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Groups work to bring historic bells to Encinitas

By: ADAM KAYE - Staff Writer

ENCINITAS ---- Two business groups and the city's Cultural Tourism Committee are working to bring 12 replicas of bells that once lined California's first highway back to Encinitas.

The bells marked the route of "The King's Highway" ---- El Camino Real ---- which linked California's 21 missions. Women's groups installed the original bells a century ago to recognize the route's connection to California's heritage.

No one knows just where the route crossed through Encinitas.

In North County, present-day El Camino Real cuts a course through Encinitas, Carlsbad and Oceanside.

The Encinitas Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Encinitas MainStreet Association are seeking sponsors to purchase the bells and the 13-foot-tall shepherd's staffs from which they hang. The price is \$1,795 for a bell and staff.

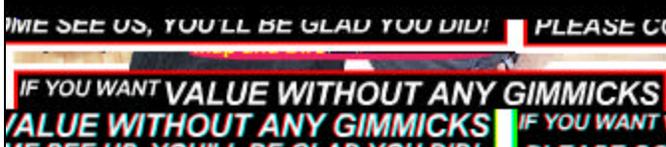
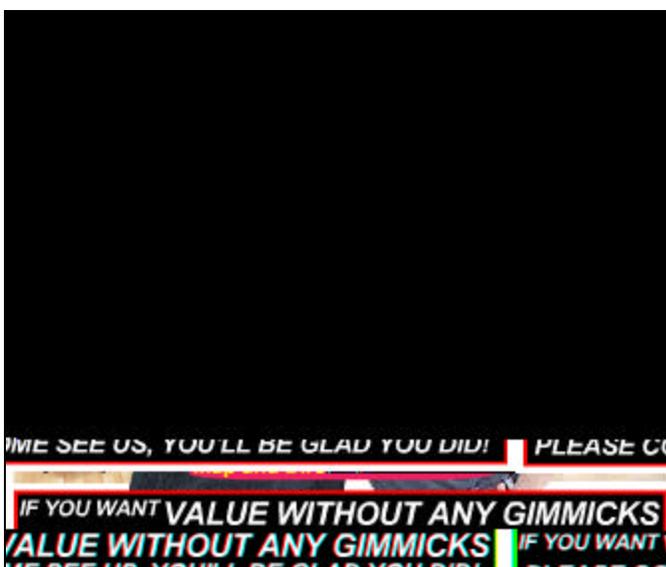
Six bells would be positioned along either side of Coast Highway 101. Another six would line El Camino Real itself, which is east of the coastal route.

"We think this is going to be a really popular project," said Keith Turner, the chamber's chief executive officer. "It's neat to be a part of bringing something like that back right here in our local community."

Beautification programs tend to focus on the coastal strip, and Turner said he was pleased that the commercial corridor along El Camino Real also will receive the historic symbols.

Organizers hope to have the bells installed by December.

The 85-pound, cast-iron bells are the specialty of John Kolstad, owner of California Bells in Saratoga.



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Kolstad's company has sold bells to the cities of Oceanside and Carlsbad and this summer is filling a 577-bell order for the state of California, he said Thursday in a telephone interview.

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To fabricate the bells, Kolstad has produced a cast of an original 1906 bell created by a Mrs. ASC Forbes, late president of the El Camino Real Association. Forbes hung her first bell in front of Plaza Church in downtown Los Angeles, Kolstad said.

Some 15 women's groups comprised the El Camino Real Association, which placed nearly 400 bells from San Diego to Sonoma. At that time, the bells marked the historic route but also served to guide early travelers, Kolstad said.

To learn more about the El Camino Real Bell program, call (408) 741-1549 or visit www.californiabell.com

Contact staff writer Adam Kaye at (760) 943-2312 or akaye@nctimes.com.

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