

# L'OBSERVATEUR



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# Richard sees Shell plan as threat

By LEONARD GRAY  
L'Observateur

NORCO - To listen to industry, the Shell Chemicals' "Good Neighbor Initiative" aims to enhance the town of Norco. To listen to some neighbors, Shell Chemicals has hardly been a good neighbor at all.

To Margie Richard of adjoining Washington Street, Shell's idea of being a good neighbor is to make sure she isn't a neighbor for very much longer.

Shell Chemicals announced a "Good Neighbor Initiative" in August which, according to spokesman Don Baker, is a multi-year, multi-million dollar investment program which includes projects designed to improve the Norco community.

The program includes the following:

• A three-year drive to reduce

Toxic Release Inventory emissions by 30 percent and also reduce flaring by 50 percent, from 1998.

• An assessment of community health care needs, which will go toward working with health-care providers and officials to improve health care for Norco residents.

Additionally, Shell Chemicals will work with emergency preparedness officials to raise public awareness about what Norco residents should do in case of an emergency.

• Development of a "greenbelt" system surrounding the plant, which includes designing and establishing park-like green areas. This is coupled with property purchase incentives to the remaining fence-line property owners to expedite development of the greenbelt.

• Finally, a community trust

program, linked with School-to-Career initiatives and creation of a \$1 million trust fund to help finance community projects in beautification, youth leadership training, scholarships and jobs skills training.

Margie Richard sees all this as simply the destruction of the Diamond Plantation community and the forced buyouts of neighbors and relatives linked through generations. The plant is plopped partially on land her grandfather once farmed, the same land which revenue financed her college education.

"If you're taking off my land, why can't you put it back?" she said as she looked out of her trailer residence onto Shell Chemicals' property, which lies across Washington Street from her.

She looked at property which (See RICHARD, Page 6A)



MARGIE RICHARD, resident of Washington Street in Norco and head of Concerned Citizens of Norco, says she faces this sight every morning across from her home and remains committed to the fight against the industry and its planned destruction of the Diamond community. (Staff Photo by Leonard Gray)

## Richard: *Thinks Shell buyout plan is a veiled threat*

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was once farmed by her grandfather and father, and which provided the money to send her and her sister to college.

She looked through a brochure about her protest drive, which includes family reminiscences and recalls a 1973 accident when Leroy Jones of Washington Street was killed by a gas release from Shell Chemicals.

However, Richard sees this buyout plan as nothing short of a veiled threat to "move or else."

The terms offered in an Oct. 3 letter include a fair-market purchase of homes and vacant lots, plus 30 percent over and above that, as well as a \$5,000 moving expense to enable people to pay for moving their houses or mobile homes.

The minimum to be paid for a residential lot is \$50,000, and the minimum for a vacant lot is \$25,000, according to the terms.

The buyout plan is aimed at Diamond Road, Cathy Street and, on the Motiva side of Norco, the

east side of Good Hope Street and, north of the first set to tracks, from the east side of Norco Street.

"But where can you go?" Richard said, adding there are very few places a family can afford a home for less than \$50,000.

The deadline for accepting the offer is Dec. 31, 2001, and Richard is concerned for what happens after that date.

"We're going to do it our way, whether you like it or not," Richard said she feels Shell is saying.

She has battled for several years as head of Concerned Citizens of Norco, attacking air emissions and other environmental threats posed by the plants which plopped onto the quiet, close-knit and long-established community.

Now, she sees Shell as not being content until all of Norco south of the Illinois Central Gulf tracks is inside its fence line.

"Civil government is ordained

by God," she said, "but it would be more effective if they remembered where the power comes from."

Baker said those residences still remaining will likely be enhanced in value by adjoining the greenbelt system.

"This is fair and consistent with what we've been doing for the last 25 to 30 years," he said, adding that about half of the targeted 250 lots have so far been acquired.

In the past years, Shell was content to let attrition take care of property acquisition, buying as families died out or moved away on their own.

"The decision to sell property is a personal decision, and we respect that," he said.

However, this program is to accelerate the process, Baker saying, "It's been my experience in the last 13 years that you don't have a lot of turnover in Norco. We don't want to wait another 30 years."