Greening the grid

How is the county’s green energy program working three years after its launch?

Page 5

Mueller to run for council again; Carlton steps aside | Page 5
Home + Garden Design | INSIDE
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📅 Tuesday, January 14, 2020
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Greening the grid
How is the county’s green energy program working three years after its launch?

By Matthew Vollrath
Special to The Almanac

In the fall of 2014, two San Mateo County supervisors sat down with a group of environmental advocates to discuss something called “Community Choice Aggregators,” or CCAs — a phenomenon that was just starting to take off in California. Though the name was clunky and confusing, the concept was powerfully simple. Instead of relying on PG&E’s power, which came mainly from fossil fuels like natural gas, the county could start buying renewable energy from wind and solar. This cleaner electricity would be delivered through PG&E’s existing lines, so no new wires would have to be installed. And in the end, residents’ electric bills wouldn’t go up. In fact, they would go down.
The supervisors, Dave Pine and Carole Groom, were immediately intrigued. Soon, they became genuinely enthusiastic.

“It became obvious that (CCAs) were a very powerful tool for quickly reducing greenhouse gas emissions,” Pine said in a recent interview. “There’s no more important priority than addressing climate change and reducing our carbon footprint. So the more I learned about this model, the more excited I became.”

Two years later, a new public agency, Peninsula Clean Energy, was formed. It was launched in 2016 through a joint powers agreement between the county and its 20 cities, and its stated mission is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in San Mateo County by providing greener power at lower rates.

How has PCE done in achieving its goal in its first three years? Impressively, county and PCE officials say. They assert that the agency has saved residents a total of $18 million annually, and cut 105,000 metric tons of carbon emissions per year — the equivalent of taking some 22,000 cars off the road.

“It’s the highest level (of impact),” said Jim Eggemeyer, sustainability director for San Mateo County. “Peninsula Clean Energy is the greatest opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions we’ve ever had.”

Cleaner power, lower price
Between October 2016 and April 2017, Peninsula Clean Energy threw a series of virtual switches, and grid-related emissions in the county were slashed dramatically.

“Almost overnight, we saw our carbon production drop 30%,” Pine said.

In a state already charging prices as a result.

But the agency’s work isn’t just about county pride, Pepper asserted.

“We don’t pay dividends to shareholders,” Pepper explained. “Instead, we can provide savings directly to customers through lower rates.” Since its launch, she noted, PCE has consistently kept the price of its default power to San Mateo County.

Another factor is the ever-growing presence of renewables. As technologies rapidly improve and more panels and turbines go up throughout the state, the price of wind and solar energy continues to plummet every year.

“We don’t pay dividends to shareholders,” Pepper explained. “Instead, we can provide savings directly to customers through lower rates.” Since its launch, she noted, PCE has consistently kept the price of its default power option at 5% below PG&E’s rates.

But the agency’s work isn’t just about county pride, Pepper said. “By demonstrating that we can do this, then others will follow, and we can help move our region, our state, and the nation to a renewable energy economy,” she said.

When PCE launched, it was the sixth community choice aggregator in California. Three years later, there are 19 CCAs throughout the state, which together supply nearly a quarter of all electricity in California. “CCAs could reshape U.S. electricity markets,” researchers from the University of California at Los Angeles Luskin Institute assert in a recent paper. They estimate that CCAs have increased renewable energy use in California by 13.1 terawatt hour (TWh) since 2011, enough to power nearly 250,000 homes per year, all while creating billions of dollars in savings.

That remarkable value proposition — cleaner power at a lower cost — is made possible by a number of factors, Pepper said. The first is the fact that CCAs are public agencies. Unlike investor-owned utilities like PG&E, PCE does not profit from its revenues, and can offer lower prices as a result.
Robert Jones establishes new ‘firsts’ on Menlo fire board

By Rick Radin
Almanac Staff Writer

East Palo Alto has typically been left out of the leadership of the Menlo Park Fire Protection District, which has served the bayside community since the district’s founding in 1916.

That situation no longer exists now that East Palo Alto resident Robert Jones is on the district’s board of directors and has been chosen unanimously as the board president for 2020.

In fact, Jones is the first East Palo Alto resident to head the board and the first African American member in the fire district’s history, he said.

After he was appointed to the board in late 2017 to replace Rex Ianson, Jones ran for election in 2018 and finished as the top vote-getter in a race among four candidates for three open seats, besting the two other winners, Jim McLaughlin and Chuck Bernstein.

Fire Chief Harold Schapelhouman said Jones’ election is “long overdue in some ways.”

“In the past, people in East Palo Alto have had so many other challenges and struggles that they haven’t thought of the fire district as a place to run (for office),” Schapelhouman said.

“Most of the residents face the challenge of living from paycheck to paycheck.

In a written statement, Schapelhouman added, “At his core, (Jones) cares very deeply about people, specifically their well-being and how we as an organization can best serve the entire community.”

As a board member, Jones sided with Schapelhouman on a couple of the district’s major spending decisions in 2019. Jones and 2019 board president Virginia Chang-Kiraly supported the chief’s recommendation to back a plan to install an emergency siren at the district’s Station 2 in East Palo Alto, and also joined to vote in favor of submitting a letter of intent to purchase an all-electric firetruck.

Both proposals failed after Bernstein, McLaughlin and Rob Silano voted against them.

Although Menlo fire isn’t ready for a districtwide rollout of the siren, known as a Long-Range Acoustical Device, which issues a loud recorded warning in the event of a fire or impending earthquake, putting one in Station 2 would have been a first step in a long-term process, Jones said.

Likewise, Jones sees the development of an all-electric fire engine as the wave of the future, despite criticisms about its limitations.

“The in the district’s history, we’ve gone from horse-driven firetrucks to diesel trucks, and now we can have an electric truck,” he said.

“These are things that I could see in the long run for the district, in tune with what the future can hold to preserve life and protect people,” Jones added. “We have to be quicker and better of what we do and innovation is part of it.”

Community leader

Jones has a background in affordable housing development, having spent five years as a project developer with Eden Housing, the Hayward-based low-cost housing nonprofit.

He went on to lead EPA CAN DO, East Palo Alto’s below-market-rate housing program, for five years.

Jones has also served as a board member for the East Palo Alto Senior Center, and is a graduate of San Jose State University with a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in counselor education, according to the district’s website.

Before joining the fire board, he was a board member for the district’s CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) organization.

There are a number of issues on the horizon for the district in 2020 that Jones and the rest of the board will be dealing with, Schapelhouman said.

The district is looking for a deputy fire chief, who would have the responsibility of running the department in Schapelhouman’s absence, and it will be in a hiring mode in general since several of the district’s chief officers will be retiring or will

Tennis court keys now on sale in Menlo Park

Keys required to access city-owned tennis courts are available for purchase at the Arrilaga Family Gymnasium in the Menlo Park Civic Center and at the Onetta Harris Community Center.

During the first half of the year, keys for the full year cost $63 for residents and $127 for residents of unincorporated Menlo Park and non-residents.

Beginning on July 1, the prices are reduced to $42 for residents and $84 for anyone who doesn’t live in incorporated Menlo Park.

The locks to the city’s tennis courts are currently not in use, so people can use the tennis courts for free until new locks are installed in mid-January, according to city staff.

―By Kate Bradshaw

Real Estate Q&A

Is There A Market For Smaller Homes?

