I f you’ve lived in Portola Valley awhile, there’s a good chance that you know Lew Hess. “(With) that big smile blasting out of the truck, you always know it’s Lew because nobody has a smile that size,” said Jean Isaacson, who’s lived in town since 1968. “I’ve never seen him in a cranky mood.”

Hess, a UPS driver who delivered packages and parcels throughout Portola Valley for 35 years, was all smiles on July 31, his last day before retirement. After a final day’s work winding his way through the tree-lined roads, past homemade signs thanking him for his service — and “endless dog treats” — Hess made his way to the parking lot of the Portola Valley Hardware store, where residents held a socially distanced “clap-out,” signed a photo book Hess’ girlfriend made and shared past homemade signs thanking them for everything they’ve done for me and how kind they’ve been to me.”

A Menlo Park resident, Hess moved to the South Bay from Nebraska in 1963 when he was only a few months old. He grew up with his sister and mother, spending most of his childhood in San Jose and Campbell. After graduating high school, Hess worked for his parents’ furniture company, then took college courses and worked as a waiter, among other things. He decided that he wanted a job that had good benefits and allowed him to work outdoors and get some exercise, and UPS fit the bill.

The company, however, wouldn’t hire him until he turned 21. That year, 1984, he got a job in the fall as Christmas help and was told he’d automatically be laid off the first day of retirement, which was July 31. After 35 years on the Portola Valley delivery route, he was greeted by signs, gifts and thank you notes as a masked and socially distanced group said goodbye.

In his statement, Morrow argued. He said he didn’t have evidence that the business and nonprofit activities that were most recently shut down, such as gyms, nail salons, hair salons, barber shops and places of worship, are spreading the coronavirus at a higher rate than other businesses and operations that are permitted to continue.

He argued that the state health department’s actions represented overreach. “While it is true the State Health Officer and the Local Health Officer have partially overlapping statutory authorities, it is generally understood, and there is very long precedence, that the State Health Officer doesn’t take action against the Local Health Officer unless there is an ask to do so, the Local Health Officer can’t take action because of exterminating circumstances, or the Local Health Officer is negligent,” he said in his statement.

The best estimate for the rate at which COVID-19 is spreading in San Mateo County was 0.91, and represents the average number of people an infected person will infect. An R-eff value of less than one means that the rate of spread is decreasing, according to the county’s COVID-19 data website.

That rate has been dropping for at least four weeks, which is a positive sign, Morrow said. In addition, hospitalizations are stable and may be decreasing, and the number of deaths has been low recently, he added.

“What’s causing the spread is not primarily the activities of businesses that were shut down, Morrow argued. He said he didn’t have evidence that the business and nonprofit activities that were most recently shut down, such as gyms, nail salons, hair salons, barber shops and places of worship, are spreading the coronavirus at a higher rate than other businesses and operations that are permitted to continue.

Dr. Scott Morrow
on your list of safe places to go

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—Mary Hawn, MD | Chair of the Department of Surgery, Stanford Medicine

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High school principals join call to fire superintendent

By Tyler Callister
Almanac Staff Writer

After receiving letters from local teachers and school administrators calling for the removal of Superintendent Mary Streshly, the Sequoia Union High School District board is still weighing her future.

Streshly's contact is up for renewal, and the board is expected to continue its private deliberations after meeting in two closed sessions to discuss her evaluation, one at its regular meeting Aug. 5 and another in a special meeting Aug. 11.

A letter from the Sequoia District Teachers Association (SDTA) was publicly released two days before the Aug. 5 meeting, announcing a vote of no confidence in Streshly and listing a number of specific complaints.

The succinct letter sent to the board by tenured administrators called for her immediate termination and had 22 signatures representing most of the high schools in the district and included Assistant Superintendent Bonnie Hansen.

"Dr. Streshly's inability to make decisions, communicate plans, or articulate a coherent vision has resulted in frustration and exhaustion at all levels of certified and paraprofessional management. These ongoing issues are not new, but have been exacerbated by the pandemic crisis such that our ability to meet the needs of students, families, and staff is jeopardized," the letter said.

The Almanac made repeated requests for a copy of the letter, which was dated July 31, but the district did not provide it until Aug. 11.

The tenured administrators who signed included the principals and vice principals of Menlo-Atherton, Carlmont, Sequoia and Woodside high schools and East Palo Alto Academy. Notably, it was not signed by the principal of TIDE Academy, a friend of Streshly.

The board is taking the issues raised in the union's resolution seriously, said board president Allen Weiner after the Aug. 11 meeting.

"The board took no action during today's closed session, but will continue its work on this matter," he said.

As of The Almanac's Wednesday press deadline, the board had not yet scheduled its next meeting on the subject.

In its Aug. 3 statement, the SDTA cited what it saw as Streshly's "lack of experience, poor communication, and absence of clear vision which have led to confusion and sown division throughout the district," as leading to a vote of no confidence from the union.

Local elementary schools weigh waiver option to open this fall

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

A new waiver system could allow elementary schools serving transitional kindergartners through sixth graders to bypass mandated closures and reopen for in-person classes. But are local schools ready?

The California Department of Public Health released its guidelines for reopening in-person learning for elementary schools on Aug. 3.

Under state guidelines, middle schools and high schools can't reopen unless the county they are in has been off the state's watchlist for 14 days.

The state's watchlist tracks a number of standardized metrics such as the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents, hospital capacity and testing rates. San Mateo County was put on the watchlist on Aug. 1 and it's not clear when it will come off.

When it comes to local public schools, the Menlo Park City and Portola Valley school districts have decided to offer remote learning at least to start out the year. The Las Lomitas and Woodside school districts had yet to announce decisions.

Nativity School in Menlo Park and some other local Catholic elementary schools planned to apply for a waiver, said Monsignor Steven Ottellini, pastor at Nativity Church.

A sign on the Nativity School campus reads that the school year will start on Aug. 20. The elementary school is seeking a waiver to open for in-person classes.

See GRADING, page 14

See WAIVER, page 17
COVID-19 updates: Pac-12 calls off fall season, governor talks economic recovery plans

By Embarcadero Media staff

San Mateo County reported about 69 new cases of COVID-19 on Tuesday, bringing the county’s total to 6,535. The death toll has stayed at 122 since Monday. Fifty-five people are hospitalized as of Tuesday.

Santa Clara County reported 121 new cases of the coronavirus on Wednesday, bringing the total to 13,059. The death toll of 207 remains unchanged since Tuesday. There are 166 people hospitalized, 23 of which are new.

Data from both counties are incomplete due to a problem with the state’s reporting system for communicable diseases.

Governor discusses economic recovery plan

At a press conference Wednesday, Gov. Gavin Newsom addressed a large package of economic recovery plans that his office is currently negotiating with the state Legislature. Newsom said he hopes to move forward with state-funded infrastructure projects, as well as wildfire prevention and green initiatives; expanding workforce training programs; improving technological infrastructure for the workforce through the Office of Digital Innovation; and other initiatives to help businesses and employees combat the COVID-19 pandemic, including a state tax exemption for small businesses that received federal funding.

The governor also mentioned that he will announce detailed plans on how the state will close the “digital divide” by helping more students and workers get access to high-speed broadband.

Pac-12 calls off fall season

The Pac-12 Conference announced Tuesday that it has postponed all sports through the end of 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. The decision affects two Bay Area schools in the conference: Stanford University and the University of California at Berkeley.

The Pac-12 CEO Group unanimously voted to postpone the fall sports calendar after consulting the conference’s Medical Advisory Committee over concerns for player and coach safety. Pac-12 officials also said they would consider a return of postponed sports in spring 2021 if conditions improve.

In a statement, Stanford University Athletics Director Bernard Muir said the postponement is “disappointing for many people, but none more than our student-athletes.” He remains hopeful that the university will figure out a way to give those student-athletes a chance to participate in their sport in the winter and spring.

Unlike professional sports, college sports cannot operate in a bubble, Pac-12 Commissioner Larry Scott said. “Our athletic programs are a part of broader campuses in communities where in many cases the prevalence of COVID-19 is significant.”

State can’t afford White House plan

The state of California does not have the financial wherewithal to afford the White House’s plan to extend unemployment benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic, Newsom said Monday.

