Menlo Park council election: Early results show Wolosin in lead

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

Menlo Park’s first official District 3 City Council member could be safe routes advocate Jen Wolosin. As of the most recent election results available the morning of Nov. 4, candidate Wolosin had received the most votes at 1,266 or 59.8% of those counted so far. Chelsea Nguyen had 543 votes or 25.7%, and Max Fennell had 306 or 14.5%. Go to is.gd/306 or 14.5%.

The three candidates are Wolosin, 46, a community advocate for bike and pedestrian safety in Menlo Park; Nguyen, 56, a Vietnam veteran, single mother of three and project manager at Cisco; and Fennell, 33, a Black professional triathlete and entrepreneur who owns Fenn Coffee.

District 3 includes a section of Menlo Park bounded between Palo Alto and Atherton, stretching southwest to Crane Street and northeast to the VA property off of Willow Road. It includes the Civic Center, the Caltrain station and the neighborhoods of Vintage Oaks, Linnfield Oaks and Felton Gables, among other areas.

On election night, Wolosin said she was excited about the early results. “It’s really gratifying and I am excited to get to work for the residents of Menlo Park.”

She added that she was proud of the work of her campaign team, which adapted to the restrictions to campaigning that the COVID-19 pandemic created. She has been campaigning since January, which gave her a head start on other candidates, as she was able to canvass part of the district before the pandemic hit. “Some people thought it was crazy, but I like to be prepared and organized,” she said.

“I’m really excited to try to bring the community together as we tackle big challenges and issues and figure out how to move forward during difficult, (and) hopefully good times,” she said.

This is Menlo Park’s first District 3 election, so while there is no way to make a direct comparison to previous elections for how many voters may cast ballots in the district race, there were a total of 3,448 District 3 residents who voted in the November 2016 presidential elections. So far the county has tallied 1,947 district votes, which means there may be a substantial number left to count. The San Mateo County Elections Office reported that the preliminary tally only includes vote-by-mail ballots received in the mail or returned at voting centers and drop boxes on or before Wednesday, Oct. 28. They do not include vote center ballots, which means there may be a substantial number left to count.

Atherton council: Incumbent Elizabeth Lewis, newcomer Diana Hawkins-Manuelian take lead

By Angela Swartz
Almanac Staff Writer

Incumbent Elizabeth Lewis and newcomer Diana Hawkins-Manuelian took an early lead on election night in the race for two seats on the Atherton City Council. Incumbent Cary Wiest was trailing.

With about 61% of votes counted, Lewis was leading with 36.5% of the vote. Hawkins-Manuelian had 26.4%, while Wiest had 22.3% and newcomer Christine David had 14.8%, according to semi-official results posted by the San Mateo County Elections Office on election night. These results include vote-by-mail ballots received in the mail, at a vote center or in a drop box on or before Oct. 28.

“I am humbled and honored to have the opportunity to serve the residents of our wonderful town of Atherton for four more years,” said Lewis in a statement Wednesday morning. “I promise to do my best to listen to our residents, learn from their experiences and work to make policies that will benefit all of Atherton. I would like to congratulate each of the other candidates for running positive and energetic campaigns and look forward to working with them all in the future on committees and boards.”

Hawkins-Manuelian said in a Wednesday email that since not all the votes are in, it may be too early to assume she has won.

“I am humbled and honored to see the votes so far,” she said. “I am ready to roll up my sleeves if I do win.”

This race marks the first time in six years there has been a contested election in town. Mayor Rick DeGolia made waves when he endorsed Hawkins-Manuelian over Wiest because he opposes the town’s controversial proposal to detach from the Menlo Park Fire Protection District, while claiming that Wiest is in favor of it. Wiest denies he has ever supported separation from the fire district.

Talks of separation were spurred by a 2016 fire services study, which showed a disparity between the fixed percentage of property tax revenues from Atherton that fund the fire district and how much it actually costs the district to provide emergency response services to the town.

Lewis was elected to the council in November 2008, while Wiest was elected to the council in 2012. David and Hawkins-Manuelian are both longtime Atherton residents.

Some 3,199 of 5,241 ballots in the race were counted by the close of election night.

Wiest could not be reached for a comment by press time on Wednesday.

Email Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanancnews.com
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Local News

Pandemic sparks enrollment dips in local public schools

By Angela Swartz

Enrollment is shrinking at local public schools as families move out of the area, join learning pods or turn to private schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic, according to district officials. Although the local elementary school districts have seen small dips in enrollment over the last few years, the Sequoia Union High School District has seen steady growth up until this school year. Menlo-Atherton High School’s enrollment shrunk from 2,457 students in September 2019 to 2,371 this school year (a 3.5% drop), according to the district. Woodside High School dipped from 1,980 students in October 2019 to 1,906.