Dear Monica: My husband and I want to move to a smaller home, now that our children have grown, but we aren’t seeing good inventory of this type. Do you have any advice on where we might find what we are looking for? Carol T.

Dear Carol: Not everyone wants a big house. There is a large and growing market for well designed smaller homes. Younger and older buyers are all looking for these properties. They want them well built, well located, and affordable.

In our area these properties are especially hard to find because of the high cost of the land. For many, especially older buyers, the best way to get what you want is to build it, which works for those who can afford the time and expense. Most younger buyers cannot afford this and decide instead to find an affordable home in a good location. They want to be close to transportation and if they have children, in a good school district. As 2020 begins, I think we will see growing demand for good smaller homes.

Contact me at monica@monicacorman.com; Office: 650-465-5971, Compass, Ranked in the Wall St Journal’s 2016, 2017, and 2018 Nationwide list of top 250 Realtors.
Michael Schwarz, a long-time Menlo Park resident with a gift for documentary storytelling, died unexpectedly on Dec. 1 at age 66 as a result of a fall in his home.

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Nationwide, WSJ 2019
U.S. national women’s wrestling coach comes to M-A High School

A clinic held at the high school for area students highlighted important strategies for athletes on and off the mat.

By Magali Gauthier
Almanac visual journalist

United States national women’s wrestling team coach Terry Steiner spent Jan. 4 training the Menlo-Atherton High School girls wrestling team with a clinic that also welcomed high school-age athletes from Sequoia and Woodside high schools, and others from the San Francisco, Oakland and Bakersfield area.

‘We are trying to teach these kids life lessons with the hope that they learn to deal with adversity.’

PHIL HOANG, HEAD M-A GIRLS WRESTLING COACH

During the first half of the session, Steiner demonstrated offensive and defensive techniques with individual athletes from the crowd seated on the red mat of the M-A wrestling room. The girls then practiced the moves with one another.

Kiely Tabaldo, a freshman wrestler for M-A and a 2018 Pan American Wrestling Championships competitor under Steiner’s coaching, said she appreciated the specific training on how to recover from being in a troubling defensive position.

“Defense in general is an area that is under-addressed,” Steiner said. “There are always issues where wrestlers get caught under as they are trying to attack their competitor’s legs and you have to go from a bad position to a good position.”

“I think the training was really eye-opening,” Tabaldo said. “We all got a new experience and benefited from learning things we may not have known about.”

After three hours of wrestling and a lunch break, coaches and athletes listened to Steiner speak about his career trajectory and the pressure that comes with the sport on and off the mat.

“There are a lot of kids around here going through adversity and who don’t know how to cope with it,” said Philip Hoang, head coach of the M-A girls wrestling team. “It was interesting to bridge the gap between a high-level coach and why we are all doing this. We are trying to teach these kids life lessons with the hope that they learn to deal with adversity.”

The athletes also asked Steiner about his experience at the Olympics, about pain management and how to overcome difficulties involving confidence.

“He reminded me why I’m doing this,” Hoang said. “At his level, he’s going to feel pressure to perform, but at the end of the day, it’s about the athlete. You are here to support their goals.”

M-A freshman Kiely Tabaldo, above, demonstrates a move on Terry Steiner, the U.S. national women’s wrestling team coach, in front of a group of high school wrestlers during a training clinic at M-A on Jan. 4. Tabaldo previously worked with Steiner when she competed in the 2018 Pan American Wrestling Championships under his coaching. At right, M-A coach Philip Hoang shows sophomore Mari Callahan where to place her arm to execute a recovery move on teammate junior Camila Tarazi during the clinic.

Jazz at the library with Jym Marks this Saturday

Jym Marks, a jazz musician, poet, author, lecturer and owner of Markstyle Barber Shop in Menlo Park, is set to offer a jazz performance Saturday, Jan. 11, from 11 a.m. to noon at the Menlo Park Library at 800 Alma St.

According to the city of Menlo Park, he once opened for Thelonious Monk at Palo Alto High School in 1967. He has also maintained a tradition of walking from his home in Fremont to his Menlo Park business, about 12 miles, on his birthday each November.

People can register for the event online at is.gd/marksjazz.

Listen to a brief clip of the quintet’s 2018 performance at the library at is.gd/marksjazzdemo.

—By Kate Bradshaw

Robert Jones continued from page 7

be eligible for retirement this year, Schapelhouman wrote in an email.

In addition, the district plans to begin construction of a new $20 million Station 4; the existing station serves much of Atherton and is more than 70 years old.

The district will also be working with the city of Menlo Park to purchase a vacant lot at the corner of Ivy Drive and Willow Road for a new fire station for the Belle Haven and bayfront areas, as well as ordering three new fire engines and a ladder truck, Schapelhouman wrote.

“We will be expanding our service delivery, readiness and command and control capabilities by having two battalion chiefs on duty and located on both sides of the Fire District by July of 2020,” he wrote. ‘There is currently only one battalion chief on duty daily.”

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CLEAN ENERGY
continued from page 5
than fossil-based energy,” she said. Many experts estimate it will fall even lower in the next few years — to as low as 0.03 a kilowatt hour (kWh), a full 0.02 cheaper than fossil fuels.
Perhaps the most powerful aspect of PCE, however, is the scope of its service. When PCE launched in 2016, it became the official power provider for San Mateo County. All residents, businesses, and government services were automatically switched from PG&E’s power mix to PCE’s 50% renewable energy.

Though customers can choose to opt out, only a small handful have done so, program officials said. As a result, the county’s overall energy load is now roughly 50% renewable.
“Right from the get-go, you had everyone involved,” Eggemeyer said. “Across all the board, we were immediately making better choices and reducing our greenhouse gas emissions.”

This has been the plan from the beginning, Pepper said. “The goal was first set at our board of directors’ retreat in 2016. And that goal is this: to demonstrate that it is achievable, and can be done in a cost-effective manner while still maintaining economic vitality in the county.”

‘Peninsula Clean Energy has always aimed to be a leader in community choice energy — to set the model for others. If anyone can do it, we can.’
SAN MATEO COUNTY SUPERVISOR DAVE PINE

Powering forward
For all its early success, however, PCE has only made it halfway. The county is only 50% renewable, but there’s still the matter of the other 50%.
With the threat of climate change closing in — a recent United Nations report gives the world just 12 years to reverse the crisis — many local governments have adopted aggressive “zero emissions” targets. Last year, the state of California pledged to be carbon neutral by 2045. And in September, the county declared a climate emergency, which included a promise to achieve zero emissions ahead of the state’s goal.

With the help of CCAs, 12 communities in California, including Culver City, Santa Monica, and San Mateo County, have already achieved 100% renewable power. But only one in San Mateo County — Portola Valley — is among the 12.

This is because of PCE’s two-tiered system. By default, customers receive PCE’s “Eco Plus” power mix, which is 50% renewable. They can also choose to opt up to “Eco 100,” and receive 100% renewable energy for roughly $4 more per month. The Portola Valley Town Council has voted to opt all of the town’s power up, and several other major customers, including Facebook, have also made the switch.

Overall, fewer than 2% have sprung for the upgrade. As a result, the overall grid is still about 50% renewable — the same as it was when the program launched.

PCE hasn’t gone to great lengths to change this, Pepper admitted. “To date, we have not made a big push to encourage customers to opt up,” she said.

