



Photo by Tom Underhill

**While firefighters and utility companies worked to halt a gas leak in RPV earlier this month, city officials were hard at work posting updates on the breaking news list server. The city's list server can send e-mails related to breaking news, local meetings and recreational events to any resident who signs up.**

## City Spins Web of Information

By Josh Cohen  
News Staff Writer

RPV — When a gas leak earlier this month forced scores of Rancho Palos Verdes residents from their homes, Councilman Doug Stern knew about the incident as soon as he awoke. All he had to do was turn on his computer and check his e-mail.

As the evacuees waited while utility companies and law-enforcement agencies worked to fix the leak and maintain order, RPV's breaking news team was hard at work bringing updates to residents via the Internet. The e-mails came in throughout the day. At 2:30 p.m., a message stated the leak had been fixed. At 3:11 p.m., another said residents would be allowed to return to their homes. For weekday commuters and soccer moms who travel city streets, the information was invaluable for route planning. It also allowed city officials and friends to relay information to the evacuees.

"The city's mind-set is that the Internet is a tool that allows better communication with the public," said Stern. "To the extent a resident has an interest in what's going on in the city, and to the extent that they want us to make information available, this is the technology that makes it possible."

In the past, the city's break-

ing news web site has informed residents of flooded streets, local celebrations and important public meetings. In fact, the breaking news update via e-mail is just one of many Internet features for which RPV residents can sign up.

Additionally, residents can get notices of City Council, commission and committee meetings, job openings, budget issues, city celebrations and recreational classes.

"I think we have a total of about 1,000 people signed up for our list server," said PV on the Net Director Ted Vegvari, one of two people credited with creating, maintaining and updating the city's web site. "We get a lot of compliments about the system. After the gas leak, one of the homeowners associations e-mailed us saying its members were grateful for the updates."

Joining Vegvari is RPV Finance Director Dennis McLean, who said about 400 people have signed up for the city's breaking news list server. The city has redesigned the system to make it even easier to sign up.

"People can go to the list server page, click on all the items for which they want to receive updates and submit it to the city," said McLean. "It's that simple."

While McLean agreed the

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purpose of the list server is to make public information easier to obtain, he stressed the importance of privacy.

"It's important for anyone who wants to join the city's list server to know that all of the e-mail addresses are kept confidential," he said.

Recently, a resident accused Stern, who is an advocate of the Internet, of using the city's e-mail list to add to his own group of some 500 web supporters.

"That's wrong," said McLean. "The city's list of subscribers, again, is strictly confidential."

McLean credits Vegvari and PV on the Net for developing the city's web page at no cost and for providing programming expertise. He also praises a number of city employees for relaying breaking news back to someone who can then post the message on the city's web site.

"One of the reasons we were getting information out so quickly during the gas leak was that [RPV building inspector] Mark Campbell was giving us updates directly from his cell phone," said McLean.

Creating a breaking news page presented a number of challenges.

"No other cities really had web pages for us to emulate," Vegvari said. "With the breaking news page, we wanted staff and emergency people to be able to post information quickly from anywhere. So we had to update it a few times, make it easier to manage and keep it secure. That was a big part of the challenge."

Stern sees RPV residents becoming more Internet savvy.

"When I was mayor [in 2003], I called City Manager Les Evans and said, 'Hey, I'm not getting a lot of letters,'" said Stern. "He said most of what I got was coming in by e-mail, and they're not sending letters like they used to."

"I'm sure in a normal community there is an age gap for computer users, but our community isn't normal," he added. "I'll bet a vast majority of our residents use e-mail. I would suggest they all sign up for the city's list server. It's a great way to get good information and, hopefully, minimize the bad information."

*A journey to the city's web site and a few simple clicks put a resident on the list server, an automated system that sends updates right to your home or work computer.*

*Go to [www.pvonthenet.com/rpv/list-server/index.cfm](http://www.pvonthenet.com/rpv/list-server/index.cfm). Then just check the boxes next to the items for which you want to receive e-mail updates and submit.*