Newcomer leading in race for two seats on Menlo Park school district board

By Angela Swartz

Francesca Segrè and David Ackerman are ahead to fill two open seats on the Menlo Park City School District’s governing board, according to semi-official results posted by the San Mateo County Elections Office on election night. These results include vote-by-mail ballots received in the mail, at a vote center or in a drop box on or before Oct. 28 and all vote center ballots. With 62.5% of votes counted, Segrè has 47% of the vote, Ackerman has nearly 40% and Robert Maclay trails behind with 13.5%.

“I’m excited by the results so far,” Segrè said in an email on election night. “I am grateful to every supporter who believed in me. I would be honored to join such a capable board in such an extraordinary district.” Ackerman, the former principal of Oak Knoll and Encinal schools, has been on the school board for four years. “I believe that my re-election, as an incumbent, demonstrates the community’s respect for the manner in which the superintendent (Erik Burmeister) and the board have managed the district during the COVID crisis,” he said via email.

Ackerman endorsed Segrè, a former journalist who applied for appointment to an open school board seat last fall. Maclay is a district parent whose children attend Oak Knoll. Besides responding to the challenges from the coronavirus pandemic, newly elected board members will face the district’s persistent achievement gap between students of different socioeconomic backgrounds and whether the district will renew or replace a parcel tax that district staff has said is only a “temporary solution” to the district’s financial woes. Measure X, the parcel tax that passed in 2017 with an initial rate of $360 per parcel, will expire in 2024.

Some 11,460 of 18,338 ballots cast in the race were counted by the end of election night, with the next update expected on Thursday, after The Almanac awaited final results.

“Throughout the summer and fall, the Town Staff has been supportive and fair handed, thank you,” Hufty wrote in a statement. “I’d like to thank the residents of Portola Valley for placing their confidence in me for another term,” said in a written statement. “I want to congratulate Sarah — I look forward to working with her.”

Elected to the board for four years.

Portola Valley council: Mayor Jeff Aalfs, challenger Sarah Wernikoff lead

By Julia Brown

Portola Valley Mayor Jeff Aalfs and challenger Sarah Wernikoff are maintaining an early lead established on election night, with each holding 40.2% and 32.5% of the vote, respectively, according to San Mateo County Elections Office results Wednesday morning.

Retired family physician Mary Hufty is in third and technology Ngelia Hey, who sits on the town’s Bicycle, Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Committee, is in fourth place. Hufty has received 20.5% of the vote, while Hey has 6.9%.

Aalfs said that, assuming the results hold, he was looking forward to “getting back to work for Portola Valley.”

“In the past 12 years, we have worked hard to make Portola Valley a safe community and a great place to live,” he said. “I look forward to continuing our work with the council and the community.”

Hufty, who has served on the council for 13 years, was not running for reelection. Wernikoff told The Almanac that she was also driven by a love for the town and recent work in state politics as the chief of operations with the Palo Alto-based organization Close the Gap California, which recruits women to run for office and helps them launch their campaigns.

Aalfs, who joined the council in 2011 and works in energy and green building consulting, had said this would likely be his last term if reelected. Both he and Wernikoff received the endorsement of all current council members and Portola Valley School District school board members.

Housing and wildfire prevention were major talking points for the candidates, especially in a year where the coronavirus pandemic underscored economic and racial inequities in the Bay Area and nationally and the CZU wildfires hit too close to home for Portola Valley residents.

With state mandates that could require the town to build 200 to 300 new housing units in the next decade, candidates recognized the prospect of building more housing will inevitably come before the council. All four supported building affordable housing in town, but candidates also emphasized retaining Portola Valley’s rural character as a high priority ongoing.

Candidates differed when asked about the proposed Stanford Wedge project, in which
The Sequoia Union High School District Board of Trustees... is seeking applicants to serve on the District’s Construction Bond Oversight Committee.

This committee will meet four times per year to monitor expenditures for the building projects of the approved Measure 'A' school construction bond. Periodically, the committee will report bond expenditures to the community.

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The District is seeking a parent or guardian of a child enrolled in the District, or a parent or guardian of a child enrolled in the District and who is actively involved in a parent-teacher organization, such as the PTA or school site council.

The District is seeking a community member that is active in a business organization representing the business community located within the District.

Applications

Applications may be downloaded from the Sequoia District website at www.seq.org or may be requested from the District Office by contacting Matthew Zito, Chief Facilities Officer, mzito@seq.org, 650-369-1411, ext. 22357

Send completed applications to: Matthew Zito, mzito@seq.org Sequoia Union High School District, 480 James Avenue, Redwood City, CA 94062

Timeline

Application filing period – October 30, 2020, to November 30, 2020

For further information, contact Matthew Zito, Chief Facilities Officer at 650-369-1411, ext. 22357

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The Almanac

ELECTION BRIEFS

Measure RR headed to victory

Caltrain has lost significant ridership and subsequent funding during the COVID-19 pandemic, but after Tuesday’s election, it may receive a lifeline and long-term financial support.

Measure RR, which requires a two-thirds vote from three Bay Area counties, looks like it will comfortably pass. As of early Wednesday morning, San Francisco County reported 74% in favor of the measure, San Mateo County with 72% in favor and Santa Clara County with 67% supporting it.

