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St. Charles

Herald-**GUIDE**

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Shell ducks debate with Diamond community

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Staff writer

Earlier this week, Shell Chemical declined the offer to debate members of the Concerned Citizens of Norco over the company's plan to purchase properties along its east and west fence lines in Norco.

Shell's statement was in part a reaction to an ad that appeared in the St. Charles Herald-Guide last week. The ad challenged

Shell to a debate on Wednesday, Nov. 1 to discuss issues related to Shell's voluntary property purchase program.

The program is part of Shell and Motiva Enterprises LLC's "Good Neighbor Initiative," a program to

physically upgrade and work with the Norco community on issues such as health care and emergency preparedness.

Also included in the plan is a program to create a "green belt," or park-like area along the Shell and Motiva properties.

"A debate by its very nature is confrontational and negative, and has the potential to be divisive," Baker said.

Good Hope Street.

However, residents such as Gaynel Johnson and Margie Richard of the Concerned Citizens of Norco are concerned that certain streets in the Diamond

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Residents meet for one-sided commentary

DAVID PLUNKETT

Contributing writer

What would a presidential debate be like if one of the candidates didn't show up?

Citizens of the Diamond neighborhood in Norco got a pretty good idea on Wednesday night at the Masonic Lodge on Washington Street. Members of the community had invited leaders from Shell to debate and discuss the company's Good Neighbor Initiative. The program is intended to buy out many of the homes of the Diamond community, and create a greenbelt in that area.

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Debate

FROM 1A

Representatives from Shell opted not to attend the discussion, thus leaving a very one-sided debate.

Twelve members of the community were present, as well as a representative from the Louisiana Bucket Brigade, and a professor of Sociology from Tulane University. Professor J. Timmons Roberts was on hand to mediate the debate. Not dissuaded, the members of the Concerned Citizens of Norco continued with the meeting. In order to represent the feelings of Shell on its buy-out policy, those present held up and read large quotes attributed to Shell employees Allen Kirkely, Wayne Pierce, and David Brignac. The gist of these quotes was that Shell was attempting to make a fair offer to the people of Diamond, and felt that health concerns were not a primary issue in the community.

The twelve citizens then presented their own tales, filled with stories of medical dilemmas (specifically with children and asthma), and the difficulty of moving to an acceptable location on the money Shell is offering for their homes. Ms. Shonda R. Lee, a registered realtor and Diamond

resident, was skeptical of Shell's assertion that comparable homes could be bought for the \$50,000 being offered. "I've been doing research, and it's impossible to find a home without repairs for that money. Vacant lots cost \$50,000."

Community members felt that the company was ignoring the history behind the community, a history which can not have a price tag. "I've been here since 1945," said Ms. Rosemary Brown, "we were here first, and they came in, they invaded us." Ms. Margie Richard, president of the Concerned Citizens of Norco added "we want health and historical value added to the package. So far they are not negotiating, just dictating. All the reasoning was done on their side."

Ms. Richard also pointed out that the debate was not an attempt to provoke Shell, or be a forum for "mud-slinging or fighting." She asserted that the citizens just wanted clarity. Ms. Richard says that while Shell is openly looking for a dialogue about this issue and others, they refuse to come to the community, and demand that the community meets on the companies' terms. Members of the Concerned Citizens complained that at the Community/Industry panel sponsored by the

Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), discussion and questions from the public is usually limited to the very end, with only several minutes to spare. Ann Rolfes, director of the Louisiana Bucket Brigade was surprised that the Shell representatives choose not to attend. "I am surprised because they keep saying the community doesn't understand our proposition, and here they had the chance to explain. They only go to the meetings that they control."

Professor Roberts said he found the meeting to be productive, despite the lack of a two-way dialogue. "I learned about what it is like to live here, across from the chemical plant."

The difficulty here is finding a common ground where community and industry can judge how much room there is to compromise. Shell believes they have already found it, by establishing the Good Neighbor Initiative, and actively participating in the Community/Industry Panel, and the St. Charles Parish Community Advisory Panel (CAP). Diamond residents feel that these media are controlled by Shell, and want to move the debate to areas outside the parameters of the panels.