But there’s a reason for that, she said. Instead of trying to opt everyone up individually, PCE plans to make the shift automatic. By 2025, the agency has determined, all of San Mateo County will receive 100% renewable energy, by default, at no additional charge.

“This has been the plan from the beginning,” Pepper said. “The goal was first set at our board of directors’ retreat in 2016. And that goal is this: to demonstrate that it is achievable, and can be done in a cost-effective manner while still maintaining economic vitality in the county.”

The value of solar batteries is twofold, Pepper said. In addition to providing backup power for residents who lack it, the batteries also help reduce the use of diesel generators in the county. After the first power shutoff in October, several local vendors sold out of the generators, which are heavy emitters of both carbon dioxide and other toxins.

On top of its own proposal, PCE also announced a partnership with other local CCAs to extend the battery-buying operation. The partners, which represent Alameda, San Mateo, and Santa Clara counties, will aim to have 6,000 new rooftop-solar-plus-battery systems installed across the Bay Area by next year, they say.

Both battery programs will start by targeting residents with special medical needs. Over 5,000 people in San Mateo County are enrolled in PG&E’s Medical Baseline program, and rely on electricity-dependent treatments like CPAP machines, oxygen concentrators, and refrigerated insulin. The battery programs will also support crucial community services like fire and police stations and hospitals.

In one sense, Pine said, these projects are icing on the cake for an agency already tackling a major issue like electricity. But ultimately, the scope of PCE’s efforts is what makes it a truly powerful tool for the county, he said — especially as it nears the goal of building a completely green grid.

“Peninsula Clean Energy allows us to have an agency that’s entirely focused on reducing carbon emissions,” Pine said. “We’ve been extremely successful in that with respect to energy. Now, we have to move on to everything else.”

Jan Pepper, chief executive officer of Peninsula Clean Energy, poses for a portrait in her office at PCE’s headquarters in Redwood City. She says PCE’s goal of making the county’s energy source 100% renewable by 2025 is an ambitious goal, but it’s “achievable, and can be done in a cost-effective manner while still maintaining economic vitality in the county.”

Photo by Magali Gauthier/The Almanac

January 8, 2020 AlmanacNews.com The Almanac 11
Contributions to the Holiday Fund go directly to programs that benefit Peninsula residents. Last year, Almanac readers and foundations contributed $150,000 from more than 150 donors for the 10 agencies that feed the hungry, house the homeless and provide numerous other services to those in need.

Contributions to the Holiday Fund will be matched, to the extent possible, by generous community organizations, foundations and individuals, including the Rotary Club of Menlo Park Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. No administrative costs will be deducted from the gifts, which are tax-deductible as permitted by law.

All donations to the Holiday Fund will be shared equally among the 10 recipient agencies listed on this page.

The organizations below provide major matching grants to the Holiday Fund.

- The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
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Boys & Girls Clubs
Provides after-school academic support, enrichment, and mentoring for 1,800 low-income K-12 youth at nine locations across Menlo Park, East Palo Alto, and the North Fair Oaks neighborhood of Redwood City.

Ecumenical Hunger Program
Provides emergency food, clothing, household essentials, and sometimes financial assistance to families in need, regardless of religious preference, including Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets for more than 2,000 households.

Fair Oaks Community Center
This multi-service facility, serving the broader Redwood City community, provides assistance with child care, senior programs, citizenship and immigration, housing and employment, and crisis intervention. Programs are available in Spanish and English.

LifeMoves
Provides shelter/housing and supportive services across 18 sites in Silicon Valley and the Peninsula. Serves thousands of homeless families and individuals annually on their path back to permanent housing and self-sufficiency.

Project Read
Provides free literacy services to adults in the Menlo Park area. Trained volunteers work one-on-one to help adults improve reading, writing and English language skills so they can function more effectively at home, at work and in the community. Basic English classes, weekly conversation clubs and volunteer-led computer enrichment are also offered.

Ravenswood Family Health Center
Provides primary medical and preventive health care for all ages at its clinic in East Palo Alto. Of the more than 17,000 registered patients, most are low-income and uninsured and live in the ethnically diverse East Palo Alto, Belle Haven, and North Fair Oaks areas.

St. Anthony’s Padua Dining Room
Serves hundreds of hot meals six days a week to people in need who walk through the doors. Funded by voluntary contributions and community grants, St. Anthony’s is the largest dining room for the needy between San Francisco and San Jose. It also offers take-home bags of food, as well as emergency food and clothing assistance.

Second Harvest Food Bank
The largest collector and distributor of food on the Peninsula, Second Harvest Food Bank distributed 52 million pounds of food last year. It gathers donations from individuals and businesses and distributes food to more than 250,000 people each month through more than 770 agencies and distribution sites in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

StarVista
Serves more than 32,000 people throughout San Mateo County, including children, young people and families, with counseling, prevention, early intervention, education, and residential programs. StarVista also provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services including a 24-hour suicide crisis hotline, an alcohol and drug helpline, and a parent support hotline.

Upward Scholars
Upward Scholars empowers low-income adults by providing them with financial support, tutoring, and other assistance so they can continue their education, get higher-paying jobs, and serve as role models and advocates for their children.
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Businesses & Organizations

Carstens Realty ............................... 10,000
Menlo Park Rotary Club .....................
Tour de Menlo Bike Ride ..................... 20,000
Griffin & Sons Construction .......... 150
Menlo Park Firefighters Association ...... 500
Narrative Histories - Maggie & Mark da Silva .... 200

DONATE ONLINE: siliconvalleycf.org/almanac-holiday-fund

Menlo Park dog survives gunshot, but family needs funds to pay vet bills

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

Rambo, a 4-year-old male American terrier, was shot in his owner’s Menlo Park yard by a man passing by on a bicycle the night of Dec. 29, police reported last week. After being taken to emergency veterinary services, the dog has returned home safely, and his family is organizing a fundraiser to pay to remove the bullet lodged in him.

Meanwhile, police continue to search for the man who shot Rambo and fled the scene. Menlo Park police officers responded to a call reporting gunfire on the 1100 block of Hollyburne Avenue in Menlo Park at around 8:40 p.m. that night. When they arrived, they found Rambo suffering from a gunshot wound that the owner was tending.

The owner reported that he had seen an unknown Hispanic male in his teens or early 20s, wearing a black hooded jacket and dark-colored pants, riding a dark-colored mountain bike by his home.

When the young man saw the dog in the owner’s yard, he allegedly stopped his bike, pulled out a handgun, and fired a shot at the dog before fleeing. He was reportedly last seen riding northbound on Pierce Road.

Building healthy relationships with kids is topic of Jan. 8 talk

Parents can learn techniques for speaking, listening and asking questions to build healthy relationships and de-escalate conflict with their children — called restorative practices — at a Hillview Middle School program on Wednesday, Jan. 8.

Karen Junker, a certified trainer by the International Institute for Restorative Practices, will present a talk entitled “Restorative Parenting: Introducing Restorative Practices used at school for home” at the Menlo Park school.

Junker works with administrators, teachers and students to implement schoolwide restorative practices, including conflict resolution, suspension diversion and community-building circles. These restorative practices are used within the Menlo Park City School District to “maintain healthy, conflict-free relationships or work towards creating the balanced, positive relationship you desire with your children,” according to the school district’s website.

Junker will teach parents how to use these same methods at home with their children.

The talk is part of the district’s Parent Education Speaker Series. It takes place at 6:30 p.m. in Hillview’s Performing Arts Center, 100 Elder Ave. in Menlo Park. There will be free child care, including dinner, for potty-trained children.