Newsom said in his daily coronavirus briefing Monday that the state would have to cover 25% of the costs associated with a $400 per week unemployment insurance payment, as outlined in a memorandum President Donald Trump announced over the weekend.

That 25% would amount to the state spending between $700 million and $3 billion in tax-payer funds per week. The state would have to make sharp cuts to public services to foot that bill, Newsom said.

“The state does not have an identified resource of $700 million per week that we haven’t already obligated,” he said.

While the state received billions from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act passed by Congress in March, Newsom said all of that funding has already been allocated.

Comprehensive COVID-19 coverage


CalMatters and Bay City News Service contributed to this report.
Menlo Park study shows pressures on housing in low-income communities

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

T
hree years in the works, a study on housing in the city of Menlo Park is finally out.

The study, which the city made Facebook pay for when it approved the company’s most recent expansion, was led by University of California at Berkeley professor Karen Chappel and involved teen researchers through Y-PLAN, a youth education and advocacy organization based out of UC Berkeley’s Center for Cities + Schools. It is aimed at evaluating the local housing supply and inventory in Belle Haven, East Palo Alto and North Fair Oaks.

As part of Facebook’s deal with the city, the company agreed to use the findings of the study — which it funded with at least $350,000 — to shape how it spends an additional $1 million to create a “housing innovation fund.”

The fund is expected to be led by an eight-member advisory group including Facebook representatives, as well as local elected officials and community organization representatives. The city managers of East Palo Alto and Menlo Park would each select one member, and Facebook would pick the rest. It’s to be set up as a nonprofit, but may be tied to an existing nonprofit, according to a staff report.

Chappel’s team collected input from representatives of around 40 nonprofits and community organizations, she said.

The findings

The study, called “Investment and Disinvestment as Neighbors: A Study of Baseline Housing Conditions in the Bay Area Peninsula,” looked at the patterns at the parcel and block level in the areas of Belle Haven, East Palo Alto and North Fair Oaks.

The study reported that its findings confirmed that those three communities are experiencing disproportionate pressure in the housing market compared to the rest of the San Mateo County.

While those areas have historically been low-income, working-class communities, the study reports, there are signs of recent change — growing turnover in the population, a decrease in the number of school-aged kids and rising homelessness, as well as a high rate of households that are overcrowded and burdened by the cost of rent.

Close to 60% of households in Belle Haven spend more than 35% of their income on rent, compared to around 40% of households in San Mateo County overall who do so, according to the study.

But the three communities are also undergoing changes that differ from one another. East Palo Alto, for instance, the study reported, “had the most observable signs of disinvestment” such as overgrown lawns, absentee owners and sidewalks missing or in poor conditions, while Belle Haven had more signs of investment and real estate speculation.

The study also found that between 2006 and 2012, Belle Haven experienced twice as many foreclosures as the rest of Menlo Park despite having only roughly one-quarter of the number of housing units and was hit substantially harder by the foreclosure crisis than wealthier areas in Menlo Park.

It also found that Belle Haven had experienced the highest degree of real estate speculation in the communities studied, with over 6% of residential parcels experiencing a sale of at least one flip — defined as being sold twice within one year — between 1995 and 2017, compared to 3% in the rest of Menlo Park, just under 6% in East Palo Alto and 5% in North Fair Oaks.

Recommendations

The study also raised a number of policy suggestions for Menlo Park study shows pressures on housing in low-income communities

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

C
ome November, Menlo Park will have both a contested and an uncontested City Council race, based on paperwork candidates have filed to run for local offices.

The deadline to file paperwork to run for City Council was Friday, Aug. 7.

This year’s election represents the completion of the city’s switch to district elections, which means that candidates now campaign as representatives of just one area of the city, rather than to represent the city at large.

Three candidates have qualified to run for District 3, which currently does not have a district representative on the city Council. They are Max Fennell, Chelsea Nguyen and Jen Wolosin.

Fennell is a professional triathlete and coffee entrepreneur. Nguyen is a parent of three, as well as a former refugee, military police trainer and theology student.

Wolosin is the founder of the Parents for Safe Routes group, an advocacy organization focused on making Menlo Park safer and easier to traverse on foot and bike, particularly for children going to school. She has also served on the city’s Transportation Master Plan Oversight and Outreach Committee and on its Safe Routes Task Force.

District 3 includes the neighborhoods of Vintage Oaks, Felton Gables, Linfield Oaks, part of the Caltrain line and a small square of Menlo Park west of El Camino Real bordered by Santa Cruz Avenue, Valparaiso Avenue and Crane Street.

Only one candidate has qualified to run for District 5: City Council incumbent Ray Mueller, who is finishing his second term representing the city at large.

Catherine Carlton, who also lives in District 5 and was elected at large twice, is not running.

District 5 covers Sharon Heights, Stanford Hills, and the portion of Menlo Park north of West Menlo Park, including Santa Cruz Avenue and San Francisco Creek, with its northeastern border zigzagging from Cotton Street to Middle Avenue to San Mateo Drive.

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

In Menlo Park, three candidates enter race for District 3 seat

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

CRIME BRIEFS

Clerk stabbed during robbery

A 27-year-old Menlo Park man was arrested Sunday afternoon as the suspect in the stabbing of a convenience store clerk during a robbery, police said.

Matthew Bertolucci was booked into the San Mateo County Jail on suspicion of robbery and assault with a deadly weapon in connection with an attack at the 7-Eleven store on the 500 block of Oak Grove Avenue in Menlo Park reported about 3 p.m. Sunday, police said. The store clerk suffered stab wounds on his neck and hand and was taken to the hospital for treatment. Police said the injuries were not considered to be life-threatening.

Officers located Bertolucci after a search of the area, with help from an “alert citizen,” police said. He was found to still be in possession of stolen property from the store and a knife believed to have been used in the attack on the clerk, police added.

The robbery and assault remain under investigation. Anyone with information regarding this incident is asked to call Menlo Park police at (650) 330-6300.

—Bay City News Service

Burglary suspects arrested

Atherton police arrested two Redwood City residents in connection with a residential burglary reported at 2:24 p.m. on Aug. 6.

The resident arrived at the home on Parker Avenue and found it had been ransacked. There was footage of the two suspects on surveillance video, and the point of entry appeared to be through a first-floor bathroom window.

Officers searching the area found two suspects matching the description from the video, who were riding bicycles near Woodside High School. Police arrested a 39-year-old woman and a 41-year-old man and booked them into San Mateo County Jail.

Police said the suspects were in possession of the victim’s jewelry (two bead necklaces), a pair of Lindberg sunglasses, and a porcelain heart-shaped container, which had a combined estimated value of $3,500.

—Tyler Callister

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Recommendations

The study also raised a number of policy suggestions for
Familiar names challenge incumbents for seats on fire board

By Julia Brown

There will be a contested election for two Menlo Park Fire Protection District board seats after two challengers qualified for the ballot in recent days.

Sean Ballard, a local businessman who ran for a seat on the board in 2018, and former board member Peter Carpenter have qualified for the ballot along with incumbents Rob Silano and Virginia Chang Kiraly, according to the San Mateo County candidate roster. Both Silano and Chang Kiraly have been on the board since November 2011.

Carpenter, a retired Menlo Park resident, didn’t run for reelection when his term ended in 2018. He previously served on the fire board for over 15 years and has decades of management experience, including as former executive director of Stanford University Medical Center and executive vice president of ALZA Corporation, according to his candidate’s statement.

“Our superb fire chief will retire in 2021,” Carpenter wrote. “In this challenging time, it is crucial that you elect those candidates who will effectively recruit a new chief and who will ensure a smooth transition of leadership such that the district can continue to be one of the best in the nation.”

Ballard served as the resident representative on the fire district’s Strategic Planning Subcommittee and on the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) executive board, according to a 2018 Almanac article.

He told The Almanac as a candidate for the board in 2018 that he thought the district could be more transparent in providing information to the public about upcoming meetings and budget details, and that he could contribute to the board as someone who’s had a career in finance.

Board members serve four-year terms in the district, which covers Menlo Park, Atherton, East Palo Alto and nearby unincorporated areas of San Mateo County.

