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Laguna Honda Hospital Gets Its Goat – 600 Of Them

San Francisco, CA -- The goats returned to Laguna Honda this week. A popular annual tradition on the 62-acre hospital campus, 600 South African Boer goats began grazing September 12 on the steep hillsides adjacent to the hospital.

“We love having them here,” said hospital Administrator John Kanaley. “Our neighbors always come over to check them out, and they’re fun to watch. For Laguna Honda, they’re like the buffalo in Golden Gate Park. They have become a signature of our campus.”

This is the third year that the goats have helped the city to clear undergrowth on the heavily wooded hospital site west of Twin Peaks. The animals will graze across 22 acres of brush and vines, providing an ecologically sustainable service to clear out heavy undergrowth and help reduce the fire risk that comes with drier weather.

“It’s been a dry year, even though it might not look like it out in the San Francisco fog belt,” where Laguna Honda is located, says Brian Dodds, owner of Sycamore Farms of Monterey County, which specializes in providing goats for challenging terrain. “Goats are a great natural way to rehabilitate an overgrown landscape.”

Dodds says the goats are pickier eaters than one might expect. “They like the leaves,” he says, “But they leave the sticks behind.”

The arrival of the goats is timed every year to coincide with the end of the bird nesting season so that fledglings will have a chance to test their wings before the ground is cleared from underneath them. The Laguna Honda site is not only a bird watching venue, its forested terrain is home to families of red foxes, feral cats, raccoons, skunks, and possums.

The goats will be at Laguna Honda for the remainder of the month. Interested goat-watchers can contact the Laguna Honda Community Affairs Office at 759-4597.

Laguna Honda Hospital and Rehabilitation Center is a city-owned and operated skilled nursing and rehabilitation facility that serves the safety net population of San Francisco. It was founded in 1866 and has served as a place of refuge for San Franciscans in times of earthquake and epidemic. The hospital is midway through a capital improvement project to replace its 1920s-era buildings with new facilities. The first of the new buildings is scheduled to open in late 2009. The replacement is financed by a bond approved by voters in 1999 and by funding from the settlement of city lawsuits against the tobacco industry. Laguna Honda currently provides skilled nursing and rehabilitative services for 1030 elderly and disabled residents.

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