

La Honda landslide destroys home, road

Community comes together to help affected homeowners

Carina Woudenberg, Half Moon Bay Review, 1-18-17

One house in La Honda has been red-tagged and another received the “limited entry” yellow-tag designation following a slow-moving landslide that also closed a portion of a street and broke a water main.

The red-tagged home — located at 345 Scenic Drive — is tucked into the small town’s hills less than a mile off of Highway 84.

Owners Paula and Derek Krogh have lived in the home since 1995. They were present for the infamous landslide that struck the area during the El Niño storms of 1998. However, while that landslide damaged a row of homes above them, the Kroghs’ biggest personal concerns at the time centered around keeping warm during the resulting power failure. It also inspired them to purchase a wood stove and down jackets shortly after the incident, Paula said.

At the time, the Federal Emergency Management Agency paid the affected homeowners per square foot and the land was turned over to the county. The homes were bulldozed and the county asked the residents to pay hundreds of dollars toward repair of the landslide.

“Those people are still paying for it,” said La Honda Fire Brigade Chief Ari Delay, who resides in La Honda himself.

In 2005, there was additional movement that affected more homes in the area.

“It was somewhat stabilized and now it’s on the move again,” Delay said of the slide.

A year ago, the Kroghs noticed a few cracks in their home.

“We hired a geo-tech company to look into it,” Krogh said. “It was really minor, only about one inch.”

When Krogh got home on Jan. 10 she noticed that the crack in the garage had doubled. She had been informed that a significant storm could exacerbate the condition but hoped that the crack would never amount to anything serious.

Fortunately for the Kroghs, the couple owns the home next door and, as a precaution, they decided to take their valuables and stay at the other place after the wider crack developed.

While they were moving things in the night, Derek Krogh heard a rushing water sound. A crack had formed across the road and a fire hydrant appeared to be shooting water.

Paula called 911 and first responders arrived at the scene to turn off the water.

By daylight the next day, the one-inch crack in the roadway had expanded to four to six inches, Paula said. The crack was steadily growing in her home as well, and she called out to her friends and neighbors for help.

“We had 20 to 30 people show up in a half hour,” Paula said. Some of her friends were part of the South Coast Community Emergency Response Team, which responded to the incident as well as the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office of Emergency Services, the Cuesta La Honda Guild, the South Coast-based nonprofit Puente and others.

Krogh said she was blown away by the outpouring of support and the dozens of people willing to work hours on end to help her family move things out of their home.

“The community response has been amazing,” Krogh said. “In the mountains we all have each other’s back.”

Delay reported Monday that the slide appeared to be continuing and the portion of Scenic Drive between Recreation Drive and Fir View was still closed to traffic.

“(We’re) obviously concerned with the upcoming weather,” Delay said. “It’s kind of going to be a wait-and-see game in terms of what further takes place.”