“At the passage of Measure RR, Caltrain now has for the first time in its nearly 30-year history a reliable and dedicated funding source,” said San Mateo County Supervisor Dave Pine, who also serves as the chairman of the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board that oversees Caltrain.

The measure would implement an eighth-cent sales tax increase in the three counties that would raise an estimated $108 million every year for 30 years.

Caltrain depends on fares for nearly 70% of its revenue and lost up to 95% of its ridership during the COVID-19 shelter-in-place order, which created a $18.5 million budget deficit.

“Measure RR funds will allow Caltrain to weather the COVID pandemic with continued service and provide faster, more frequent, and affordable service in the future,” Pine said.

The sales tax will also fund electrification of the train line and fund an equity plan that provides fares at half-price to low-income riders. “Caltrain will continue to be a critical component of our public transit network and will help sustainably and equitably drive our economic recovery,” Pine said.

The numbers from early Wednesday are not yet certified.

Democrats keep House seats

Unlike the presidential race, which raged on the day after Election Day, there was very little drama in Bay Area congressional races Wednesday morning.

Incumbent Democrats ruled the day in all 12 House races involving Bay Area congressional districts. Locally, Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-Palo Alto) won her 15th term in Congress, beating fellow Democrat Rishi Kumar in District 18 with 65.7% of the vote. Eshoo’s district covers parts of Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Santa Cruz counties.

Democrat Jackie Speier beat Republican Ran S. Petel in District 14, winning her fifth term in the House with 80.5% of the vote. Speier’s district covers San Mateo County and a small part of San Francisco.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi easily won her 18th term in Congress, defeating fellow Democrat Shahid Buttar with 79.2% of the vote in San Francisco’s District 12.

—Bay City News Service

State Legislature races

Democrats will still hold commanding majorities in both the state Senate and Assembly. Even if Republicans were to win all of their target seats and keep the ones they’re defending — and preliminary results suggest that’s unlikely — Democrats would still hold more than 70% of seats in both chambers.

What isn’t clear is just how large next year’s Democratic supermajorities will be and what kind of Democrats they’ll include.

Another sizable blue wave would send more GOP incumbents across central and Southern California into involuntary retirement. That would bolster the chamber’s Democratic ranks, and its representation of moderate suburbs.

Locally, the race for state Senate District 13 indicates Democrat Josh Becker is set to replace Jerry Hill, who’s being termed out of office. Becker garnered 77.3% of votes (or 238,412) while Republican Alexander Glew collected 22.7% of votes (or 70,120), according to unofficial state election results available Wednesday afternoon.

Assemblyman Marc Berman, the Democrat who previously served on the Palo Alto City Council, has retained his seat. Berman had 75.8% of votes (or 105,423) while Republican Peter Ohtaki, a former Menlo Park mayor, received 24.2% of votes (or 33,716), unofficial state election results show.

—Ben Christopher/CalMatters
Sequoia district race: Two challengers leading to fill open seats

By Angela Swartz
Almanac Staff Writer

Two newcomers took the lead in election night returns to fill two contested seats on the Sequoia Union High School District’s governing board.

With 63.5% of votes counted, Rich Ginn, a parent and business owner, pulled ahead in Trustee Area C, which represents Woodside, West Menlo Park and Portola Valley, with 36.7% of the vote, according to semi-official results posted by the San Mateo County Elections Office on Nov. 3. Incumbent Georgia Jack, who initially led on election night, has nearly 35.4% of the vote, while Shamar Edwards, former TIDE Academy principal and current Sunnyvale Middle School principal, has almost 28%. These results include vote-by-mail ballots received in the mail, at a vote center or in a drop box on or before Oct. 28 and all vote center ballots.

Ginn said in an email Wednesday that although the race is too close to call, he would like to thank all those who supported his campaign. Jack could not be reached for comment by press time.

“District residents, for the first time, voted based on the geographical area of the school district they reside in,” Chang Kiraly said in an email. “I am at awe of the blessings and opportunity to serve our students of the district and thank you to East Palo Alto, Belle Haven, and North Fair Oaks/Redwood City.”

Cebrian remained on the ballot, as the San Mateo County Elections Office’s deadline for candidates to withdraw had passed. Cebrian explained that she dropped out of the race because she believed Stevenson, as a Black woman, would better represent the area.

Incumbent Carrie Du Bois is running uncontested to represent Area B, which includes Redwood City, Belmont and San Carlos.

Board President Allen Wein er, whose term ends in December, did not seek reelection.

The new school board members will be tasked with helping hire a replacement for Superintendent Mary Streshly, who resigned in September after the district’s teachers union and 22 school administrators said they had no confidence in her leadership and called for her firing.

Some 23,997 of 37,778 ballots cast in the Area C race were counted by the end of election night. Some 8,645 of 20,841 ballots cast in Area E were counted by the same time.

