

Poet Soto gives \$300,000 to restoration

By Doug Hoagland
The Fresno Bee

Poet and author Gary Soto returned Wednesday to the Old Administration Building at Fresno City College — where he took classes in the early 1970s — and announced he is donating \$300,000 to help restore the building's auditorium.

Soto appeared with community leaders who gathered in the courtyard of the Old Administration Building to kick off a \$3 million community fundraiser.

Soto was a student at City College when he attended his first poetry reading in the auditorium.

"I thought, 'God, I would love to do that,'" Soto said. "City College is responsible for my growth intellectually, and I think it made me grow as a man."

Born in Fresno, Soto graduated from City College in 1972 and then from California State University, Fresno. He lives in Berkeley but has a house in Fresno.

Soto is the author of 10 poetry collections for adults, one of which was a 1985 finalist for both the Los Angeles Times Book Award and the National Book Award.

Michele Cantwell-Copher, head of the State Center Community College District's fundraising foundation, said the

money from Soto and his wife, Carolyn, "is a testament to the respect many people feel for this building."

The Old Administration Building was completed in 1916 but has been closed since 1976 because it does not meet the state's earthquake code for schools. It has 70,000 square feet of classroom, office and auditorium space.

Debate raged for years about the building's future.

It will cost \$41 million to renovate the structure and bring it up to earthquake standards, with that money coming from local and state bonds and private donations.

Because college officials can't use bond money on the auditorium, the \$4 million needed for its restoration will come from private donations.

City College instructors and staff — plus others in the college district — already have pledged or donated \$1 million, so the community is being asked to give the remaining \$3 million.

City College officials say they plan to have the Old Administration Building restored and opened in the fall of 2009.

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Teen killed in stolen car crash identified

By Louis Galvan
The Fresno Bee

The passenger who was killed Tuesday when a stolen car crashed into a tree in west-central Fresno during a California Highway Patrol chase has been identified as Denny Xiong, 17, of Fresno, officials said Wednesday.

Xiong was not carrying identification, but officials were able to identify him after checking his fingerprints, said Joseph Tiger, a Fresno County deputy coroner.

The driver, a 16-year-old Fresno boy, has been charged with vehicular manslaughter, vehicle theft, possession of a stolen vehicle, evading arrest and driving without a license, said officer Paul Solarzano, CHP spokesman.

Investigators said the driver was traveling about 75 mph and driving recklessly when he was spotted on northbound Highway 99 at Olive Avenue shortly before 1:30 a.m. Tuesday.

A CHP officer attempted to stop the car, but the driver continued north on 99 until he got off at the Clinton Avenue off-ramp, ran a red light and turned east on Clinton at about 70 mph, according to Solarzano.

Less than a minute after the chase had started, the car made several turns and was going east on Yale Avenue when it jumped a curb and crashed at Yale and Arthur avenues, investigators said.

The car slammed into a tree, knocked down a 25-foot section of a wooden fence and demolished a patio brick wall. The driver was treated for moderate injuries and turned over to Juvenile Hall authorities.

Two other passengers in the car, a 1993 Honda Civic, were admitted to University Medical Center with major injuries.

One of them, Tou Her, 19, of Fresno, was listed in good condition Wednesday afternoon. The condition of the other passenger, a 14-year-old Fresno boy who was thrown out of the vehicle, was not made available Wednesday.

Solarzano said Her and the 14-year-old face charges of vehicle theft and possession of a stolen vehicle.

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Fresno staffers unveil major street-fee boost

By Matt Leedy
The Fresno Bee

Fresno's plan to pay for new streets and improve others would make development fees on the city's fringe seven times higher for homes and 20 times higher for stores.

City staffers formally unveiled their long-delayed proposal Wednesday in two public meetings. In both, the audience was predominantly developers and public officials.

The City Council, which for months has been pushing staffers for a fee proposal, will be asked to approve the plan Tuesday.

But after getting their first look at the proposal this week, some council members already are concerned the steep increases could cost the city jobs, sales tax revenue and affordable homes.

Council Member Mike Dages said the plan to increase street fees to \$70,000 per acre from \$3,500 per acre for retail stores near the city's borders would slow such development to a crawl. A loss in retail development, he said, would mean fewer jobs for Fresnoans and less sales tax revenue for the city.

"My gut reaction is I don't know how I'm going to support this on Tuesday," Dages said. "They're just too high. I cannot sit here and allow unemployment to increase."

Commercial developers also are worried about the fee increases.

Richard Fairbank, an attorney who represents retail and office developer Zinkin Development, said the fees will "stop or nearly stop" construction in Fresno.

Under the proposal, fees for commercial and apartment development would be phased in over three years, which city staffers hope will help alleviate some of the concerns. Fees for industrial developments also would increase but would not be phased in.

"I would be very disappointed by anyone who would say this would stop development in its tracks," Assistant City Manager Jon Ruiz said.

Council President Henry T. Perea wants the phase-in period extended an extra year to 2010. He also wants city staffers to make sure the higher fees don't push housing costs out of reach for Fresno's poor and moderate-income residents.

"For me, the jury's still out on this," Perea said.

City staffers said they will suggest that the council find a couple million dollars in the city budget each year so the fees can be waived for developers who build homes that are affordable for residents who earn 60% or less of the area's median income — about \$41,000 for a family of four.

Money for affordable housing could come from the city's general fund — which pays for police and fire services — or new grants.