Portola Valley Mayor Jeff Aalfs seeks third term on council

Fire safety, housing are biggest issues facing town, he says

By Julia Brown

Election Day on Nov. 3 will mark the first time Portola Valley Mayor Jeff Aalfs runs for a contested council seat, as well as the first contested council election in town since 2013.

Aalfs, a sustainability professional who was appointed to the Town Council in 2011, is joined on the ballot by challengers Mary Hufty, a former town committee member and retired family physician; Sarah Wernikoff, a Portola Valley School District volunteer with a background in e-commerce and nonprofit management; and Angela Hey, a management consultant who serves on the town’s Bicycle, Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Committee, according to her website. Councilwoman Ann Wengert is not running for reelection.

Since Wengert is not running, the deadline to file papers to run for a council seat was extended to 5 p.m. on Wednesday, after The Almanac’s press deadline. Check almanacnews.com for updates.

A 14-year resident of Portola Valley, Aalfs believes the town’s two biggest concerns are fire safety and housing.

“We’re doing everything we can right now to prepare for the upcoming fire season,” he said. “Last summer we formed a fire preparedness committee that made 35 recommendations that the council accepted. It all got slowed down badly by COVID, but we’ve been doing a lot to make our main roads and emergency exits from town more safe by removing excess vegetation.”

He added that he would like to see the fire code updated to promote more fire-safe construction when people build or renovate housing.

Asked about the proposal from Portola Valley Neighbors United, a newly formed group of residents working to preserve the town’s rural character, to adopt a wildfire prevention and safety ordinance, and establish a public safety officer to enforce it, Aalfs said he doesn’t believe such a position is necessary.

“We have worked very hard to be fiscally responsible, and that means keeping a very lean staff,” he said. “They (Woodside Fire Protection District officials) have the authority to oversee vegetation removal on public and private property. The idea of having a full-time person here, I don’t think it’s necessary at this point. ... I don’t think it adds much to the efforts we’re making right now, which are considerable.”

On the housing front, Aalfs said the town will have to determine its response to the housing crisis and state mandates on providing housing. He acknowledged that these two biggest concerns — housing and wildfire safety — are somewhat at odds with each other.

“If we build too much in Portola Valley, there’s concern that we’d create more fire danger, and we’ve always prided ourselves on our rural environment out here, but not overdeveloping,” he said. “The tricky question is, how do we do our part with the housing crisis without making it too crowded or losing that rural feel, because it’s an important part of living here.”

The construction of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) has been a big tool in helping the town meet state housing requirements. The town has also developed affiliated housing partners, which are institutions — such as Woodside Priory School — that Portola Valley has agreed to work with if they want to build employee housing on their land. The school has 17 housing units on its property for faculty and staff members and just broke ground on six more, Aalfs said.

“They have been the staples we’ve gone by in the past, and I hope we can rely on them to some extent,” he said. “I’m hoping our future efforts to provide more housing will look more like our past efforts for the time being.”

Aalfs, who works as a consultant dealing with energy code and green building compliance mostly for residential architectural projects, says the environment has always been one of his passions, and that during his time in office he has “always tried to make sure we’re leading the way in any way we can in addressing things like climate change.”

“Aside from concerns everyone agrees are concerns, fire and housing, I’m always thinking about the environment,” he said.

Asked about the creation of the race and policing council subcommittee and the work that’s been done so far to engage community members around those subjects, he said, “As an affluent white community, I don’t think we’ve had a lot of instances of police brutality. But, we have an opportunity to speak out on behalf of other communities, and I think we have a responsibility to do that.”

He added that he believes his fellow council members have been thoughtful and patient as they weigh different issues, and he hopes the new council members will do the same, “as opposed to shouting slogans or throwing rocks.”

He added that trying to lead during the coronavirus pandemic has made 2020 a “stressful year,” but said he still enjoys the work and engaging with the community.

“I’ve done this for nine years and I’ve enjoyed it,” he said. “I don’t see myself doing this forever — this might be my last term — but I think I have more to offer.”

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Rep. Eshoo, mental health advocates push for suicide prevention legislation

By Katie King / San Jose Spotlight

A few weeks ago, Palo Alto resident Victor Ojakian received an unexpected letter in the mail.

It was from one of his son’s former classmates. The boys had gone to secondary school together and played some of the same sports, he said, but they weren’t best friends or even especially close companions. Yet the man still wrote to Ojakian more than a decade after his son’s death to say he had never forgotten his friend.

“He still thinks about my son,” Ojakian said. “He essentially said it’s never left him.”

When someone dies from suicide, Ojakian explained, countless others are affected by the loss. Family, friends, neighbors, classmates, co-workers and church members all share in the sorrow; the pain ripples throughout the community and remains for years to come.

That grief casts a wide net in the United States. Recent data from the National Center for Health Statistics shows that suicide has ranked as the 10th leading cause of death for all ages each year since 2008. But some lawmakers in Congress are now taking steps that they hope will save lives.

The Energy and Commerce Committee passed three bills on July 15 related to suicide prevention, including The Campaign to Prevent Suicide Act, which would launch a national media campaign to raise awareness; the Suicide Prevention Lifeline Improvement Act of 2019, which would enhance the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline; and the Suicide Prevention Act, which would establish two grant programs to help hospitals or health centers identify and support at-risk patients.

If signed into law, each bill would provide a notable amount of funding. The lawmakers allotted $10 million each year from fiscal years 2020 through 2024 for the media campaign, and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline — a nationwide network of more than 160 centers that run crisis hotlines — would see its funding increased to $50 million each year from 2020 to 2022. Meanwhile, $30 million would be doled out each year from 2021 to 2025 to establish the grant programs.

Rep. Anna Eshoo of Palo Alto, who chairs the FCC’s Health Subcommittee where the bills originated, said that suicide is a serious crisis that must be addressed. The Democratic congresswoman and legislative action is even more urgently needed due to COVID-19.

“The state of mental health for many has only worsened since the beginning of the pandemic,” she said. “A recent Kaiser Family Foundation poll found that half of all adults report that their mental health has been negatively impacted due to the coronavirus.”

Eshoo added that her own district is no exception to the suicide epidemic.

“Silicon Valley has had an alarmingly high rate of suicide for years,” she said.

There were 719 total recorded suicides in Santa Clara County from 2014 to 2018, according to data from Santa Clara County Behavioral Health Services. There were 148 suicides in 2018, or a rate of 7.63 per 100,000 individuals. That number was slightly higher than figures from 2016 and 2017, which recorded 134 and 133 suicides, respectively.

Since the start of the pandemic, Santa Clara County has seen a rise in calls to a suicide prevention hotline — a trend that is mirrored nationally. Until four months ago, San Jose did not even have a suicide prevention policy.

The national Disaster Distress Helpline saw an uptick of 900 percent more calls in May compared to May 2019. Santa Clara County received 215 calls in May 2020 compared to 157 in February, before the shelter-in-place orders were enacted.

Keeping with national trends, the data showed that Santa Clara County’s men have been disproportionately affected. Men died by suicide at a rate of 11.91 per 100,000 individuals in 2018. For females, that figure was 3.25.

Melissa Mayes, executive director for the Teen Therapy Center of Silicon Valley, said she and her clinical team appreciate any effort from lawmakers to shine a light on suicide and the underlying mental health conditions that lead to it. Her team applauded the extra funding for crisis hotlines.

“Crisis lines are a great support to clients because it allows for anonymity and fosters vulnerability. Many times clients are able to process the best by verbalizing away their worries; sometimes journaling, exercising and talking to a pet just doesn’t suffice,” they wrote. “You really need a human who you know can’t tell any of your friends what is going on.”

Officials at the center added that funneling some money from the bills into the nation’s education system and creating more school-based mental health programs would also be beneficial for at-risk youth.

Ojakian said he welcomes any legislative efforts to prevent suicide. In addition to being a suicide loss survivor, he also serves as the co-president for the Board of Directors at NAMI Santa Clara County, which supports and advocates for those with mental disorders.

But Ojakian also noted one area of concern.

One of the potential new programs would authorize the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to award grants to state, local and tribal health departments. In return, grant recipients must provide their suicide data to the organization for research purposes.

Ojakian said he hoped the CDC will be straightforward when it comes to sharing their findings with the public. Guns are a major means by which people in the U.S. take their lives, he explained, but he fears the CDC would face political pressure to downplay any mention of firearms due to the intense national debate over gun control.