The county’s next update of the vote count was set for Thursday, after The Almanac’s Wednesday press deadline.

Email Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com

Fire board incumbents appear headed for reelection

By Julia Brown
Almanac Assistant Editor

Menlo Park Fire Protection District board incumbents Rob Silano and Virginia Chang Kiraly have a comfortable lead in their bids for reelection, according to numbers released by the San Mateo County Elections Office as of Wednesday morning. Chang Kiraly has earned 37.9% of votes cast, while Silano has received 36.7% of the vote.

Former fire board member Peter Carpenter and investment professional Sean Ballard, who is chairperson of the district’s Community Crisis Management Advisory Board, trail with 14% and 10.6% of the vote, respectively.

Chang Kiraly and Silano have both been on the board since November 2011. Carpenter decided not to run for reelection in 2018 after serving a combined 15 years on the board, while this was Ballard’s second time running for a fire board seat after a 2016 campaign.

In an emailed statement, Silano said he was excited to see the initial results.

“I am grateful to the voters and will look forward to my continued service on the board to advance the public safety of our communities,” he said. “I thank all the candidates that ran for office in this race, and hope we can all work together to make our community safe.”

The fire board race was not without controversy, as Carpenter and Ballard accused the current board of micromanaging fire chief Harold Schapelhouman and district staff — they campaigned together with a stated goal to “restore dignity and professionalism to the Fire Board,” according to their joint campaign website. Chang Kiraly said that the board could be better at providing broad oversight rather than micromanaging operations, and with being respectful toward fellow directors.

None of the candidates supported a proposal for the town of Atherton to detach from the fire district and contract out for emergency services. The council elected to further research the idea — which was prompted by a fiscal services review that found property tax revenue from Atherton is millions of dollars more than it costs the fire district to provide the town services — but the process has been put on hold due to the pandemic.

Candidates identified planning for the next fire chief as one of the board’s top priorities moving forward. Schapelhouman’s contract is up in June, and he said he’ll decide whether to retire in January.

Chang Kiraly said if reelected, her top priorities would be to continue ensuring the district’s budget is healthy by funding capital improvement projects and paying down unfunded pension liabilities; improving the district’s relationship with local jurisdictions and its volunteers; and ensuring a smooth transition to the new fire chief when Schapelhouman retires. Silano said his goals would be to “maintain the highest level of fire and emergency services to communities served by the district;” continue to support prudent fiscal management oversight policies with balanced budgets and strong reserves; and keep pace with current trends in public safety equipment, facility upgrades and additional personnel.

Carpenter spent the most in the fire board race by far, including more than $16,000 in mailers, advertising and related materials.

See FIRE BOARD, page 14

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indoor visits for com-
guidelines for care facilities to Thursday revised visitation Offic er Dr. Scott Morrow last San Mateo County Health at care facilities

The revised order also allows in-person group activities and and staff supervision are also required. The revised order also allows in-person group activities and group dining for residents, once care facilities follow guidelines from the state's Department of Public Health and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Activities that may increase COVID-19 transmission — such as singing — are still prohibited.

County health officer revises quarantine, isolation guidelines
San Mateo County has revised its local COVID-19 health orders to provide updated guidelines for quarantine and isolation, the county announced Oct. 30. The revised order further aligns with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The guidelines were revised by Dr. Scott Morrow, the county’s health officer. Quarantine applies to individuals who are exposed to COVID-19 after being in close contact with someone who has tested positive for the virus. If someone is aware that they have been in close contact with a positive case, they must self-quarantine. For individuals who do not live with someone diagnosed with COVID-19, quarantine lasts 14 days. Individuals living with someone diagnosed with the virus must quarantine for 14 days after the household member no longer needs to be isolated.

Isolation applies to individuals diagnosed with COVID-19. If they test positive, individuals must immediately isolate in their homes or another residence, follow isolation instructions, notify close contacts and cooperate with local public health officials.

Individuals with the virus should isolate for at least 10 days after first developing symptoms and at least one day after recovery, defined as resolution of fever without medication and improvement in other COVID-19 symptoms. Those individuals who are asymptomatic should isolate for 10 days following their positive test. Anyone needing assistance with finding a place to isolate or quarantine can call 211 to contact the county’s Emergency Operations Center Care and Shelter Branch. The center may also be able to help with food and other essentials.

San Mateo County’s new orders also contain specific guidelines for health care workers and first responders. Morrow said in a press release that the order is based on scientific evidence and best practices, as COVID-19 can easily spread between people who are in close contact with one another.

San Mateo County’s COVID-19 numbers continue to decline. For the week ending Oct. 17, the county had an adjusted case rate of 3 per day per 100,000 compared to 3.5 the previous week. The test positivity rate declined from 1.8% the week ending Oct. 10 to 1.6% the following week. These numbers — due in part to increased testing — helped the county to advance last month from the red (substantial risk) tier to the orange (moderate risk) tier of the state’s Blueprint for a Safer Economy.