Currently, street fees cost from \$1,100 to \$3,700 per acre for all development. Homes typically have lower fees than stores. Under the new proposal, those fees would jump to \$27,000 per acre for developments of single-family homes on the fringes and nearly twice as much per acre for apartments.

Street fees for developments in the city's core would be a third of what they would be on the fast-growing fringe. Ruiz said the fee break should encourage more development in the city's older sections.

Development throughout the city would pay for improvement to major streets, such as Herndon, Blackstone and Jensen avenues. Development on the city's fringes also would pay for new roads and prevent bottlenecks on existing streets.

If approved by the council, the new fees would begin to take effect May 27.

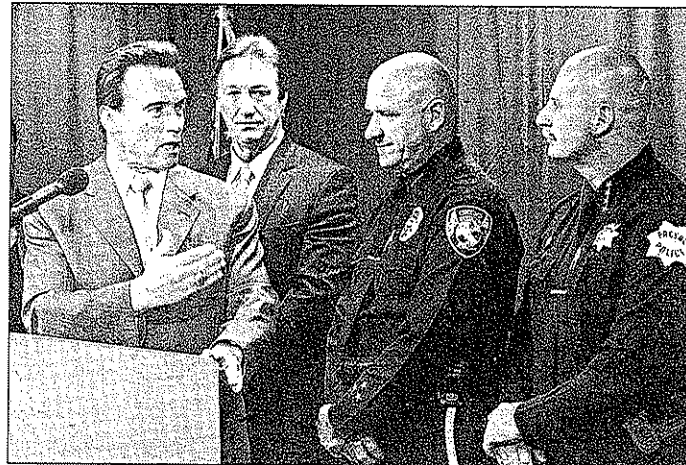
The council passed a resolution in January that will help the city collect fees from new development plans that are submitted to the city but haven't received final approval by the time the increases are adopted.

A decision on new street fees is seven months late. The fees haven't been increased in about 15 years, and Ruiz said it took a long time to find a way for Fresno to catch up. The fees are needed to raise about \$415 million during the next 20 years.

Development fees will be reviewed every year so the city doesn't fall behind again, Ruiz said.

The proposal, Ruiz said, will encourage developers to help restore Fresno's core and hem in sprawl. "In five to 10 years, we'll be saying it was well worth the effort to do this right."

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JOHN WALKER/THE FRESNO BEE

From left, Gov. Schwarzenegger acknowledges gang-prevention efforts made by Fresno Mayor Alan Autry, Reedley Police Chief Doug Johnson and Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer, during a news conference Wednesday in Fresno. The governor said gangs across the state are killing people and peddling drugs.

Governor in Fresno to discuss gang prevention

By Tim Eberly
The Fresno Bee

Gov. Schwarzenegger came to Fresno on Wednesday to talk with local political and law enforcement officials about creating a statewide effort to squash gang violence.

Schwarzenegger spent about 45 minutes talking privately with Fresno Mayor Alan Autry, Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer, Fresno County Sheriff Margaret Mims and others.

In a news conference that followed, Schwarzenegger described the meeting as "terrific" and praised Fresno's anti-gang efforts.

But Schwarzenegger offered no specific plans or solutions for a broader coordinated statewide effort. His goal in visiting Fresno and other California communities is to learn about the cities' gang problems, an aide said.

Now is the time to come together and act, Schwarzenegger said. Gangs across the state are killing people and peddling drugs, he said, specifically mentioning the Fresno Bulldogs gang as "dangerous."

The governor praised the Mayor's Gang Prevention Initiative — a program designed to give gang members a fresh start — as well as the city's effort in trying to wipe out the Bulldogs gang.

"I think the work that is being done here in town is terrific," he said.

Since Nov. 13, 1,772 Bulldog gang members or associates have been arrested on felony charges in the Operation Bulldogs crackdown, Dyer reported. The chief also said that 357 people with ties to the Bulldogs have been referred to the gang-prevention program, which offers job counseling, therapy and tattoo removal.

Dyer said the recent police work is good progress — he's trying to make Bulldog gang members wear Global Positioning System monitors to track their whereabouts — but there's much more to be done. And he said Schwarzenegger could help local police pursue federal funding.

Dyer later said Schwarzenegger was "very attentive" in the meeting. His staffers were trying to rush him, but he took the time to listen, Dyer said.

Autry, meanwhile, said battling gang violence is a topic that, in the past, politicians have not embraced.

No specific incident has prompted the governor's push to coordinate efforts against gangs, but rather numerous calls for help from community leaders, his spokesman said.

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Rep. Hunter's son may seek House seat

Associated Press

The son of Rep. Duncan Hunter, the California Republican running a long-shot campaign for president, said Wednesday

The former Marine, who served two tours in Iraq, said he now volunteers full time for his father's campaign and expects to formally announce his candidacy in the next few weeks.

Ag: Children visit animals, make ice cream

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Education and the Tulare County Farm Bureau.

Kings County had about 2,000 students at a similar event earlier this month in Hanford.

Touching animals wasn't the only activity for the students at Ag Day on Wednesday.

Other activities included making ice cream and trail

center's interactive learning center. Kaphelm said most boys in her class liked the farm equipment such as the nut harvester that made the ground shake.

Douglas Rogers, 15, a student at Porterville High School, spent part of his spring break educating the children about sheep.

Douglas, a member of

age some of Wednesday's students to get involved, he said.

"It's a fun thing to do, and maybe they will have fun with it, too."

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