Ojakian, however, said he supports the bills and that change will come in increments.

“We have a hill to climb because there’s been decades of negativity around mental health,” Ojakian said. “But it’s changing — these bills are indicative of that.”

Any person who is feeling depressed, troubled or suicidal can call 1-800-784-2433 to speak with a crisis counselor. People in Santa Clara County can call 1-855-278-4204. Spanish speakers can call 1-888-628-9454.

People can reach trained counselors at Crisis Text Line by texting 741741.

Additional resources can be found paloaltolive.com/news/2017/05/05/resources-how-to-help-those-in-crisis.

This article was originally published July 26 by San Jose Spotlight.
Menlo Park resident to take reins of Silicon Valley Leadership Group

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

A menlo Park resident and investment banking executive took the reins of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, a prominent advocacy group in the region on Monday, Aug. 10.

The group announced on July 23 that Ahmad Thomas, a Menlo Park resident, will succeed Carl Guardino as the group’s CEO.

Guardino, as the group’s CEO.

The Silicon Valley Leadership Group is a 43-year-old nonprofit business advocacy organization that represents the policy interests of 350 member companies and 26 sectors, according to its website. Guardino led it for 23 years.

Thomas is the group’s fourth CEO and its first African American CEO, according to a press statement.

He has been a director at Barclays Capital for 10 years, and worked for five years as a legislative assistant in the U.S. Senate, according to his LinkedIn profile.

“Our community has always had serious issues to tackle, but with unprecedented economic challenges brought on by a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic and reckoning with systemic racism, we need to lead with industry-wide initiatives that drive both the national dialogue and bring about real, measurable change,” he said in the press statement.

Thomas served as senior advisor for economics and business issues for U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein. “Ahmad’s practical understanding of how businesses interact with the community will be invaluable as he carries on the work of Carl Guardino, who made transportation, housing and career development cornerstone issues for the leadership group,” Feinstein said in the statement.

Thomas’s priorities are to address housing, transportation and education challenges in the region. He also aims to focus on racial justice and equity, including expanding the diversity of the Silicon Valley workforce at all levels, especially on corporate boards and within executive lineups.

He plans to help member companies to “identify and hire more underrepresented minorities while also outlining concrete solutions to fund more Black-owned and Latinx-owned start-ups,” the statement added.

“Thomas brings both the vision and the legislative and business experience needed to lead our team into a new decade of new challenges and opportunities,” said Stephen Milligan, chair of the group’s board of directors.

Thomas holds an MBA from the Wharton School of Business, a master’s degree from the London School of Economics and a bachelor’s degree from Cornell University. He also sits on the board of directors at HealthRIGHT 360 and volunteers as a startup advisor.

Thomas lives in Menlo Park with two sons and his wife, Dr. Reema Thomas, who is a practicing neurologist at Stanford Hospital and Lucilleńska.

Facebook fund has helped build or protect about 600 Midpeninsula homes

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

Facebook announced Aug. 6 that its Catalyst Fund, dedicated to supporting local housing needs for lower-income residents, has so far preserved or produced about 600 affordable housing units near Facebook’s Menlo Park headquarters.

About 70% of those units have been reserved for households with extremely low and very low incomes, according to Facebook.

The fund was created in December 2016 after months of negotiations between Facebook and a coalition of local nonprofits including Youth United for Community Action, Faith in Action Bay Area, Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto and Casa de Vencinos del Lado Oeste, East Palo Alto.

At the time, a number of nonprofit and community members raised concerns that the corporation’s expansion set to draw more than 6,000 new workers to the additional office development, would worsen displacement pressures in the communities of color in closest proximity to Facebook, such as East Palo Alto, North Fair Oaks and Belle Haven.

The fund is on track to create about 750 affordable homes by 2022, according to the statement.

Among the projects that Facebook has provided funding for are:

- The Light Tree Project, offering nearly 200 affordable units in an all-electric complex by Eden Housing in East Palo Alto.
- The Walnut Street Apartment complexes, set to offer two dozen affordable apartments with support services for low-income residents near downtown San Carlos.
- Casa de Sobrato, a project by the St. Francis Center to renovate and preserve the affordability of 50 apartments in Redwood City.
- 935 Weeks, a 130-unit affordable development with a vocational program, after school and summer programs for kids, leadership development program for youth, financial literacy programs and other services for special needs residents in East Palo Alto.

The City Council agreed to review the findings of the study alongside a regionwide study on housing at a later date. Councilwoman Betsy Nash also favored having a number of city commissions review the information presented in the study.

Go to isgd.housingstudy to access the full study online.

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

The Almanac News
August 14, 2020

County supervisors OK $5M in help for renters, property owners

By Bay City News Service

San Mateo County supervisors on Aug. 4 approved allocating up to $5 million in federal funds to provide support to renters and property owners adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The allocations include $2 million in rental assistance, up to $2 million to support small residential property owners and $1 million for assistance programs, such as incentives for landlords and tenants to compromise on back rent, legal services, and educational programs.

The funds come from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds provided by the federal government.

Board President Warren Slocum said that this was a step toward creating a “win-win” situation. “We’re trying to create a situation that benefits small landlords as well as people and families so that they can stay in their homes and not end up homeless,” Slocum said.

Before the pandemic, renters in the county were already “rent-burdened,” according to a board memo, with some paying more than 50% of their income on rent. Now, many have also lost income, with the unemployment rate in San Francisco and San Mateo counties at 11.7% in June 2020, more than five times the rate of 2.3% in June 2019, according to data from the state’s Employment Development Department.

Shirley Gibson, directing attorney of the Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County, said during public comment that diversifying the assistance fund was necessary to help families recovering from the pandemic.

“What is good for tenants is good for landlords and what is good for landlords is good for tenants. In these unprecedented times, there aren’t two sides,” Gibson said.

The board also extended the repayment period for tenants unable to pay rent due to the pandemic.

When the countywide moratorium on evictions expires on Aug. 31, tenants will have up to six months to pay at least half of the owed rent, and up to 12 months to pay the full amount. Before the amendment last week, tenants had up to 180 days to pay the full amount of missed rent.

During last week’s meeting, community members advocated for the board to extend the moratorium through Sept. 30, but the termination date of Aug. 31 remains.

Supervisor Don Horsley said at the meeting that he didn’t favor extending the moratorium, as it would not be equitable for everyone.

“I don’t think it is a property owner’s responsibility to provide housing for free. I think it’s our responsibility to cover that cost and not put it on the back of some property owner,” Horsley said.

The board called for the state and federal government to provide further assistance.
From visiting friends and family to dining out at a restaurant, remember to wash your hands, wear a face covering, and practice social distancing. Together we can get back to enjoying everyday life safely.

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New section of San Francisco Bay Trail opens to public

East Palo Alto and Menlo Park residents will have improved access to the San Francisco Bay Trail with a new 0.6-mile section of the trail that has opened to the public.

The section is located between University Avenue and the Ravenswood Open Space Preserve in East Palo Alto and Menlo Park. It includes a new boardwalk and a bridge across the wetlands in the north.

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District hosted a virtual opening ceremony Aug. 7 that included a virtual tour, detailed the planning behind the trail’s construction and showed features that cater to local wildlife.

“The current health crisis has underscored how essential Midpen preserves are for providing free and safe public access to nature for mental, emotional and physical health,” Midpen General Manager Ana Maria Ruiz said on the nonprofit’s website. “This small trail will provide big benefits to the community.”

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, visitors to the trail must stay at least 6 feet away from each other if not from the same household. Face coverings are required if staying 6 feet away is not possible, especially on narrow stretches of a trail.

—Bay City News Service

A bicyclist rides on the new Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District trail extension at the Ravenswood Preserve in East Palo Alto on Aug. 11.

Susan Allain Miller
September 18, 1941 – August 4, 2020

Susan Allain Miller died peacefully in her home in Atherton on Tuesday August 4, 2020 with her husband Dean at her side. She had been dealing with cancer since the diagnosis and surgery in 2016.

Susan was born to Paul and Edna Allain in Holyoke Massachusetts on September 18, 1941. She was educated in public schools in Holyoke and Northampton Massachusetts and graduated from Conrad High School in West Hartford Connecticut. She received a BA Magna Cum Laude, in Art History from Indiana University.