While the move loosens restrictions on businesses and activities, county officials warn that people should not let their guard down. County Manager Mike Callagy said that people should continue to wear face coverings, wash their hands frequently, practice social distancing and take other common-sense precautions. He also discouraged gatherings.

See CORONAVIRUS, page 14

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Menlo Park council OKs mixed-use Allied Arts development despite neighborhood outcry over heritage trees

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

A proposal to construct a three-story building with apartments, townhomes, retail and restaurant space in Menlo Park’s Allied Arts neighborhood won unanimous approval from the City Council Oct. 27. The proposal, by property owner Yihan Hu, will demolish the current structures at 201-211 El Camino Real, at the corner of El Camino Real and Cambrige Avenue where Koma Sushi is currently located, and replace them with a 25,282-square-foot structure with spaces for one restaurant and up to three retail shops on the ground floor, and 12 apartments — six one-bedroom and six two-bedroom units — on the second and third floors.

The structure would have a two-level underground parking garage with 59 spaces. Behind it, at 612 Cambridge Ave., would be two new townhouses. In the hours leading up to the council’s meeting on the proposal, about 25 messages entered the City Council’s public email inbox from people beseecing council members to spare the heritage trees planned to be felled as part of the proposal.

Project architects Mark Womack and Stuart Welte of EID Architects said they worked hard to avoid impacting the heritage trees, but landed at their proposal after consulting with multiple arborists and going through the city’s legal process for obtaining permits to cut down a heritage tree. Five trees, two of which are considered heritage trees, are expected to be axed. At least 26 new trees will be planted on the site, the architects said. Despite the outcry over the heritage trees, the council did not require the developer to change the project to preserve the trees.

As an additional condition to their approval of the project, the council members agreed that the developer should install electrical equipment needed to accommodate electric vehicles at whatever level is mandated by the city at the time the developer acquires the building permit.

The developer has agreed to dedicate two of the housing units for below-market-rate rent or purchase by low-income households. The developer has the option to convert the housing units from rental to ownership properties in the future, according to a staff report, and if the housing units are sold, then the two units will be eligible for below-market-rate purchase by low-income households, according to a staff report.

Sidewalks are also planned to be widened to 12 feet from 4 feet, and the developer plans to install a raised crosswalk on Cambridge Avenue to improve pedestrian safety near the property.

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

To guide young voters, Riekes Center students made a how-to video

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

In a creative collaboration, student filmmakers from Menlo Park’s Riekes Center teamed up with San Francisco Peninsula People Power to create a short, informative video geared toward informing young people about how to vote this year in California.

Drew Annis directs filmmaking and media arts at the Riekes Center, which has suspended in-person classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. About a month ago, he said in a phone interview, a friend’s dad approached him about creating an educational video to speak to young voters — in the 18- to 24-year-old age group — and provide them straightforward information about how to vote.

That was Bill Newell of San Francisco Peninsula People Power, a nonpartisan civil rights organization affiliated with the ACLU. Newell said in an interview that a committee within the organization has taken on a number of initiatives in the past several years to boost voter turnout for young people, including organizing voter registration drives at local high schools like Eastside College Prep in East Palo Alto.

Annis said he brought the idea to his students, who quickly embraced the idea and led the project from there.

Student participants filmed sections of the video remotely and acquired a demo ballot they could use as a prop to show viewers how to cast a vote. Once the segments were filmed, the students met over Zoom to edit the film, Annis said.

Student Sara Wallace directed the film, and students Julio Deras and Miriam Dijamco supported with cinematography. Bennett Roth-Newell, who teaches music at the Riekes Center, crafted original music, including a rap for the video, Annis said.

Carlmont High School students Emily Livesay, Ella Williams and Caroline Larsen-Riffe contributed by doing the voice-overs, explaining step by step how to vote. Newell served as executive producer.

The video is part voting tutorial, and part an expression of “why voting is cool,” Annis said.

“They relished the opportunity to make a video that had some social impact,” he said. “This is a moment to influence how we’re governed, and how this society is going to operate.”

The video has since been circulated to local government and civic classes, middle school social studies classes and local community colleges like Cañada College, Foothill College and the College of San Mateo, Annis said.

One of the high school participants, he said, was eager to participate because although she could not vote herself, she wanted to influence her peers who are just a bit older who can.

“It is pretty meaningful how a group of young high school/college students became inspired at Riekes to join a grassroots group of civil rights voting advocates in San Mateo (County) to create something that has taken on real meaning here in Menlo Park and beyond,” Newell said in an email.

Go to is.gd/RiekesVoteVideo1 to access the video via YouTube.

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

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Newcomers hold top two spots for Ravenswood school board

By Elena Kadvany

Two newcomers, Bronwyn Alexander and Jenny Varghese Bloom, are leading the race for two open seats on the Ravenswood City School District Board of Education.

Alexander, a former Belle Haven Elementary School teacher, has held the top spot since the first unofficial results were released Tuesday night, with 24% of the vote (2,194 votes). Varghese Bloom, a college admissions counselor and district parent, is close behind, trailing by only 254 votes.