For more information, go to mpcsdspokesseries.com.

—By Angela Swartz
Rep. Jackie Speier looks to lower airplane noise with five bills

Congresswoman proposes legislation to allow airports to impose curfews, include noise-related health impacts in evaluation criteria for new flights

Responding to growing concerns about airplane noise, U.S. Rep. Jackie Speier has proposed a series of bills that would allow airports to restrict flight times, require the Federal Aviation Administration to give greater importance to noise impacts when developing flight routes and procedures, and allow local communities to have a significant say in developing flight plans.

The bills, which are co-sponsored by U.S. Reps. Anna Eshoo and Jimmy Panetta, were introduced last month to address the spikes in complaints about airplane noise throughout the region. The problem became acute in 2014, when the FAA rolled out its NextGen program, which created new routes and procedures affecting local communities, and other impacts of the use of airspace on the environment.

Three other bills aim to make it easier for legislators and residents to get information from the FAA and to provide feedback on new policies. The All Participating in Process Reaching Informed Solutions for Everyone Act directs the FAA to provide feedback on new policies. The All Participating in Process Reaching Informed Solutions for Everyone Act directs the FAA administration to ensure that aviation roundtables be allowed to appoint a representative to working groups involved in NextGen. These representatives, according to the bill, would be able to participate "on the same terms and conditions as a representative of the industry, an airport or a participating proponent of a procedure."

The responsive Employees Support Productive Educated Congressional Talk Act would require FAA staff to respond to members of Congress regarding flight procedures affecting their districts within 90 days. The Notified Officials to Inform Fully Impel Educated Decisions Act would require the FAA to notify local governments about new or modified flight paths.

While the issue of airplane noise has been on Palo Alto's radar for years, the city is one of several in the region that have struggled to make headway with the FAA on the topic. In June, the council considered suing the FAA over its flight plans. But despite pleas from dozens of residents, some of whom argued that the city has become a "trash heap" and a "dumping ground" for FAA's noise pollution, the council ultimately opted not to move ahead with the lawsuit. Instead, much like in April 2018, when it had similarly considered litigation, the council agreed to pursue regional partnerships on the issue and to continue its lobbying efforts.

Palo Alto is one of a dozen cities that are participating in the Santa Clara/Santa Cruz Community Roundtable, an organization that aims to foster "collaboration and resolution" on aircraft noise. Other cities involved in the roundtable, which is open to any city in the two counties, are Capitola, Cupertino, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Monte Sereno, Mountain View, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Saratoga and Sunnyvale.

Gennady Sheyner is a staff writer for the Palo Alto Weekly, The Almanac's sister publication.
Alpine Inn beer garden tent to keep party going year-round

By Rick Radin
Almanac Staff Writer

Now that the historic Alpine Inn has reopened after an extensive and expensive remodel, management has come up with a solution for keeping the indoor-outdoor tavern in operation year-round: a tent over the outdoor seating area. The structure that will go up sometime in the middle of February, if things go as scheduled, will cover 22 tables in the Inn's garden that will seat about 120 to 150 guests, according to executive chef Sean Agoliati.

Heating lamps will keep patrons warm under the tent structure, Agoliati said. The tent is now being assembled and the plans have received approval from the Portola Valley planning department for use for three months out of the year, not necessarily consecutively, he said. Management is going to keep track of the weather predictions in a way that could reach a broad audience.

"He was interested in everything from science to the arts," Iverson said. "His fiercest allegiance was to telling the truth, and telling it in a way that people could relate to ... no matter their background or political allegiance."

Over the years, Schwarz's work was honored with prestigious awards in broadcasting: three national Emmy awards, two George Foster Peabody awards, the Alfred I. DuPont-Columbia University Journalism Award for Investigative Journalism, the Investigative Reporters and Editors Award, red and blue ribbons from the American Film Festival, four awards for excellence in local broadcasting from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the grand prize in the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Awards for Coverage of the Disadvantaged, and a number of Cine Golden Eagles and local Emmys.

He is remembered for his personal ease, sense of humor and gentleness.

He is survived by his wife, Kiki, their daughters Ari and Misha, their daughters Ari and Misha, his sister Debbie Funderburk, and extended family members, and is remembered by friends and colleagues around the world.

His family is asking those interested in making a memorial donation to consider supporting Science Bytes in his memory. It is a science education film project he worked to bring to fruition. Learn more at is.gd/scibyte1 or make a donation at is.gd/scibyte2.

Academy in East Palo Alto next fall. "It's natural that we reach out and support them (district schools) as much as possible."

Donations have come in from Ibarra's colleagues, along with friends and family everywhere from New York to Spain, Wachtel Pronovost said. Funds will go toward all of the foundation's programming, she added. In December, Menlo Park city officials memorialized Ibarra by declaring Dec. 17 "Jose Ibarra Day."

Foundation officials are working with the district's teachers union and district officials to create a lasting tribute to the beloved teacher, Wachtel Pronovost said. They are waiting until the district decides which schools it will close since officials would like the tribute to be at a campus that will continue to operate, she said, adding that officials could name Belle Haven School's garden, which Ibarra started several years ago, after him.

Ibarra is survived by his husband, Dean Larson; parents Juan and Jovita Ibarra; siblings Maria Trinidad Gonzales, Silvia Alvarez, Margarita Segura, Guadalupe Ibarra and Daniel Ibarra; and many nieces and nephews.

Having (our own tent) means that we don't have to change out our staffing."

The rented tent was transparent, but the new tent will be an opaque hemp color so it will blend in with the natural environment, according to Agoliati.

The town wanted a solid roof to maintain the dark sky," said Alpine Inn operating partner Greg St. Claire. "You won't see light from the tent at night.

The 167-year-old Alpine Inn, the second-oldest operating tavern in California, reopened following a six-month makeover on Aug. 9 and did a brisk business during the fall with the parking lot full on many evenings and weekends.

A group of investors from Portola Valley that include Lori and Dek Hunter, Fred and Stephanie Harman, and Jim Kohlberg, purchased the Inn, which is also known as Rossotti's and Zott's, from the family of longtime owner Molly Alexander, who died at the age of 93 in 2018.

St. Claire said he is looking forward to starting the next phase of the remodel, which will involve upgrading and expanding the kitchen.

The tavern is serving food on compostable plates because it has not been able to install commercial dishwashers, he said.

"There is currently very limited gas and electric, and the kitchen is undersized and very antiquated," St. Claire said. "It's very hard on our scullery team, and we want to give them modern equipment."

CONSTRUCTION ALERT
Night Work on El Camino Real – Starting December 2019

WHAT:
Middle Plaza construction crews will be doing night work and partially closing travel lanes on El Camino Real between Middle Ave and Ravenswood Ave in both directions for the demolition and installation of West Bay sanitary sewer lines. For a given direction of travel, a maximum of two lanes of travel will be shut down each night, leaving at least one lane of travel open at all times. Work will take place at night when traffic volumes along El Camino Real are lower.

WHEN:
Mid-December, 2019 – mid-January 2020

Construction schedules are approximate and subject to change due to weather and unforeseen conditions.