She taught school after college and then moved to Southern California where she worked in the movie industry. She came to Northern California and for many years was the office manager for an electronic manufacturers rep. firm in Silicon Valley. In 2005 she became the manager of a small Menlo Park manufacturing firm serving the medical device industry. In 2010 she was named CEO of that firm and continued in that role until retirement in 2015.

Susan was trained as a Spiritual Director at Mercy Center in Burlingame. She led a women’s spirituality group at Christ Church Portola Valley for 16 years. She was also active in the chapel community at Woodside Priory for many years.

Susan is survived by her husband Dean, her two daughters Carolyn Plummer (Elk Grove, California) and Kathryn Chalfant-Magesacher (Austin, Texas), and her sister Nancy Clark (Sun City, Florida). She has two Grandsons, Christian Plummer and Eric Magesacher.

A private memorial service will be held at the Woodside Priory Chapel.

In lieu of flowers, we request donations to Catholic Worker House in Redwood City, California.

[LEHUA GREENMAN]
"Only if we understand will we care. Only if we care will we help. Only if we help shall all be saved."

650.245.1845 COMPASS

Susan Allain Miller, 78, an Atherton resident, died on Aug. 4.

To read full obituaries, leave remembrances and post photos, go to Lasting Memories at almanacnews.com/obituaries.

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[OBITUARY]
Local school board elections draw wide range of candidates

By Tyler Callister

Candidates have pulled papers in eight local school board elections. Below is a list of confirmed candidates as of Aug. 12.

Sequoia Union High School District

For the Sequoia Union High School District’s Trustee Area E, which includes Woodside, Portola Valley and West Menlo Park, incumbent Georgia Solkov Jack is running against newcomers Shamar Edwards, a school principal, and Rich Ginn, a parent and business owner.

Ginn formerly served as a board member in the Las Lomitas Elementary School District for eight years. His candidate statement says the district had two successful bond measures (Measure S and Measure R) during his time on the board, purchased an acre of land in Atherton for the Las Lomitas campus and used the Measure S funds to construct new classroom buildings to replace portable classrooms.

For Trustee Area E, which includes Menlo Park neighborhood schools east of Highway 101 and East Palo Alto, the seat is currently unfilled. Jacqui Cebrian, an educator and Menlo Park resident, and Shawneece Stevenson, a parent and social worker, are running.

In her candidate statement, Cebrian identified herself as a second-generation public school teacher who studied in public schools from kindergarten to graduate school, and a 13-year resident of Menlo Park’s Belle Haven neighborhood. “I believe strongly that public institutions should be accountable to the citizens they serve. As a trustee on the SUHS Board, I will work to ensure that those public institutions are responding to the needs of all students from Area E of the Sequoia Union High School district.”

Menlo Park City School District

In the Menlo Park City School District school board race, there are three candidates running for two open seats. Incumbent David Ackerman is running, as are two newcomers: Francesca Segre, a communications professional and parent, and Robert Maclay, a parent.

“In a statement, Maclay said, “Our schools build the foundation of our community. The schools through the board and district leadership must build a collaborative and trusting relationship with the community.”

Las Lomitas Elementary School District

Three candidates and no incumbents are jumping into the race for two seats on the Las Lomitas Elementary School District board. Jason Morimoto, a financial executive and parent; Molly Finn, a legal executive and parent; and Jody Leng, and physician anesthesiologist and parent, are running.

Woodside Elementary School District

Two new candidates have entered the race for two open seats: Neil Sequeira and Dan Simon, a health care provider.

Portola Valley School District

Three spots have opened in this district, and three candidates are running.

Incumbent Jeff Kligman is in the race, along with current board member Kimberley Morris Rosen. Rosen was appointed to the board in March 2019 after former member Michael Mattia resigned.

Gary Hanning, a parent and community volunteer, is also running.

Ravenswood City School District

Seven candidates are vying for two seats on the Ravenswood school board. The only incumbent is Mariela Gaona-Mendoza, of East Palo Alto. The challengers are: Bronwyn Alexander, a public school teacher; Joel Rivera, a construction labor manager; Mele K. Latu, a community collaborations manager; Jenny Varghese Bloom, a college counselor; Julian Alberto Garcia, an educator; and Zeb Feldman, a contract negotiator.

Redwood City School District

For each area in the Redwood City School District there is just one candidate running for one seat. Janet Lawson is an at-large school board member who is running for Trustee Area 3, which covers portions of Woodside and Atherton.

Vallombrosa Center to close

By Kate Bradshaw

Menlo Park’s Vallombrosa Center has announced that it will be shut down until the new year, according to a statement by the center’s director, Father Reginald Martin.

The retreat center, situated on 11 acres at 250 Oak Grove Ave., is owned by the Archdiocese of San Francisco but operates separately as a small business, said David Leech, the center’s marketing coordinator and leader of online retreats.

The center has a capacity for 120 overnight visitors and hosts nonprofits and religious retreats for a variety of faith traditions, Leech said. But the pandemic halted months’ worth of business and threatened its survival unless the most austere operating cuts were made, he said.

“We lost business from March 15 on,” he said. The retreat center has had to reduce its staff of 12 down to three people and switch its primary focus to keeping the lights on — no more kitchen staff, gardeners or retreats.

The archdiocese bought the property in 1947. Edward Hopkins, nephew to railroad magnate Mark Hopkins, initially purchased it in 1883, according to the Menlo Park Historical Association.

“The grounds of the center, including a garden dedicated to Mother Teresa, remain open to the public, though visitors are encouraged to visit during regular business hours,” Leech added. The operators are looking for volunteers to help maintain the property, and said that there is a possibility the site could be used for outdoor events.

“A common misconception is that we’re flush with money because we’re owned by the archdiocese, but that’s not the case. We do need help,” he said.

The retreat center is hosting a video series and is asking for donations to one of three fundraisers it is running: A $70,000 fundraiser to pay off a loan to invest in low-cost lighting; a $100,000 fundraiser to support irrigation improvements, ground maintenance and lawn care; and a $25,000 fundraiser to meet a matching grant to construct and landscape a shrine and plaza.

Go to www.vallombrosa.org/save/ for more information.

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

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Atherton City Council race is first contested election since 2014

By Tyler Callister
Almanac Staff Writer

This November, Atherton's City Council election will have a total of four candidates running — two incumbents and two challenger vying for two open seats — for the town’s first contested election since 2014.

The initial deadline for filing as a candidate passed Aug. 7, leaving the field full with incumbents Vice Mayor Elizabeth Lewis (12 years on the council) and Councilman Cary West (eight years on the council), pitted against challengers Christine David, a former Park and Recreation Committee vice chair, and Diana Hawkins-Manuelian, who is currently on the Environmental Programs Committee. Potential candidate Kelly Davis, who pulled papers for candidacy Aug. 6, ended up deciding not to run, City Clerk Anthony Suber confirmed.

David, a longtime Atherton resident who also served on the town’s Civic Center Committee, drew attention last year when push came to shove over the construction of a new dog park. When the City Council refused to commit to building a proposed dog park at Holbrook-Palmer Park, David and her fellow Park and Recreation Committee member John Davey protested by resigning from their committee positions.

David’s background is as an independent marketing consultant with experience working at local tech startups and public relations firms, and she has lived in Atherton for nearly 20 years. In an interview, she said that the core of her campaign is to get more residents involved in the local town political process.

The other challenger, Hawkins-Manuelian, has lived in Atherton for 20 years, according to Suber, and she has a background in consulting and entrepreneurship. She holds a doctorate of education from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

The election will be held Nov. 3, and the last day to register to vote is Monday, Oct. 19.

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UPS DRIVER
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off Dec. 24. So he went traveling for a few weeks after Christmas, expecting to turn his uniform in when he came back.

Instead, he returned to a slew of messages asking where he was and when he’d be back at work. Hess was never laid off.

He started his UPS career working in Sunnyvale, then came to Menlo Park when the company opened new offices there. Hess bounced around Portola Valley, Woodside, Atherton and Menlo Park at first and was trained by the Portola Valley driver before taking over the route for the town a couple of years later. If a more tenured driver had wanted the Portola Valley route, Hess would have been reassigned due to seniority, he said. But the route “never went up for bid, so I kept it.”