Trustee Marielena Gaona Mendoza, who's running for a second term, is in third place with 14% of the vote — 669 votes behind Varghese Bloom. Gaona Mendoza's seat is up for grabs as well as Sharifa Wilson's, who is not running for reelection after 12 years on the board.

Julian Alberto Garcia, a former Ravenswood employee who ran unsuccessfully in the last school board election, pulled into fourth place overnight with 1,165 votes. He’s followed closely by labor manager Joel Rivera (1,136 votes), East Palo Alto native and Emerson Collective employee Mele K. Lats (1,111 votes) and Zeb Feldman (330 votes).

The San Mateo County chief elections officer warns that election night results “may be significantly different from the final count.” Preliminary results do not include vote-by-mail ballots received in the mail after Oct. 28, dropped off at vote centers or drop boxes after Oct. 28 or conditional voter registration or provisional ballots.

Alexander, a longtime teacher who left her job at Belle Haven in Menlo Park last year so she could run for a school board seat in this election, said she’s cautiously optimistic about the early results. She believes the issues she campaigned on, including reversing Ravenswood’s declining enrollment and increasing teacher pay, resonated with voters.

“I think it’s coming down to what the candidates were saying that addressed what the community was feeling,” she said. Varghese Bloom, whose daughter is a Ravenswood kindergartner and son attends the district’s preschool, said in a previous interview that her priorities, if elected, include focusing on better preparing Ravenswood students for high school — an area she knows well through her work as a college counselor at Insight Education — and listening to input from parents, students and teachers.

On Tuesday night, she also remained “hopefully optimistic” with about half of the ballots counted.

“The most important thing I’ve been able to run with the support of my neighbors, friends, and family,” she said. “I believe my platform is a positive contribution to the furthering of Ravenswood schools. No matter what the outcome is, I will be involved in (the) Ravenswood School District as a parent, and I hope that I will be a voice on the board.”

Gaona Mendoza, a special education teacher who was first elected in 2016, has said she wants to continue the district’s upward trajectory, particularly with new leadership in place. She did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The recent, sudden resignation of trustee Stephanie Fitch halfway through her first term means that there will be a third, new face on the dais this winter. The board voted last week to proceed with making a provisional appointment to replace Fitch.

—Heather Zimmerman

Woodside Town Council results are no surprise

The Woodside Town Council will have two new members to swear in when it reconvenes after the election.

The town held an uncontested election on Nov. 3, with the candidates for the four seats up for election in districts 1, 3, 5 and 7 all unopposed. New to the council are attorney Jenn Wall, elected to the District 1 seat, and management consultant John Carvell, elected to the District 5 seat. They are replacing Daniel Yost (District 1) and Tom Livermore (District 5), who both declined to run for reelection.

Wall serves on the town Planning Commission and previously was a member of the Circulation Committee. Carvell is the vice chair of the Architectural and Site Review Board.

Returning to the council are Chris Shaw (District 3), who is starting his second term, and Ned Fluet (District 7), who will start his first full term. Fluet was elected to the council in 2018 after the seat was left vacant by the resignation of longtime council member Peter Mason in the spring of that year.

Fluet is the town’s current mayor. Brian Dombkowski, mayor pro tem and council member for District 2, is set to succeed Fluet as mayor when the new council is seated.

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**Community college district: Menlo Park’s John Pimentel holds lead**

Almanac Staff Writer
By Kate Bradshaw
of Redwood City and Blair Whitney of North Fair Oaks are all competing for the open seat.

The college community district oversees Skyline and Cañada community colleges and the College of San Mateo. The district is in the process of switching to a by-district collection system from an at-large one, meaning candidates must live in one of the trustee areas up for election to be eligible.

As of the morning of Nov. 4, the San Mateo County Elections Office reported Pimentel had 17,447 votes (49.9%), Hicks-Dumanske had 15,034 votes (43%), and Whitney had 2,473 votes (7.1%). The preliminary tally included all vote center ballots and vote-by-mail ballots returned at vote centers,drop boxes or via mail by Wednesday, Oct. 28.

Pimentel, a renewable energy entrepreneur, put a significant sum of money into his campaign, especially for a local county-level race, spending 11.6 times as much as his next competitor, according to campaign finance documents. He personally loaned his campaign $150,000, raised $13,158 and spent more than $200,527 on mailers, ads, a billboard and other campaign expenses. In a statement, he told The Almanac that he made the personal loan to maintain political independence. “I chose to lend part of my personal savings to my campaign so that I could focus effort on understanding the issues and investing the time to listen to the community’s needs,” he said.

By contrast, Hicks-Dumanske, executive director of the Redwood City Library Foundation, reported raising $20,958 and spending $17,292 as of the latest campaign finance report and Whitney, a veteran, member of the North Fair Oaks Community Council and site supervisor who provides security at a tech campus, did not report any campaign fundraising.

