



James Berardi is the superintendent of Twin Ridges Elementary School District and principal of Grizzly Hill School.

### Know & Go

**What:** Achilles Wheel, Belfry Brothers, DJ Jim Tonic perform

**When:** 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 4. Music starts at 9 p.m.

**Where:** Stonehouse, 107 Sacramento St., Nevada City.

**Who:** Benefit for San Juan Ridge Taxpayers Association to support efforts to block re-opening of San Juan Ridge Mine.

**Cost:** \$15, 21 and over, ID checked at door. No outside alcohol or food.

**Details:** [www.sjrtaxpayers.org](http://www.sjrtaxpayers.org)

On San Juan Ridge's Jackass Flats, a gravel road that starts across the intersection from where James Berardi now sits, a moon-like expanse of jagged, exposed rock shrouds the view on one side, lasting for more than a mile.

As far as Berardi, superintendent of Twin Ridges Elementary School District and principal of Grizzly Hill School, is concerned, the rocky acreage might as well be the second door of doom.

It is where Tim Callaway, CEO of San Juan Mining Corp., wants to dig again to try to get out the gold ore buried in the gravel. The last time he tried, in the 1990s, Grizzly Hill's well went dry — one of a total of 14 wells affected when Callaway's equipment breached a water-bearing fault and drained the local water table.

Berardi, who was open to the project the first time around and who grew up in a gold-mine friendly Sierra County community, doesn't want to give Callaway the chance to try again.

“We’re still eating the costs,” said Berardi, pointing to a \$117,000 tab the district has paid so far for water filtration system maintenance, staff training, bottled water and purification chemicals.

“San Juan Mining Corp. remains committed to the community surrounding the project to provide all baseline data reasonably required to establish a baseline for environmental conditions related to the re-opening of the mine.”

Tim Callaway

CEO of San Juan Mining Corp.

Even with that, some parents in the 95-student school still do not let their kids drink the water, and some staff members still bring in bottled water to make tea.

Worse, the once-safe, kid-friendly aura of a grade school campus took a hit in perception.

“The community lost faith in us,” Berardi says.

“To think that they’re saying, ‘We’re going to come back here and do this again,’” Berardi adds. “It’s like, ‘Please, I’m not seein’ it.’”

Tod Herman, the Nevada County senior planner in charge of the mine re-opening application, said Callaway notified him in March that he was suspending collections of water quality data in the 100 or so wells that were being monitored to create a baseline for the environmental impact report.

At that time, Herman told Callaway that the three or four months of water quality data already collected would not be enough for a EIR baseline.

At least 12 months of water quality data are needed to create a baseline that carries through all four seasons to see the effects of a dry summer or wet winter, according to Sol Henson, president of the San Juan Ridge Taxpayers Association and a hydrologist.

“Based on the county’s response to the applicant regarding water quality monitoring, we are optimistic that the county will require an additional 12 months of water quality monitoring,” Henson said this week. “We expect the county to hold firm on their monitoring requirements for the EIR process.”

Herman said he and Callaway, who were in communication this week for the first time in months, will be meeting soon to decide the next step.

“We will be reviewing their response before we set up a meeting with the applicant (Callaway) to discuss the continued processing of their application,” Herman said on Wednesday.

The taxpayers association is hosting a fundraiser tonight at the Stonehouse in Nevada City to support their efforts to oppose the mine's application to reopen. The fundraiser features Achilles Wheel, Belfry Boys and DJ Jim Tonic. (see Know & Go box). For more information, see [www.sjrtaxpayers.org](http://www.sjrtaxpayers.org).

Meanwhile, Callaway, featured Aug. 22 in the New York Times, said he thinks enough water quality and water level data has been collected to prepare a draft EIR.

“San Juan Mining Corp. remains committed to the community surrounding the project to provide all baseline data reasonably required to establish a baseline for environmental conditions related to the reopening of the mine,” he said Wednesday. “Baseline water quality, and homeowner well levels, have been established more than sufficiently to complete the draft EIR.”

Callaway indicated that more data could be collected later.