Throughout his career, Hess dabbled in different lines of work, selling real estate and owning a boutique fashion company. At times, he thought he might leave UPS, “but nothing appealed to me more than finishing and getting my retirement,” Hess said.

A lot of people have come and gone over the past 35 years, but the town itself hasn’t changed or grown much, Hess said.

“It’s pretty odd to think there’s a town in the middle of Silicon Valley that doesn’t have a stoplight,” he said.

What also hasn’t changed is Hess’ habit of engaging with residents along his route. Meeting people was “by far” his favorite part of the job — swapping recipes, hearing what people are up to, trading travel tips.

He also enjoyed greeting people’s four-legged friends, keeping a steady supply of bones on hand for them and belying the notion that mail carriers and dogs don’t mix. When news of Hess’ retirement made its way onto PV Forum, an online forum for Portola Valley residents and business owners, several people posted photos of Hess with their dogs, lamenting how their pets would miss jumping into his truck for a treat.

“Some people tell me their dogs have a bark just for the UPS truck — they start barking in a certain pitch,” Hess said.

Over the years, Hess has befriended many residents, attending birthday and Christmas parties and being invited to “way more parties than I could have possibly gone to.” Eventually parties led to invitations to join in on everything from bike rides to ski trips.

Mark Paris, the former owner of the hardware store, has known Hess since he bought the store in 1985. He fondly recalls Hess dropping packages off at the store for customers who were worried about their safekeeping and calling them to let them know they’d arrived.

“He was always doing things like that,” Paris said. “He was always great with customers — always positive, always helpful.”

Paris and Hess became friends, and over the years they windsurfed together, taking a road trip on one occasion to windsurf in Oregon. Paris invited Hess on his sailboat, and Hess would invite Paris to barbecues at his home.

“He’s always been a positive guy,” Paris said. “He saw you, talked to you, always said hello and had a smile on his face.”

Danna Breen, who moved to Portola Valley in 1991 and organized the send-off July 31, encouraged residents to put up signs wishing Hess well after it became clear that a party at Rossotti’s was out of the question. She remembers times when her children, now in their 30s, would jump on their trampoline with Hess.

“He’s part of the fabric (of the town),” Breen said. “He’s always been there. It’s a small community but he’s kind of cohesive in that everybody loves him.

“I imagine we’ll embrace the next person, but they’re going to have big shoes to fill,” she added.

Hess has a multitude of stories and memories of his own. He remembers dropping off a package at a woman’s home early in his career and how she came out and implored him to write down stories of the people and situations he encounters day-to-day.

He took her advice and says he probably has 100 stories written down.

“If I got together with 10 UPS drivers and we wrote our 10 craziest stories, it would be a bestseller,” Hess said.

In recent years, the biggest challenge for UPS drivers has been the wave of new business brought on by an increase in online shopping, Hess said. When he started, he was the only driver in town and made about 120 stops a day. Now there are four or five UPS drivers who collectively make 600 to 700 stops in Portola Valley each day. A couple of years ago, the federal government also changed its protocol that limited anyone in the transit business to a 12-hour workday; now, employees can work up to 14 hours a day.

With COVID-19 keeping many people at home, Hess went from having relatively busy days to “it being like Christmas every day for the most part.” At the same time, he felt fortunate that his job allowed him to get out of the house and talk to people.

“People were very thankful about us being out and bringing them things they really needed,” Hess said.

Although Hess won’t be driving through Portola Valley in his big brown delivery truck anymore, he won’t be a stranger. He’ll stop by to see friends, especially when the pandemic ends and there are fewer restrictions on socializing. In retirement, Hess is particularly looking forward to traveling and spending more time with his son Lucas, who just turned 4.

“It was a very warm and touching outing from the town,” Hess said. “That’s how everybody related to him. He’s part of the fabric of the town.”

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WAIVER
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Woodland School in Portola Valley said it will “investigate a waiver” if that becomes available, to understand the guidelines and requirements for reopening the campus, according to an email from Head of School Jennifer Warren. However, she noted, as of Aug. 4, there wasn’t waiver process available in the county.

Sacred Heart Schools in Atherton plans to offer remote learning throughout the fall term. According to spokesperson Elizabeth Nixon, the decision was made in consideration of the fact that the Sacred Heart Schools campus serves people of a wide variety of ages, from infants in child care to elderly nuns who live at a retirement center on-campus.

The decision was made to keep the students, faculty, staff and nuns “as safe as possible; ensures consistency and routine for students; enables our faculty to fully focus plans and preparation on one instructional model rather than three concurrently; and enables families adequate time to plan their respective schedules and address any childcare needs appropriately,” she said.

A case study
Beechwood School, a private pre-K through eighth grade school on Terminal Avenue in Menlo Park’s Belle Haven neighborhood, has a unique perspective, because it offered in-person learning for eight weeks this summer for kindergarten through fourth graders, according to Principal David Laurance, who retired Aug. 7.

But for the new school year, the school plans to transition to remote learning full-time, Laurance said, attributing the decision to new principal Priscilla Taylor, who could not be reached by press time.

The in-person summer program was going well, Laurance said. Each class of 18 students was broken into two cohorts that each spent four consecutive weeks in class over the summer. Students wore masks and sat at desks centered in masking tape squares on the floors set 6 feet apart. About 20% of families opted out of the in-person program, he said.

As of Monday, the start of the last week of the program, no teachers or students had tested positive for COVID-19. “You can see how much the kids really need to be at school and how happy they are to see their teachers, friends and (the campus),” he said. “But as the summer has gone on, staff has gotten increasingly nervous.”

The private school, which has historically operated year-round, serves families from Menlo Park and East Palo Alto. It has a relatively small student population and a relatively large campus, which made socially distancing more feasible than it might be for a larger public school, Laurance said.

He identified two problems that came up during the in-person summer program:

One was that keeping small children 6 feet apart at all times requires constant observation and reminders, especially during outdoor play time.

The students are good about not touching each other, wrestling, high-fiving or hugging, he said.

But keeping them from inching closer together when they interact is harder. And, he noted, many kindergarteners are still mastering the abstract concepts of what six is and how long a foot is.

Another challenge was the gray area of what to do when it’s not a teacher or student who develops symptoms or tests positive for the new coronavirus, but someone one level removed, like a teacher’s partner or a parent’s coworker.

“Knowing what to do in those situations is really tricky,” Laurance said. “We’ve had to deal with that throughout the whole eight weeks, six or seven times where a person has been exposed, (the test) comes up negative and we dodge another bullet.”

In the new school year, the private school will transition fully to distance learning, though there is a possibility that the school will seek to offer supervised on-campus remote learning to a small subset of students who struggle with learning from home, he said.

Waiver requirements
The county health department and the office of education are developing a process for local schools to apply for such waivers, according to the education office’s website.

According to state guidelines, schools that apply for waivers must develop a plan to address a long list of health and safety issues, including cleaning, hygiene, contact tracing, physical distancing, and student and staff testing, according to state guidelines. Applicants must also describe how students will be broken into small, stable cohorts and how movement will work within the school and its entrance and exit points. They also have to prove they consulted with labor, parent and community organizations.

The state is recommending that schools in counties with more than 200 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents over a 14-day period not be considered for waivers.

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CLOSURES
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the statement.

“I didn’t ask for these actions to be taken, I’m certainly capable of taking these actions if warranted, and I do not believe I’m being negligent,” he said.

Morrow pointed to a number of problems he has with the state’s “watchlist” system. The system has issues with the quality and consistency of its data; adherence to the state’s benchmarks may vary widely because of small, variable numbers at the local level; and some of the state’s metrics are based on state actions that local governments don’t have control over, which can unfairly reflect negatively on a county’s performance. For instance, the state may restrict testing or, as has happened in San Mateo County, transfer sick prisoners from state prisons like San Quentin to local hospitals, thus increasing the number of hospitalizations reported within the county.

He also asked to instead see case-control studies, the state might be able to perform, that provided evidence about how COVID-19 is spreading in the community.

Go to is.gd/morrow86 to access the full statement.

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com.

Bottles of hand sanitizer sit ready for clients on every pedicure chair at Kendra’s Spa in Menlo Park. San Mateo County’s top health official released a statement Aug. 6 criticizing the state’s recent shutdown of gyms, nail salons, hair salons and barbershops, and places of worship after the county landed on the state’s COVID-19 watchlist.