Pimentel’s campaign focused on a goal of making tuition free for those who need it in the community college district, among other ideas.

Hicks-Dumanske identified a number of goals she hoped to address if elected: to ensure that budget decisions prioritize student needs; to expand program options; to speed up program completions and help students transition to next steps after community college; to provide vulnerable students with support for food, housing, transportation and digital access needs; and to help them afford higher education.

Whitney had identified the top issues facing the district as COVID-19, management and governance failures, and the economy.

**Area 1**

In the Area 1 race, candidate Lisa Petrides ran unopposed after candidate Eugene Whitlock dropped out of the race in September. Area 1 includes the San Mateo County coastline, Woodside, Portola Valley, Atherton, unincorporated West Menlo Park and the city of Menlo Park up to El Camino Real.

In an election night email to The Almanac, Petrides said she was excited for this historic election and “what looks to be an unprecedented California turnout.”

“Feeling good as I join you all in awaiting continued returns,” she said.

The next election results update was scheduled for Thursday afternoon, after The Almanac’s Wednesday press deadline.

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

**FIRE BOARD**

continued from page 7

expenses toward Ballard’s campaign. Slano received the most money from donors, receiving $6,300 in monetary contributions, according to campaign finance documents filed last month.

The district covers Menlo Park, East Palo Alto, Atherton and nearby unincorporated areas of San Mateo County, approximately 30 square miles that reaches into the Bay, according to its website. It responded to over 9,000 emergency incidents last year, with most of them emergency medical calls.

Email Julia Brown at jbrown@almanacnews.com

**CORNONAVIRUS**

continued from page 8

“As we approach the holidays and cooler weather, it is important to know that the risks associated with gatherings outside of households are significant,” Callagy said in last Friday’s press release. “While we often gather with friends and family out of affection, this year consider showing your respect by staying safely apart.”

To view the revised health orders regarding quarantine and isolation, visit smchealth.org.

**Comprehensive COVID-19 coverage**


CalMatters and Bay City News Service contributed to this report.
Jason Morimoto and Jody Leng lead Las Lomitas board race

By Angela Swartz
Almanac Staff Writer

Jason Morimoto and Jody Leng were ahead Tuesday night to fill two open seats on the Las Lomitas Elementary School District’s governing board, according to early results. With 64.3% of votes counted, Morimoto was leading with 40.6% of the vote. Leng had 32% and Molly Finn had nearly 28% according to unofficial results posted by the San Mateo County Elections Office on election night. These results include vote-by-mail ballots received in the mail, at a vote center or in a drop box on or before Oct. 28 and all vote center ballots.

Morimoto, Leng and Finn are all new additions to the board that governs Las Lomitas Elementary School in Atherton and La Enrida Middle School in Menlo Park. A financial executive, Morimoto said closing equity gaps in the district is his top priority. He said he also hopes to focus on financial oversight and COVID-19 safety.

Leng is an anesthesiologist who was the only physician on the Las Lomitas Pandemic Recovery Planning Committee. He which aided in the district’s COVID-19 response.

By Gennady Sheyner

Seeking to settle a lawsuit from the NAACP and ACLU and resolve a decadesold community debate, the Palo Alto City Council agreed on Monday to abolish a contentious policy that excludes nonresidents from visiting Foothills Park.

By a 5-2 vote, with council members Lydia Kou and Greg Tanaka dissenting, the council abolished a 1965 policy that bans nonresidents from entering the 1,400-acre nature preserve off Page Mill Road unless they are accompanied by a resident. In a report recommending the change, City Attorney Molly Stump and City Manager Ed Shikada noted that such a regulation is “extremely rare” and that city staff is not aware of any other California municipality that limits access to parkland to residents and their guests.

The council vote will have two near-term effects. It means that anyone will be able to enter Foothills Park as soon as mid-December. It also means that the city will probably be able to settle the lawsuit from a coalition that includes the NAACP, the American Civil Liberties Union and a group of residents that includes former Council member LaDoris Cordell, former Parks and Recreation Commissioner Don McDougall and former East Palo Alto Mayor Laura Martinez.

But as several council members observed Monday, the decision will also settle a contentious issue that has split residents for decades and that has forced Palo Alto to defend itself against accusations of racism and elitism.

“This is history in the making,” Council member Liz Kniss said shortly before the vote.

Kniss predicted that the council will end up being “delighted that we have a park that we’ll be able to share with everyone and our neighbors, wherever our neighbors come from.”

The council voted after hearing from about 20 residents, with most saying that they favor expanding access to Foothills Park. Many of the proponents of the new policy pointed to the city’s history of racial exclusion, as described in the Sept. 15 lawsuit, which calls Foothills Park a “gated paradise that unconstitutionally excludes non-residents.”

“The ban on non-residents traces its roots to an era when racial discrimination in and around the city was open and notorious,” the suit states. “It is long past time to relegiate this unlawful exclusion to the dustbin of history.”

