turn a small house on Johnson Street into an unhosted vacation rental. It was the first permit request for an unhosted vacation rental since the city approved its new general plan and updated the zoning in 2018.

At its March 26 meeting, the planning commission voted 5-1 to approve the permit for the Johnson Street house, but one of the planning commissioners, Linda Kelley, the lone holdout, appealed their decision to the city council.

"I am appealing this planning commission decision in order to bring this important housing issue to the city council, as our city's housing goals to maintain and retain our housing stock are a high priority," Kelley wrote in her appeal.

Introducing Kelley's appeal,

Planning Director Kari Svanstrom said, "The appeal is two fold — the conversion of a single family house to a vacation rental will affect the housing stock by removing a viable unit that could be used for low-income housing; also it's inconsistent with the housing element of the general plan, which is to preserve housing resources, including low-income and affordable units."

Much to the dismay of the owner of the house on Johnson Street, the members of the city council agreed with Kelley's appeal.

Sebastopol's rules on vacation rentals

Looking at Sebastopol's zoning regulations, it's easy to see why the planning commission approved the permit for the Johnson Street house. While the city's general plan is quite clear about protecting residential neighborhoods and preserving housing stock, the zoning regulations allow both hosted and non-hosted vacation rentals. (In a hosted rental, the homeowner lives onsite; in a non-hosted rental, the owner lives elsewhere.)

All vacation rentals require either an administrative permit, which is granted by the planning department, or a conditional use

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Photo from Zillow

WHAT KIND OF RENTAL? — This small house on Johnson Street in Sebastopol set off a debate about the place of unhosted vacation rentals in town. The Sebastopol City Council has asked city staff to prepare a moratorium on unhosted vacation rentals to be discussed at a future council meeting.

We Remember



Photo Dylan Sirdofsky

HONORING THOSE WHO GAVE ALL — Goldridge VFW Post 3919 paid tribute to their fallen comrades on Memorial Day, May 27, at the Sebastopol Memorial Lawn Cemetery.

Come to the Graton Green opening celebration, June 2

By Laura Hagar Rush Sonoma West Editor laura@sonomawest.com

For more than 10 years, residents of Graton have talked about creating a public park near downtown. Thanks to the unstinting work of the Graton Green Group, a local nonprofit, that dream is coming true.

There will be an opening celebration for Graton Green, Graton's only public park, on June 2 at 4 p.m. The event will include a community potluck, music and dancing, and speeches by local luminaries like Supervisor Lynda Hopkins and others. Elizabeth

Herron will deliver a poem written especially for the Graton Green opening.

The park is a half-acre property located just off Graton Road, between Bowen and Edison streets. Located along the West County Trail, the park features pathways through small green lawns, edged with oak and redwood trees, and a tributary to Atascadero Creek, thick with willow trees, along its southern boundary.

In the future, park boosters plan to add more seating, a community garden and a bridge across the creek (or as locals call it "the critch") leading to a strip of land they hope to acquire from the county.

Graton Green is also adjacent to Green Valley Village, a new development of 10 single-family homes, built by Orrin Thiessen.

Several residents of Graton began working on creating the park in 2007. They incorporated as the nonprofit Graton Green Group in 2010.

"We chose the name 'Graton Green' because we want to be stewards of the land and be the most conscientious as we can be to follow today's 'green,' or environmentally conscious, standards," HoLyn D'Lil, president of the Graton Green Group, said. "The name also

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