



MY BEST SHOT

by Lisa Ross

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**IMPOSSIBLE DREAM: A PERFORMING ARTS
CENTER FOR CARMEL VALLEY**

My week of impossible dreams began during the North Coast Repertory Theater's production of *Man of La Mancha* at their tiny Solana Beach shopping center theater, another inspiration of the impossible from this plucky ensemble that specializes in making performances in a shoebox feel like shows on a Broadway scale.

Two days later, 60 year old Dennis Tito, the guy who dreamed his impossible dream to do summersaults in space, used the entrepreneurial spirit that made him wealthy to leave earth. As I write, he's in space having paid the Russians \$20 million to get him there after NASA turned him down. If that isn't out-of-the-box thinking, I don't know what is.

For a small group of Carmel Valley planning dreamers, the quest to transform the Highlands Town Center from a congested transient beehive into a social and cultural center for the community up to now has been nothing more than a battle against windmills. And, without some fast Dennis Tito thinking and know-how, the windmills are poised to win.

That's because the field of Carmel Valley dreams, twelve acres between the library and the community park, is already spoken for—an 500-unit apartment complex already has preliminary approvals from a density-crazed city, and a 3-acre police station complex complete with jiffy lube and maintenance yard is steadily crawling its way through the approval process.

While most community planners argue that a police station of this type belongs in an industrial area or business park, the property owners are bound by a requirement injected into 1998's Proposition M by former Councilman Harry Mathis to sell the city a 3-acre police station site somewhere in Carmel Valley for \$3 million. They think this is their best shot.

But, for us Dennis Tito types, this site is just the spot for a performing arts center—right in the middle of the education capital of San Diego. Situated within walking distance of four schools, huddled between a community park and a library, property currently planned as a rabbit warren of suburban ennui would transform into a lively cultural space.

Surely, performing arts centers are expensive to build and prone to annual red ink hemorrhaging. And, many pragmatic Eeyore's will whine that even a police jiffy lube station is more useful than an elitist glitter palace the community can't or won't afford—this is an \$8 million fantasy, but my husband will tell you that I rarely think cheap.

But, such a center could succeed if designed as a combined residence for regional professional arts organizations and a venue for a public school performing arts program, together a formidable funding base.

The two-decade old North Coast Repertory Theater and the nescient SeaGate Concerts come to mind, top-notch theater and classical music organizations with strong youth education programs. Both need better homes—both come with traditional donors, strong boards of directors and fundraising know-how. The quickly growing, highly educated and affluent Carmel Valley could inject new life into their efforts and needs to grow.

With a longer stretch of the imagination, perhaps one of the three school districts in the area with their power of eminent domain might think outside their planning boxes to visualize a school set in the midst of a public library, a joint use performing arts center and a community park—an awesome chemistry.

Such is the alchemical stuff of my dreams this week, thanks to a wild performance of the *Man of La Mancha* at the NC Rep and a wild space ride by a guy named Dennis. A toast to the Don Quixote's among us—let's make us a Town Center.