To go: AlmanacNews.com/obituaries

Kings Mountain Art Fair goes online
The coronavirus pandemic has shuttered many art festivals this summer, but the Kings Mountain Art Fair, a longtime local staple in Woodside, will continue online. According to the fair’s online platform offering a live chat function. For more original art virtually. The event will even replicate the unique art experience that came up during the in-person program.

Fourth graders at Beechwood School attend in-person classes this summer. The class was broken into two sessions to create smaller cohorts, and students stayed spread out and wore masks.

Lasting Memories
An online directory of obituaries and remembrances. Search obituaries, submit a memorial, share a photo.

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COMMUNITY BRIEF
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By Lara Sandora

At the most controversial “back to school” season in recent memory approaches, you are probably already acquainted with the issues in the subject.

Parents are clearly desperate for their children to have a routine, rekindle in-person social connections, and to simply be out of their house.

Educators are desperate as well. They are desperate for districts to follow scientific, not political, guidelines. They want our schools to reach benchmarks of physical safety that were long overdue before our current health crisis (news flash, for those of you who haven’t been past the parking lot of a school in 20-plus years — overcrowded classrooms, non-functional windows, nonexistent HVAC systems, and restrooms without hot water were issues in January; now they are potentially without hot water were issues in functional windows, nonexistent — overcrowded classrooms, nonexistent).

We have also spent the past six months in various states of lockdown, in close quarters with our families, wiping down groceries and spending too much time staring at screens. We have had our routines disrupted, our lives turned upside down, and we have struggled with the same lack of sleep, situational anxiety, and other mental and physical health challenges that have affected so many others during this health crisis.

The tip of the iceberg

Second — again, basic, but worth making clear — 50 minutes of lecture is the proverbial tip of the iceberg. What educators do “behind the scenes” is easily two to three times what students experience. With crisis learning, at-home learning, distance learning and hybrid learning, the ratio of prep time has increased dramatically. Planning in-person lessons and grading in-person assessments is part of our life’s work. Planning lessons that can be accessed with various types of technology and at synchronous and asynchronous times and assessing students in remote settings becomes an entirely different animal.

And never mind the non-academic tasks that are on our plates. There are few things that — blissfully — we need to worry less about in distance learning (most significantly the need to prepare for active shooters on campus, but also earthquake procedures and fire drills). But there are many that have been amplified: cyberbullying, creating school community, electronic communications etiquette, and addressing the social-emotional needs of a cohort of youth growing up in a time that has left most adults reeling.

If you are a parent-educator you already know these truths. But if you are not, here’s one more: No one will be “behind.” I parent a child with extreme special needs, and one who is extremely self-directed. Was their spring semester perfect? No. Will the fall semester be better? Absolutely. Will it be perfect? Likely not.

As fellow parent-educator Ellen Jacobson shares, this summer was a busy one for all educators. A stream of professional development workshops, worthwhile webinars and social justice reading, with the occasional break to practice setting up Zoom breakout rooms by “meeting” with your own kids as they sit in their bedrooms.

Many of us who are decades into our careers are posting like this will be our first day of teaching all over again. We are rethinking every aspect of what we do — and how we do it. We are identifying technology tools, such as Flipgrid, Peer Deck and EdPuzzle, that will allow us to connect with students on their own terms. We hope that students will be typically fearful of the traditional classroom might feel more willing to post a question on a Padlet, or more willing to share in a breakout room.

Will there be some bumps on this steep ramp to implementing full-scale distance learning? Absolutely. But we are focused and ready to tackle this fall on our own terms.

Lara Sandora is a Menlo-Atherton High School guidance counselor.
Surreal Art For Surreal Times

Art gallery turns to nature, Salvador Dalí for COVID-era exhibits

By Sheryl Nonnenberg

Since the beginning of the pandemic-related shutdowns, viewing visual art has been mostly limited to online offerings by major museums. But the Midpeninsula has some art galleries that are not only featuring virtual exhibits but slowly beginning to open in a physical space as well, such as Pamela Walsh Gallery in downtown Palo Alto.

A commercial art gallery with the designation of a retail space, Walsh’s gallery reopened last month with a group show entitled “Seeking Nature,” as well as a virtual exhibition featuring the works of the Spanish surrealist Salvador Dalí.

Walsh, who is an art advisor as well as a gallery owner, is thankful that she was able to open her doors again.

“I am fortunate that my business provides a low-risk environment, so I have not had to make radical adjustments. Although I won’t be hosting any gatherings in the near future, people can visit the gallery safely and enjoy the art while maintaining a safe distance,” she said.

For her first show after reopening, Walsh decided to look to nature and invited six artists to participate with works focused on that central theme. Two of the artists, Craig Waddell and Don Scott MacDonald, are part of her gallery roster. The remaining four — Danielle Eubank, Zoya Frolova, Pierre Marie Brisson and Fernando Reyes — were familiar to her as a result of networking with other galleries and art fairs. “I wanted to curate a world-class exhibition featuring artists from many places who each feel a deep connection to the earth. The subject matter is fairly similar (light, water, land, plants) but the artists’ expressions of them are all unique,” she said.

With its high ceilings and abundant natural lighting, the Ramona Street gallery space is perfect for art of all sizes and media, and many pieces in this show are quite large. Waddell’s thickly painted, abundantly floral still lifes seem to glow in this setting. His impasto approach to applying paint seems almost sculptural, even as it adheres to canvas. Although flowers are Waddell’s main subject matter, Walsh has also included a rare seascape by the Australian artist. “I can hear your whispers from across the sea” is a dramatic evocation of water meeting land, thanks to the thick, almost gestural application of paint and the cool palette.

Waddell is also the subject matter of Frolova, who happens to be a competitive swimmer. In “Following Light,” the artist has depicted an ocean that seems to end at the side of the canvas, much like an infinity pool. A tiny origami boat floats along enigmatically under the eyes of a hazy sun. It’s mysterious and yet calming.

Water is also the theme for Eubank, who undertook a project to paint every ocean on Earth in order to raise awareness about climate change. It took 20 years and was completed in 2019 after a visit to Antarctica. Walsh explained that the artist “claims every ocean is different.” In “Arctic VI,” roiling waves are painted in cool shades of green and blue, against a white background. Compare it with “Phoenician Reflection II,” with its warm hues of gold and brown and one can, physically, feel the temperature change.

“Putting together a show is a multifaceted process of relationship building, logistics management and curation,” Walsh said. “It is one thing to pick great artists and art but another to put all of it in a gallery and create a dialogue that allows each work to sing.”

Walsh has managed to do just that, combining disparate artists who work in wildly different styles — somehow, it all works well aesthetically. Consider, for example, both the sinewy realism of Reyes’ trees as they reach for the sky, as well as the cool minimalism of MacDonald’s landscapes. Finally, for those who appreciate the creatures of land and sea, Brisson’s lovely batik-like evocations of birds and fish might be just the ticket. These mixed-media works will find you looking closely to ascertain just how the artist achieved such a feeling of tactility.

For those who are not ready to venture out yet, Walsh has organized a virtual exhibition of works by an art world icon, Salvador Dalí. The title “Surreal Art for Surreal Times” says it all — and seems most appropriate in the current situation. Walsh said that the prints belong to a collection owned by a dear friend, Michael Schwartz, who owns Galerie Michael in Beverly Hills.

“The word ‘surrealist’ — or beyond reality — was coined by French poet Guillaume Apollinaire at the beginning of the 20th century,” she said. “The confluence of the physical world and the dream world was starting to feel like our new reality.”

The lithographs and engravings in the exhibition convey the well-known dream (or nightmare) tropes: skulls, anthropomorphic figures and distorted faces. Be sure to take the short audio tour, written and narrated by Walsh, who has a familiarity with Dalí that only many years in the art world could achieve. Walsh said that she plans to continue virtual programming, with future exhibitions of work by Picasso and Rembrandt.

Walsh reports that, although foot traffic in Palo Alto has been sparse, the response to an open gallery has been fantastic. “There is no replacement for seeing art in person; there is an energy exchange that occurs when you are face to face with a work of art that is powerful and transformative,” she said. “Art helps us to connect to our human experience, and my gallery provides a space for that.”