“Keep in mind that at present we are talking about data necessary to complete the EIR,” Callaway added. “The EIR will set future monitoring requirements prior to any de-watering or mining activity.”

He added that “future requirements for additional water quality testing will be established well in advance of any actual mining activity. Anti-project politics seems to be setting scientific protocol for advancing the EIR process.

“In order for Nevada County to understand the potential impacts of the project, the draft EIR must be completed,” Callaway added.

Businesses on the San Juan Ridge are not reassured.

“They have to dewater the hole — and who knows whether our water is tied in or not?” said Bob Erickson, founder and co-partner, with son Tor Erickson, of Erickson Woodworking, a craftsman furniture studio on Jackass Flats just down the way from the mine.

Erickson says he has never before felt as threatened with survival as he does now. The mine's west pit, which is where Callaway wants to dig, butts right up to Erickson's property — much closer than the diggings in the last go-round, which didn't affect the Ericksons' wells.

“If we don't have water, we can't be here,” said Erickson, 67, a nationally renowned furniture maker who built his first chair in 1969 while helping to build his friend Gary Snyder's home.

Snyder, the founder of the San Juan Ridge Taxpayers Association, had met Erickson when the two lived in the same enclave in Mill Valley, Marin County, near Muir Woods, before Snyder and later Erickson both relocated to the rural outskirts of the San Juan Ridge in Nevada County.

Erickson Woodworking was opened for business in 1973.

“If we don’t have an attractive climate that has night quiet, then highly skilled people that we want to hire won’t want to live here,” Erickson said.

During the last time the mine was opened, “from daybreak to sundown, it was extremely noisy, even here,” Erickson said.

Tor Erickson, 35, has learned furniture making at his father’s knee and is now a partner in the company.

“We sell our furniture all over the country,” Tor Erickson said. “We exhibit alongside major artists in galleries, and we have furniture on exhibit in the Smithsonian.”

He said the mine re-opening would mean the firm could not sustain itself.

“My dad’s one of the last great woodworkers of the first generation of woodworkers in the U.S.,” Tor Erickson said. “It’s a legacy that I have to be able to continue here.”

Close by Erickson Woodworking, at Ananda Village, another major Ridge entity that is within a mile or so of the west pit of the San Juan Ridge Mine, manager Peter Goering is worried.

“All our water comes from wells,” he said. “We’re concerned about the impact on groundwater from pumping that much water.”

Earlier reports indicate that San Juan Mining Corp. would need to pump up to 3 million gallons of water a day to dewater the newly styled “incline mine tunnel” that would be used to reach the gravel in the pit where the gold ore is located.

“The mine claims that their water would be completely independent and that there is not much flow from the bedrock (where the wells are) to the gravel (in the mine),” Goering said. “But it’s very close, and typically water, when it’s collected, finds its way through the cracks.”

Ananda, in Nevada County since 1968, includes the 700-acre Expanding Light Retreat Center off Tyler Foote Road that hosts residents, staff and visitors from all over the world for yoga teacher training, yoga retreats, meditation and yoga therapy.

The complex brings in millions of dollars in revenue to Nevada County, and employs 80 to 100 full-time staff members.

About 230 people live there full time, not counting the hundreds of annual visitors. The center also runs the K-12 Ananda Living Wisdom School, which teaches children of Ananda residents and local families.

It also includes the 70-acre Ananda Meditation Retreat Center. Ananda, which monitors its own wells and which was not affected during the 1990s dig, is clearly on the radar this time, Goering said. He said all the Ananda facilities on Jackass Flats and on Tyler Foote Road would be in jeopardy of losing their water if the mine were reopened.

“To say that you’re not going to have any impact on the neighboring bedrock (water) system, the burden of proof should be on them to prove that there is not a connection,” Goering said.

“The consequences for us are potentially catastrophic, if you lose 80 to 100 jobs and millions of dollars in revenue to the county,” he said. “We’re dependent on groundwater as our unique water source, and to have that jeopardized, jeopardizes our livelihood.”

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