WORK HOURS:
10:00 P.M. to 5:00 A.M, Sunday through Thursday. No night work will occur on Friday and Saturday

MORE INFORMATION
For more information about the Middle Plaza project and to sign up for construction alerts, please visit our website at middleplaza.stanford.edu

If you have any comments or questions, contact (650) 497-4052 or middleplaza@stanford.edu

Office of Government & Community Relations
450 Jane Stanford Way
Building 170, 1st Floor, Main Quad
Stanford, CA 94305
Anne Eastham Lewis
August 21, 1936 – December 14, 2019

On Saturday, December 14, 2019, Anne Eastham Lewis passed away at age 83 from progressive dementia. She is survived by her sister Margaret Tavener Eastham, her first husband John Richard Neff, her daughters Linda Neff Sunde and Pamela Lewis Thornton, her sons-in-law Doug Sunde and Tom Thornton, her son John Lewis, Jr., her nephews Thomas and David Dawkins, and her six grandchildren. Both her parents, son Steven Neff, and her second husband John M. Lewis predeceased her.

On August 21, 1936, Anne's parents Arthur Jackson Eastham and Elizabeth Wilkins Eastham of Houston celebrated their first child—a tall blond-headed, blue-eyed daughter.

Anne and younger sister Margaret embraced life in River Oaks, but longed for the family trips to their home in Galveston Bay to fish, crab, and explore the coast in the warm Texas sun. An athletic child, Anne and her doubles’ partner Jill Kyle became the top girls’ tennis team in the state of Texas! Anne graduated in 1954 from Lamar High School with honors and earned admission to Stanford University, where she majored in Spanish and joined the Texas, Ski, and Spirit Clubs.

In 1958, swept away by a tall, handsome Stanford engineer and football player named John Neff, Anne married. After college, while her husband pursued his naval career, she raised their two children Linda and Steven. Ultimately, they all settled in Atherton, California, where he began a career in Engineering. There, she volunteered with the Peninsula Volunteers and made many long-lasting friendships. Later, they moved as he took a position as a pilot with Pan Am airlines. After nine years of marriage, Anne moved with her two children to be closer to her parents in Houston, Texas.

A few years later, it was there her friends introduced her to a handsome cardiologist with a great sense of humor and two children of his own Pam and John. The families combined a year later, much to the delight of their children!

Anne fondly remembered the simple joys of the country life in Round Top, Texas, where they spent most weekends, raising Black Angus and beautiful Quarter horses. Weekends were filled with raising the four children, which proved to be a full-time job. Anne continued to volunteer, this time, with the Junior League, which she found to be very enriching too.

Years later, Anne returned to Atherton, California. After having raised her children, she obtained a Master of Divinity at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific. There, she embarked on a soul-searching journey that would nourish her the rest of her life. After obtaining her degree, she spent time in Sun Valley Idaho, where she volunteered at St. Thomas Church, and enjoyed skiing and hiking in the beauty of the mountains there. Later, she discovered the North Shore of Kauai, where she sang and hiking in the beauty of the mountains there. Later, she discovered the North Shore of Kauai, where she sang and enjoyed nature, Anne also enjoyed preparing food, and studying scripture, which proved to be a full-time job. Anne continued to volunteer, this time, with the Junior League, which she found to be very enriching too.

Working Group will talk about the student hunger problem. In March, a coalition of county-based groups, including the San Mateo County Office of Education, will host "Breakfast Up!" Representatives from California Food Policy Advocates and the county's School Breakfast Working Group will talk about the importance of school breakfast and the disparities between students who receive breakfast and those who don't in the county.

Attendees will brainstorm on how to close the "breakfast gap" in the county and beyond, according to the event description. The event takes place on March 9 from 10 a.m. to noon at 101 Twin Dolphin Drive in Redwood City.

The district will evaluate the FruitGuys program at the end of March, a coalition of county-based groups, including the San Mateo County Office of Education, will host "Breakfast Up!" Representatives from California Food Policy Advocates and the county's School Breakfast Working Group will talk about the importance of school breakfast and the disparities between students who receive breakfast and those who don't in the county.

November 3, 1929 – August 21, 2019

Anne Eastham Lewis

Her funeral was held at St. John's Chapel in Monterey, California, on January 4, 2019.

SCHOOLS

Las Lomitas School students, from left, Florin, B, Laura, B, and Savannah, 8, pick free fruit during recess on Dec. 3. The Las Lomitas School District is providing fresh fruit and other snacks to its students.

Free fruit helps fuel student learning in Las Lomitas district classrooms

By Angela Swartz
Almanac Staff Writer

A
ter the 45-minute to an hourlong bus ride from east of U.S. 101 to the neighboring towns of Menlo Park and Atherton, students grab a piece of fruit — grapes, bananas, kiwis, pears, apples and other options — before they file into classrooms at Las Lomitas Elementary and La Entrada Middle schools.

Through a partnership with South San Francisco-based fruit delivery service FruitGuys, the two-school Las Lomitas Elementary School District is piloting a program this school year in which all district students and staff are offered breakfast items during the start of their school days and at recess. The focus is on feeding the 85 Tinsley Transfer Program students, who wake up early to journey from the bayside of Menlo Park or East Palo Alto to Las Lomitas in west Atherton and La Entrada in west Menlo Park, said Superintendent Beth Polito. Buses come by for these students no later than 7 a.m. to take them to school, according to Alain Camou, principal of Las Lomitas School.

It's intended to be a solution to the "breakfast problem," Polito said. "Children were sitting on the bus and arriving (at) school, and a number of them hadn't had breakfast.'

Superintendent BETH POLITO

‘It’s intended to be a solution to the ‘breakfast problem.’
Children were sitting on the bus and arriving (at) school, and a number of them hadn’t had breakfast.’

By Beth Polito

By Beth Polito

By Beth Polito

The food helps fuel students’ bodies, and when they come back from 10 a.m. recess they are ready to learn, Katie Gordon, a first grade teacher at Las Lomitas, said in an email. Not only that, but students come to class in an excited mood after picking up fruit, she said.

Camou said that even if students eat breakfast before they board the bus to school, it’s still a long time before they sit down for lunch at 11:45.

It’s not just the students coming from east of U.S. 101 who might be struggling to eat enough during the school day, he said.

“The assumption is the child across the street (from the school) doesn’t have issues or concerns about food, he said. The food program “is opening it up to everyone,” he noted.

The district is paying for the pilot, which launched in September, with some contributions from site budgets and parent teacher associations at both schools, Polito said. The cases of fruit cost about $40 to $60 each, and the district orders four per week, with two for each school, she said.

At recess, the district also offers Las Lomitas students granola bars. At La Entrada, there are additional perishable snacks — such as string cheese and yogurt — since there is a kitchen to store them.

Officials across San Mateo County are working to address the student hunger problem. In March, a coalition of county-based groups, including the San Mateo County Office of Education, will host "Breakfast Up!" Representatives from California Food Policy Advocates and the county’s School Breakfast Working Group will talk about the importance of school breakfast and the disparities between students who receive breakfast and those who don't in the county.

Attendees will brainstorm on how to close the "breakfast gap" in the county and beyond, according to the event description. The event takes place on March 9 from 10 a.m. to noon at 101 Twin Dolphin Drive in Redwood City.

The district will evaluate the FruitGuys program at the end of the school year, Polito said. It could partner with the Sequoia Healthcare District next school year to continue and possibly expand the program, she said.
Almanac readers, what is local journalism worth to you?

As we celebrate being Atherton, Menlo Park, Portola Valley and Woodside’s most trusted news source, we also look ahead to sustaining our award-winning journalism in the decades to come.