More information is available at pamelawalshgallery.com.

Email freelance writer Sheryl Nonnenberg at nonnenberg@aol.com. This story originally appeared on thesisfifty.com.
Enterprising eats
Local underground food movement is driven by Instagram and COVID economics

By Elena Kadvany
Photos by Magali Gauthier

There’s an underground food movement booming on the San Francisco Peninsula. It’s not happening at restaurants, but in the homes and backyards of out-of-work cooks, high school coaches, mothers and fathers — people who have turned to selling food to make ends meet during the coronavirus shutdown. On any given day, if you’re plugged into the right Instagram and Facebook pages, you can find homemade quesabirria tacos, fresh tamales, lumpia, pupusas, smoked brisket, smoothies, boba tea and otai (a Polynesian drink made from fresh fruit).

While these types of homemade food ventures have long existed in neighborhoods throughout the Bay Area, a new wave of businesses has taken hold during the shutdown. For most people, it’s a good enough side hustle to help them get by during a challenging time. For some, it’s generating enough income to help them cover rent while they wait for the next unemployment check or to send money to family members. “What’s that a lot of people are doing right now,” said Tina, a Mountain View resident who sells desserts out of her home. “If they have a skill, they’re trying to figure out how can I utilize it to best help me during this pandemic?”

In many ways, the boom in under-the-table home food businesses — concentrated in communities like East Palo Alto where residents are hardest hit by the economic impacts of the pandemic — reflects the inequities of the shutdown. The majority of people interviewed for this story are selling food without permits, using social media and word of mouth to boost their new ventures. For many of them, getting the necessary permits to legally sell homemade food is a less pressing concern than making rent.

Enterprising eats

In one East Palo Alto backyard on a recent afternoon, a makeshift kitchen, complete with two flat top grills, stacks of takeaway containers and a steaming vat of consomme broth, was churning out orders of quesabirria, burritos, rice and beans. Pepe, an East Palo Alto native who was a cook at Facebook until the social media company’s Menlo Park campus shut down in mid-March, manned a sizzling flat top next to family members he’s recruited to help his homegrown business.

(Back to story)

Pepe’s recipe for slow-braised birria takes inspiration from his father, who worked as a professional chef, and mother, who would make the dish with the traditional goat but also sometimes beef. Pepe prefers beef, which he marinates overnight with a combination of spices and starts braising early in the morning so it’s fresh at noon when he starts selling.

He puts the rich, shredded birria into several kinds of tacos — quesabirria, multi and vam-piro, all variations on crispy corn tortillas with meat and melted cheese — as well as ramen with fresh noodles.

“I’ve been wanting to start my own thing. As a chef, that’s the ultimate goal,” Pepe said. “You make good food, people are going to come and try it.”

Pepe is making money, though not much since he’s only selling food once a week. He hopes to purchase a food truck soon so he can serve food full time — and do it legally.

He’s one of many local residents pursuing this kind of under-the-table income.

Tina, who has a self-described sweet tooth, started selling chocolate-covered strawberries to friends and family for fun on Valentine’s Day. Then COVID-19 hit, and her husband lost his job. He received two weeks of unemployment and then the checks stopped coming, she said. In April, she was elated to get hired as a contractor at Stanford Hospital, making $25 an hour — and then got laid off because, she said she was told, the hospital wasn’t crowded enough.

“It was like, ‘Wow. What do I do? We couldn’t get ahead of unemployment. We couldn’t get ahead of anybody,’” Tina said.

She thought of the chocolate-covered strawberries, which had netted her a few thousand dollars. So she made a website and social media pages, expanded to making several flavors of jarred, no-bake cheesecakes and started offering delivery throughout the Bay Area three days a week. She now sells about 50 to 100 cheesecakes a week — enough to cover her family’s household bills.

“It’s given us a nice cushion during this pandemic where at first we were trying to figure out if we still had a house to live in,” Tina said.

Legal limbo

For residents of Santa Clara and San Mateo counties, Cottage Food permits are the path toward legally selling food out of their homes. The California Home-made Food Act allows people to sell specific “low risk” foods made in home kitchens. These are largely largely non-perishable foods that don’t require refrigeration to keep them safe from bacterial growth that could make people sick, such as bread, dried pasta, coffee, tea and honey.

Permits can be costly. In Santa Clara County, there are two categories of Cottage Food permits, one costing $219 and the other $635, with additional fees for any complaint inspections or if additional time is needed to review paperwork or food labels. There are also annual revenue caps for cottage food operations.

In 2019, a new California law that allows people to sell more kinds of food from their homes, the Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operations Act (MEHHKO Act), took effect, but with a major catch — counties have to opt in to local implementation.

That same year, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors approved a pilot program of the state law, but it was contingent on hiring more staff, according to Heather Forshey, director of San Mateo County Environmental Health Services.

With Environmental Health Services staff now consumed with responding to COVID-19, the pilot fell by the wayside, she said.

Forshey said the county plans to resume the pilot at a later date and is not considering easing regulations during the shutdown, which leaves the homegrown efforts of Pepe and others on the margins, even as the state has a program to accommodate them.

“Public health protection is the highest priority for County Environmental Health as it implements the state’s regulations, including regulations pertaining to sales under the Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operations Act,” Forshey said.

“There is also no legal flexibility to ease permitting,” Rochelle Gaddi, director of the Santa Clara County Consumer Protection Division, said the county hasn’t opted into the state law and that the Department of Environmental Health continues to evaluate the options regarding the implementation of the MEHHKO program within Santa Clara County.

The text of the state law, AB626, acknowledges that an “informal economy” of illegal homemade food exists in communities across the state.

“However, due to a lack of appropriate regulations, many experienced cooks in California are unable to legally participate in the locally prepared food economy and to earn an income legally therein,” the bill reads.

“As a result, and because they feel they have no other option, thousands of private chefs, home caterers, and many other food microentrepreneurs cook out of private homes or unlicensed food facilities, with little access to education for best practices or safety guidelines.”

The bill notes the benefits of legalizing that work, from increasing food access (particularly in food deserts), increasing public health safeguards and providing economic opportunities to people who “are unable to enter the traditional food economy.”

“Small-scale, home-cooking operations can create significant economic opportunities for Californians that need them most — often women, immigrants, and people of color,” the law reads.

“We need the money now”

Monday through Friday, Teresita posts to Instagram the homemade dishes she’s selling that day — from lumpia, bihon pancit to sell specific “low risk” foods made in home kitchens. These are largely largely non-perishable foods that don’t require refrigeration to keep them safe from bacterial growth that could make people sick, such as bread, dried pasta, coffee, tea and honey.

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That same year, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors approved a pilot program of the state law, but it was contingent on hiring more staff, according to Heather Forshey, director of San Mateo County Environmental Health Services.

With Environmental Health Services staff now consumed with responding to COVID-19, the pilot fell by the wayside, she said.

Forshey said the county plans to resume the pilot at a later date and is not considering easing regulations during the shutdown, which leaves the homegrown efforts of Pepe and others on the margins, even as the state has a program to accommodate them.

“Public health protection is the highest priority for County Environmental Health as it implements the state’s regulations, including regulations pertaining to sales under the Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operations Act,” Forshey said.

“There is also no legal flexibility to ease permitting,” Rochelle Gaddi, director of the Santa Clara County Consumer Protection Division, said the county hasn’t opted into the state law and that the Department of Environmental Health continues to evaluate the options regarding the implementation of the MEHHKO program within Santa Clara County.

The text of the state law, AB626, acknowledges that an “informal economy” of illegal homemade food exists in communities across the state.

“However, due to a lack of appropriate regulations, many experienced cooks in California are unable to legally participate in the locally prepared food economy and to earn an income legally therein,” the bill reads.

“As a result, and because they feel they have no other option, thousands of private chefs, home caterers, and many other food microentrepreneurs cook out of private homes or unlicensed food facilities, with little access to education for best practices or safety guidelines.”

The bill notes the benefits of legalizing that work, from increasing food access (particularly in food deserts), increasing public health safeguards and providing economic opportunities to people who “are unable to enter the traditional food economy.”

“Small-scale, home-cooking operations can create significant economic opportunities for Californians that need them most — often women, immigrants, and people of color,” the law reads.

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