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FEATURED

Big Wave breaking ground in Half Moon Bay

'Intentional community' for people living with disabilities begins development

By Sierra Lopez Daily Journal staff

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Following two decades of planning and preparation, the Big Wave Project intended to house adults with developmental disabilities will finally break ground Saturday, rallying an excited crowd of families, county supervisors and community members.

“It was a difficult journey, a lot of stress, a lot of trials. That has to happen but once this is built we’ll go back to being parents. It’s a sweet victory,” said Jeff Peck, the CEO of Big Wave who purchased the property where the development will go in 1999.

With the capacity to house up to 63 residents, the Half Moon Bay-based development just north of Pillar Point Harbor will be one of the first California-based “intentional communities,” consisting of disability friendly places to work,

Sarah Carlson, also a future resident of the community, said she has mixed feelings about the move, both excited for the new journey but also nervousness around living without her parents. As a 25-year-old woman with developmental disabilities due to a life-saving removal of a brain tumor at the age of 9, Carlson's main concern centers on finding the perfect match for a roommate.

"There's a lot of people that want to be my roommate but I want a roommate who's equally as able. I don't want to have to take care of my roommate because I'm pretty high functioning. I want a friend," said Carlson who added she'd like to share a space with someone who enjoys art and Disney movies.

Her mother, Jeanne Carlson, also described her daughter as high functioning, noting she often took on leadership roles when around peers with disabilities. As she turns 66-years-old and her husband continues into his 70s, Carlson said they have become acutely aware of the level of support their daughter would need within a living situation.

"It's an incredible weight off our shoulders, unfortunately we're not living forever," said Jeanne Carlson. "It's exciting and I'm really grateful it's finally happening. It's going to be such a wonderful community for our daughter to live and thrive."

The groundbreaking event will be held at 335 Airport St. the morning of Saturday, Aug. 15, and will welcome several speakers including Peck, supervisors Don Horsley, David Pine and David Canepa, and Steve Bacich, the chief technology officer and founding partner of the medical technology company Med1 Ventures.

"Tomorrow is to celebrate a 20 year journey for myself and for the families who've been involved, many for the 20 years. It's to thank everybody who has helped with Big Wave," said Peck. "I'm just tickled pink that the families can get together and have a celebration."

Keeping in line with the county health order, the event is limited to 50 guests and social distancing will be enforced.

Visit www.bigwaveproject.org for more information on the Big Wave Project.

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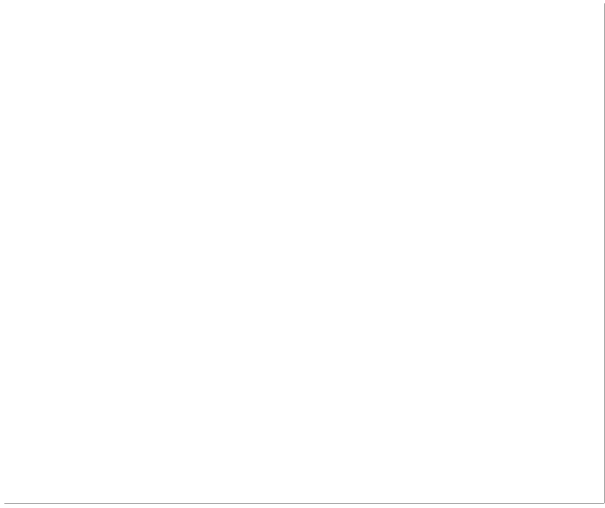
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More Information

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places to socialize and housing for independent living. While most of the future units have been rapidly claimed, some spots are still available, said Sarah Sherwood, the information officer for Big Wave.



Matt Hearn, a 36-year-old future resident of the community who lives with Autism, said in a statement that Big Wave and other activities including Special Olympics basketball and hiking have helped him, as an introverted person, overcome his struggles.

“Big Wave community fosters an environment conducive for the concept of self-actualization for myself or others. Big Wave from my experiences to this juncture provides a framework with the community that is both engaging and supportive,” said Hearn in the statement.

As parents of children with disabilities, Peck and his three co-founders always intended to develop a space for adults with similar developmental disabilities, such as Autism, Asperger’s, Cerebral Palsy and Down Syndrome among other disabilities. While Peck said he’s been in warrior mode for the past 20 years, trying to mobilize the project from concept to reality, he added spirits are up for him and the other families involved.

“They’re elated but they totally expected and believed it would happen. We’re just happy we can really start planning on how we’re going to go about operating and not if we’re going to build it. It’s a nice change of direction,” said Peck.