With local retail advertising steadily declining around the nation, the future of local journalism is in the hands of our readers. Only with your direct support as a subscribing member can we retain our professional journalists and continue to provide insightful and engaging coverage of the community.

Please join your neighbors and friends in keeping strong journalism alive in your community.

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Learn more and sign up for membership at almanacnews.com/join
Longtime teaching assistant is the ‘rock star’ of Trinity School

By Angela Swartz
Almanac Staff Writer

Bin Cleland is one of the first teachers to arrive at Trinity School in Menlo Park, getting there at 7:30 a.m., before the school day begins. He’s out on the schoolyard greeting students and organizing athletic activities. The daily scenario exemplifies how Cleland, 64, “wears many hats and wears them expertly at the school, said Trinity Principal Matt Allio. He follows his daily early morning activities with classroom duties as a first grade teaching assistant, using art and mathematics in his lessons. And, he’s also a PE teacher.

“Many people at this stage in their career pick and choose, but he chooses everything, and does everything well,” said Allio. “He’s a role model for all kids. He’s out on the schoolyard in the morning, incorporating students’ names into word problems. Cleland said the word problems let students work with numbers in a different format. The problems include photos he takes, so students can observe shapes and numbers in real-life scenarios, he said.

“He brings it (math) to life and makes it engaging,” Rutherford said. “At this age (the kids) all love themselves, so it speaks to their egos. O He helps to make (math) shine a bit more.”

Cleland, who hails to campus from his Woodside home every morning, received his bachelor’s degree in art therapy at Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, and brings his love of

art and nature photography to his job at Trinity. For years, he has created greeting cards for his fellow teachers, school officials said. The cards feature sketches based on his nature photographs.

Cleland incorporates his own love of painting and close-up photos of flowers and insects into his art lessons with students. “I always have a camera in my car or on my bike with me,” he said. “I always want to stop to take a photo of an oak tree in the Horse Park on the way to work.”

Cleland is the assistant for teachers Linda Rutherford’s class. He teaches the first graders math in the mornings, incorporating students’ names into word problems. Cleland said the word problems let students work with numbers in a different format. The problems include photos he takes, so students can observe shapes and numbers in real-life scenarios, he said.

“He brings it (math) to life and makes it engaging,” Rutherford said. “At this age (the kids) all love themselves, so it speaks to their egos. O He helps to make (math) shine a bit more.”

A number of years ago, Cleland also decided to put together a book of math problems for the school’s first graders to supplement their math learning. He created the cover art for the book as well.

Cleland said he has stayed at Trinity for the past couple of decades because it’s a school where professional development is encouraged. What I do bring to the school is valued and very appreciated,” he said, noting that he likes education that is progressive but holds on to traditions that really work, which, he says, Trinity does. He arrives to teach the “whole child,” and families come to Trinity to receive that type of education, he said.

Trinity fifth grader Lucas said Cleland is “super creative and funny, and goes out of his way to make up new games” during PE classes. For example, Cleland created “capture the aliens” — a game of tag in which some students play extraterrestrials and others play humans, Lucas said.

Cleland said he tries to help students develop motor skills — the ability to sense what one’s muscles are doing as they perform the act — during PE classes.

“He’s a lot of people’s favorite teacher because he’s always going around and helping make problems better where he sees them,” Lucas said.

Cleland has such an impact on students that when he retires, there will be a shift in the Trinity School community, Rutherford said.

“He’s the rock star of the school,” she said. “Every student knows him and he knows every child.”

Hill calls for contest submissions

State Sen. Jerry Hill is calling for submissions for his 12th annual “Oughta Be a Law ... or Not” contest, which allows constituents to suggest ideas for new state legislation.

Entries may call for the creation of a new law or the repeal of an obsolete law to improve quality of

life in San Mateo County, Santa Clara County and California overall.

The contest is open to all constituents of the 13th Senate District, which includes Atherton, Portola Valley, Menlo Park, Woodside, Redwood City, East Palo Alto, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Mountain View, Pacifica, Palo Alto, and parts of unincorporated San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

“I always welcome great bill ideas and if there is more than one winner, that’s terrific — our record is four winners in a single year,” Hill said in a press release, referring to four bills inspired by constituents that he introduced in 2016, two of which became laws. The senator typically chooses a standout bill idea and introduces legislation based on it. The person who suggested the bill will have the opportunity to testify in Sacramento at hearings on the legislation.

Laws resulting from constituents’ ideas include Jojo’s Act. The

Hills calls for contest submissions

by Angels both nonprofit aimed at

San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

For the month of January, the Menlo Park Library is hosting a photo exhibit showcasing the photography of students from East Palo Alto who participated in photographer Kate Bradshaw’s “Uneven Ground” reporting series, which was published in The Almanac in September. The exhibit features 20 photographs taken by girls ages 11 to 13 enrolled in a summer program by Girls to Women, an East Palo Alto-based nonprofit aimed at empowering young women. The students responded to a prompt asking the following questions: What is healthy in your community? What is unhealthy?

The library, located at 800 Alma St. in Menlo Park, is open Mondays and Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., Tuesdays noon to 6 p.m., Thursdays and Fridays 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturdays 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sundays from noon

to 5 p.m. Bradshaw is also scheduled to speak about the series at the library on Monday, Feb. 3, at 6:30 p.m.

— Almanac staff

POLICE CALLS

These reports are from the Menlo Park and Atherton police departments and the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office. Under the law, people charged with offenses are considered innocent unless convicted. Police received the reports on the dates shown.

MENLO PARK

Auto burglary: Two people were drunk driver: Employees at Jack in the Box in the 1400 block of Willow Road called 911 to report that a vehicle hit a curb in their drive-through and that the driver was passed out behind the wheel. Several people tried banging on the window to wake him up. When police arrived they were able to wake up the driver, who showed

signs of impairment and was arrested and transported to First Chance where he was cited and released.

Fraud: Someone reported that their checking account showed fraudulent deductions because of forged checks. The action took place in the 700 block of Hamilton Avenue. The case is under investigation. Dec. 18.

Property for Destruction: A student confessed to bringing marijuana, a vape pen and a lighter to a school in the 400 block of Ivy Drive. The items were booked into the Menlo Park Police Department as property for destruction. Dec. 18.
Stanford class offers modern techniques for expectant grandparents

by Chris Kenrick

O

n a recent Monday evening, 20 soon-to-be grandparents gathered in a Stanford Health Care classroom to get their grandparenting skills up to speed before the arrival of the newest members of their families. Most of them hadn’t swaddled, fed or cared for a baby in decades, and with advanced technology, new research and different family dynamics, some of the accepted practices of baby care from those days have changed.

The group, which included 14 women and six men, shared information about their grandchildren’s impending births. Some — including a couple from Bangladesh and another from Florida — said they’d moved to the Bay Area specifically to help with child care. Several said they were taking the class at the request of their children or that their kids had paid the $65 tuition as a gift for them to attend.

The “Grandparents Seminar” at Stanford is part of a growing trend for them to attend.

Swarts’ 2.5-hour session, which covers some of the latest pediatric thinking on newborn care, attracts grandparents from throughout the region and consistently sells out.

Swarts tells her students: “You’ve all brought up great kids, but today there are some pretty significant differences from the way we did things.”

At the top of that list, Swarts said, is the way infants should be placed on their backs on a firm mattress “with absolutely nothing in the crib — no bumpers, no blankets,” she said.

Such advice comes as a surprise to many prospective grandparents who, prior to the mid-1990s, typically were advised to position infants on their stomachs for sleep. One soon-to-be grandmother said she’d retrieved old family photos in which her babies were “sleeping on lamb’s wool, on their stomachs, with bumpers and little toys — the whole nine yards.”

It’s now understood that stomach sleeping, blankets and crib bumpers increase the risk of SIDS, according to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. The Sudden Infant Death rate in the United States has dropped by about 50% since the agency’s “Back to Sleep” campaign was launched in 1994, saving thousands of lives.

Also new to many grandparents are the “skin to skin” and “rooming in” practices in today’s maternity wards, which have brought an end to nurseries in many hospitals over the past decade. Swarts said. Instead of nurses whisking a newborn away for a checkup and a bath, the baby is placed belly down directly on the mother’s chest for the first hour or more after birth. Newborn assessments are done in that position, and babies not requiring special medical attention remain in the rooms of their parents — yes, dads stay overnight in the hospital, too — throughout their hospital stay.

Swarts covers a host of other topics in her monthly evening sessions: the resurgence of swaddling, breastfeeding, cord clamps, cloth versus disposable diapers, introduction of solid food and peanuts, baby food pouches, colic, soothing methods — including baby-soothing apps — warnings against honey and baby powder and more.

She reminds grandparents to update their flu vaccinations and to wash their hands often. She notes that today’s car seats are so complicated that parents and grandparents are advised to have their installation double checked at the police or fire station.

But Swarts stresses that her single-most important message for grandparents — repeated throughout the session — is to resist the urge to offer unsolicited advice to their child and their child’s partner.

“Zip your lip. Bite your tongue,” she said. “They are the parents of this baby. Your job is to support and empower them to be good parents.”

Swarts often repeats that she “scars on my tongue” from trying this.”

She reminds grandparents to support and empower their child and their child’s partner.

“Refrain as much as you can from saying, ‘This is the way we did it for you,’” Swarts said. “They don’t want to hear that. This is their experience. If they ask you, OK, you can say, ‘We tried this.’”

And as you see how they’re evolving as parents, just take joy in that.”

For more information, go to bit.ly/StanfordGrandparent Seminar

Chris Kenrick is a freelance writer

“I really had to let her learn to be the mother rather than be the expert — and that’s a hard one when that’s your expertise.”

With a newborn, she advises grandparents to offer assistance that allows parents to focus on learning to care for their baby. Often most helpful are chores such as meal preparation, laundry, pet care, cleaning and shopping, she said.

“Refrain as much as you can from saying, ‘This is the way we did it for you,’” Swarts said. “They don’t want to hear that. This is their experience. If they ask you, OK, you can say, ‘We tried this.’”

And as you see how they’re evolving as parents, just take joy in that.”

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Chris Kenrick is a freelance writer

January 8, 2020 ■ AlmanacNews.com ■ The Almanac ■ 19
This year, the line between the big and small screen, between cinema and television, blurred more than ever. Big-spending Netflix — emboldened by last year’s Oscar-acknowledged “Roma” — led the charge again with “The Irishman,” “Marriage Story,” “The Two Popes,” “I Lost My Body,” “The King,” and “Atlantics,” among others, while Hulu continued to program new feature films and Disney+ and Apple+ entered the streaming-service fray. This year, one could watch Willem Dafoe tangle with Robert Pattinson in “The Lighthouse” at the local multiplex, or stay home and watch Dafoe fall in love with his sled dog in Disney’s “Togo,” a big-screen-quality, family adventure film instantly watchable on anything from a phone to a giant-size 4K TV. What does it mean for cinema when movies as dumb and/or chintzy as “Stuber” and “The Curse of La Llorona” compete for butts in seats with TV series as smart and/or cinematic as HBO’s “Watchmen” and Disney’s “The Mandalorian”? Choice, of course. Perhaps too much of it. Truly, there is something for everyone in today’s screen landscape. Want blockbuster movies? “Avengers: Endgame” set the new standard by skillfully wrapping up the initial phases of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (before ‘Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker’ not so satisfactorily concluded the initial “Star Wars” saga). Want intimate human-scale drama? I’ve got the Mr. Rogers flick “A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood” and indie film “The Souvenir” right here. Animated family movies? Have a “Toy Story 4” or a “Missing Link.” Foreign film lover? We’ve got you covered with everything from “Parasite” to “Pain and Glory.” “Rocketman” came along to shame those who thought “Bohemian Rhapsody” was the best of musical biopics, and “Cats” crawled into theaters to face the music with Broadway lovers. Even a good old-fashioned ensemble murder mystery came along in “Knives Out,” to tide us over until Kenneth Branagh’s Poirot returns. In other words, not much has really changed (although TV’s “Breaking Bad” suddenly became a movie — both streamed and in select theaters). But as the sheer volume of films and television increases, audiences must work harder to dig up the hidden gems (not to be confused with “Uncut Gems,” the wild new Adam Sandler dramedy). That’s where your Friendly Neighborhood Film Critic comes in, highlighting the most intriguing and, in some cases, the least widely discussed of cinematic options. Pin this list up on your bulletin board or grant it a magnet on your fridge, and you have a road map to 2019’s boldest statements, its most adventurous narratives and arresting aesthetics. In a year of cinematic stunts, like the long-take constructions of “1917” and “Long Day’s Journey into Night” (which added 3D into the bargain) and the de-aging of everyone from Robert De Niro (“The Irishman”) to Samuel L. Jackson (“Captain Marvel”), the fundamental things apply as time goes by: a dimly lit room, an illuminated screen and a story that appeals to our emotions. And away we go...
**THE TOP 10 FILMS OF 2019**

10. **THE MOUNTAIN**
   As downbeat as they come, Rick Alverson’s rigorous “The Mountain” functions as an eccentric commentary on the horror of historical ignorance and the pain of existence in a world that’s gone insane. With just a dollop of deadpan black comedy, Alverson plays out a corrupted mentor-mentee relationship between the emotionally prone, newly orphaned Andy (Tye Sheridan) and a semi-chaotic lobotomist (Jeff Goldblum) as they travel the backroads spreading traumatic brain injury to the mentally ill and the socially ostracized. The year’s most unsettling American self-portrait.

9. **END OF THE CENTURY**
   Writer-director Lucio Castro’s deceptively simple story of chance encounters, possibility and regret provides comment on gay romantic culture (and its sometime collateral damage) and how love and sex play out on individual but intersecting timelines. In 84 minutes, Castro dramatizes the lovers’ two meetings (at either end of a 20-year gap), a flashback and a daydream to clarify the tension between the power of desire and the indifference of reality. Naturalistic performances (by Juan Barberini and Ramon Pujol) and direction make this zen koan on the indifference of reality. Naturalistic performances by Juan Barberini and Ramon Pujol) and direction make this zen koan on the indifference of reality.

8. **THE SOUVENIR**
   Joanna Hogg’s agonizingly honest and mature semi-autobiographical drama explores the agonizing self-delusions and ineptitude of youth. As Hogg’s stand-in, Honor Swinton Byrne comes to hard-won realizations in her vocational and personal lives, each informing the other as the film student succumbs to the overlays of an older lover (Tom Burke) who’s harboring a dark secret (Byrne’s mother Tilda Swinton plays along as Byrne’s uneasy screen mother). Hogg’s understated approach and self-examined privilege accumulate for a distinctive take on the young-adult coming-of-age narrative.

7. **THE LAST BLACK MAN IN SAN FRANCISCO**
   Joe Talbot’s impressive debut serves up a highly personal and locally resonant story that begins as a screech on gentrification but turns out to be a lively and complex salon on family history, friendship, community and the folly of belief in ownership. Playing characters that exhibit differing shades of naive sentimentality, Anika Noni Rose and Jonathan Majors deliver breakout performances, while Talbot fearlessly creates a heightened reality that’s also grounded in some uncomfortable truths about American life — particularly its influence in buying and selling stolen property to establish and maintain the land of the free, home of the brave.

6. **LONG DAY’S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT**
   In a year of strong Chinese imports (see also “An Elephant Sitting Still” and “Ash is Purest White”), Bi Gan gave us the greatest stunner with his visionary and transformative neo-noir (natively titled “Last Evenings on Earth”). A classic “cherchez la femme” narrative gradually reveals itself to be a meditation on untrustworthy memory, as well as unconscious and celluloid dreams. As such, an amateur detective’s plodding path to find his lost love leads to an astonishing “one-take” 3D dream sequence forming the film’s final 50 minutes. A lyrical, gorgeous, but devastating reminder of precious time in the vein of director Wong Kar-wai.

5. **THE IRISHMAN**
   Flawed, but still essential, Martin Scorsese’s culminating statement on American life through a mobster lens appears at first to be a neat capper to a thematic trilogy formed with “Goodfellas” and “Casino,” but turns out to be a lively and complex salon on family history, friendship, community and the folly of belief in ownership. The year’s most unsettling American self-portrait.

4. **PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE**
   Celine Sciamma’s doomed but rapturous romance patiently observes the spark, the fire and the sad extinguishment of love. As William Butler Yeats noted, “love comes in at the eye,” dramatized here as a painter (Noemie Merlant) who falls in love with her subject (Adèle Haenel). Beautifully realized, “Portrait of a Lady on Fire” works as a feminist historical drama (foregrounding customarily forgotten late-18th century female painters), but soars as a love story of swoony beauty.

3. **A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD**
   Marielle Heller’s finely sensitive Mr. Rogers dramedy gets the magical appeal of Fred Rogers’ children’s show host, ordained minister, husband, father and friend to all. As played by Tom Hanks, Rogers could have made the convincing center of a hagiography. Micah Fitzerman-Blue and Noah Harpster’s ingenious adaptation of Tom Junod’s “Esquire” profile “Can You Say ... Hero?” sees Rogers as the most extraordinary kind of human: capable, like all of us, of succumbing to anger and selfishness, but choosing again and again to look beyond himself and truly see and hear each person he encounters. In doing so, Mr. Rogers helps to heal the temporarily broken (embodied by Matthew Rhys’ world-weary journalist).

2. **CATS**
   This svengali of songs? This tedious, talent-deficient adaptation of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s famous/infamous spandex-and-whiskers stage musical becomes an unintentionally funny and uncannily unsettling big-screen monstrosity by digitally infecting stars like Dame Judi Dench and Idris Elba with cat-scratch fever. There aren’t enough CGI artists in the world to make this work.

1. **PLAYMOBIL: THE MOVIE**
   What do you get when you bring together dull animation, charmless characters, unthrilling adventure, flat attempts at humor, and generic-brand songs? This risible, talent-deficient “Lego Movie” rip-off.

See FILMS, page 22
Submitted by Nancy Gill

Steve and Anne Gill will be joined by talented Menlo School alumni and others in a benefit for The LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired at Menlo School.

Free Organ Recital

Weekly noon-time organ recitals on the historic organs at All Saints Episcopal Church. Each recital will include at least one work by J.S. Bach. Tuesdays through May 26, 12:15-12:45 p.m. Free. All Saints Episcopal Church, 555 Waverley St., Palo Alto. allsaints.org

Tales & Talks

California Senate District 13 Climate and Environment Forum All six candidates for California Senate District 13 discuss the climate crisis and key environmental legislation impacting this region. Jan. 15, 7:30-9:30 p.m. Free. Menlo-Atherton High School Performing Arts Center, 555 Middlefield Road, Atherton. eventbrite.com

Get Ready for Spring Gardening

Learn about proper site selection, how to prepare soil and the best timing for seeds and seedlings. Jan. 8, 7-8:30 p.m. Free. Menlo Park Library, 800 Alma St., Menlo Park, menlopark.org

Restorative Parenting: Karen Junker, certified trainer for the International Institute for Restorative Practices, discusses how to maintain healthy, conflict-free relationships and work toward creating a balanced, positive relationship between parents, children and family. Jan. 11, 6-10 p.m. Free. Hillview Middle School, 1100 Elster Ave, Menlo Park. mpccstomptalks.org

Stairway Walks in San Francisco


Kiersten White’s "Chosen"


Steve Inskeep with Angie Coiro "Imperfect Union"

" Imperfect Union." NPR’s Steve Inskeep explores the life stories of one of America’s earliest power couples: John and Jessie Menlo Park. Jan. 14, 7:30-8:30 p.m. $15-$45. Kapier’s Books, 1010 El Camino Real, Menlo Park, kapiers.org

Trade and Empire: African Art’s Golden Age


Upcycling Life by Downscaling Stuff

The event features a film screened with Dee Williams, author of the bestselling book "The Big Tiny." Participants get practical tips for getting rid of stuff, and see how one woman downsized to owning less than 100 items to maximize the amount of space in her RV. Jan. 8, 8:30-7:30 p.m. Free. Bethany Lutheran Church, 1055 Cloud Ave., Menlo Park. Bethanyrecreation.com

Family

A Day at the Farm: Visitors can reserve a day at the Hidden Villa farm and take turns to include private farm tours for up to 30 people and one of three picnic areas. Dates vary through May 23, times vary. $155-$275, prices vary between packages. Hidden Villa, 26870 Moody Rd., Los Altos Hills, hiddenvilla.org

Road Play Learn

Learn tips to prepare children to read and express creativity through books and arts and crafts. Jan. 11, 11 a.m.-noon. Free. Belle Haven Library, 413 Ivy Drive, Menlo Park. menlopark.org

Second Sunday Family Day

The Anderson Collection has family activities every second Sunday of the month in collaboration with the Cantor Arts Center, offering family-focused museum tours, art making and hands-on art making. Jan. 12, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Free. Cantor Arts Center, 338 Lomita Drive, Stanford. events.stanford.edu

Dance

Journey of the Simorgh: A dance and music concert by the Simorgh Dance Collective, adapted from Farid ud-Din Attar’s Persian epic, “The Conference of the Birds.” Jan. 11, 7 p.m. $35-$50. Menlo-Atherton High School Performing Arts Center, 555 Middlefield Road, Atherton. journeyofthesimorgh.bpt.me

Film

Basaquiel" Jeffrey Wright portrays Jean Michel Basquiat in this documentary about the world-renowned New York street artist’s struggles with fame and identity. Jan. 13, 8-10:30 p.m. $25-$50. Menlo Park Library, 800 Alma St., Menlo Park, menlopark.org

Submitting items for the Calendar

Go to AlmanacNews.com and see the Community Calendar module at the top right side of the page. Click on “Add your event.” If the event is of interest to a large number of people, also e-mail a press release to Editor@AlmanacNews.com.
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