The suit lists a number of policies that illustrate the city’s history of exclusion: the first ban on non-white neighborhoods in the middle of the 20th century, including the creation of racially restrictive covenant in deeds, restrictions on mortage insurance for residents in non-white neighborhoods (“redlining”) and efforts by realtors to “incite white flight” from East Palo Alto and to encourage African Americans to settle there (a campaign known as “blockbusting”).

Most of the speakers at Monday’s hearing supported the lawsuit’s contentions and argued that opening up Foothills Park to the general public would be the right thing to do. Others argued that the city’s prohibition on nonresidents visiting the park has nothing to do with race and that limiting visitors is necessary to protect the park’s sensitive habitat.

“I don’t think the lawsuit should be settled in a way that implies that the plaintiffs against Palo Alto are correct,” said resident Joe Hirsch. “Palo Alto is not in my opinion a racist town or community.”

He called the specific examples of racist policies “ancient history” and argued that the city — unlike the market — does not restrict who gets to live here.

The suit, however, contends that the effects of the discrimination are still felt to this day. Palo Alto has a far lower proportion of Black residents than neighbor communities such as East Palo Alto and Menlo Park, the suit states. According to U.S. Census data, African Americans made up 1.6% of the city’s population in 1939, when the city purchased the land. As of 2019, it remained at 1.6%.

“The ordinance perpetuates this historic exclusion and violates the constitutional rights of individuals who are not Palo Alto residents. It bars nonresidents from entering a public park that occupies nearly 10% of the land in Palo Alto. And it transforms this vast space into a preserve for the fortunate few: for people who were not systematically denied the right to reside in the city during the era of outright racial exclusion, and people who are wealthy enough to afford to move into the city, as well as anyone else who can afford one of the five most expensive places to live in the United States.”

Some residents welcomed the abolition of the policy as an important milestone for African Americans. A former mayor of Menlo Park, John Breiner, said shortly before the vote.

“I also don’t believe that the majority of Palo Altans would agree that this is a racist, segregationist or human rights issue,” Filseth said.

“I think most Palo Altans believe we passed the hat, no one was interested and that’s how we got there,” she added, alluding to the fact that neighboring cities declined to chip in for the purchase of Foothills Park in the 1950s.

Filseth ultimately joined the council majority in supporting the settlement, which includes a $28,600, according to a Sept. 22 report provided to the City Council.

The council majority in supporting the settlement, which includes a $28,600, according to a Sept. 22 report provided to the City Council.

The week of Nov. 9 through 13, drivers from Recology will collect coat donations in addition to the household waste in their usual weekly rounds.

People wishing to make donations to the drive should place coats in a clear plastic bag marked “Coats for Kids” and put the bag next to or on top of the blue recycling cart on their regular waste collection day.

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Teachers awarded grants for 21 innovative projects

By Angela Swartz
Almanac Staff Writer

Maintaining a native plant garden, West African dance lessons, learning about racism and creating self-care packages are some of the 21 projects that earned over $39,000 of grant funding from the Menlo Park-Atherton Education Foundation this school year.

The foundation, through its annual Jeanie Ritchie Grants, announced on Oct. 30 that it will award grants that range from $400 to $5,400 to fund innovative projects in Menlo Park City School District (MPCSD) classrooms during the 2020-21 school year.

"The ability for teachers to design and implement these projects dovetails with our teacher-leader culture, and the innovation and collaboration they inspire enriches our curriculum," said Erik Burmeister, the district’s superintendent, in a prepared statement. "Through Jeanie Ritchie Grants, our district’s core values of engagement, teamwork, and perseverance are put into action."

The program has grown since its inception. During the first grant cycle during the 1984-85 school year, eight projects were funded with a total of $2,200, according to the foundation.

"Year after year, they bring innovative ideas to our classrooms that support the MPCSD initiative for whole child learning and development," said Francie Malletis, chair of the grant committee and district parent, in a prepared statement. "In the face of very challenging times, we are incredibly grateful to our teachers for continuing to innovate and provide safe and engaging learning experiences for our students, both in the classroom and now at home."

Encinal Elementary teacher and grantee Karin Bloom shared "so much has changed, but our need to create has not." However, she noted some of the programs funded by the grants:

**Beyond the Comic Book** — Discovering Heroes in Literature: Jacky Shlegel and Libby Ellis will lead sixth graders at Hillview Middle School in two book clubs to delve into the question "who is and who is not a hero?" Participating students will be exposed to novels with protagonists from many different backgrounds and protagonistic from different cultures — broadening their view of what a hero might look like.

**Djembe Jam!! West African Dance & Drumming for First Graders:** Elizabeth Harrison will bring West African dance to first graders at Laurel Elementary School. Students will learn from master dancer, Alhassane Camara (Guinea), who will guide them through the motions and meaning of the dance. Students will attend four weekly workshops, learn to use their bodies in new and liberating ways, and at the end of the four weeks of instruction, Camara will bring his dance troupe and live drummers for a school assembly.

**Latin Music Workshop with Guitar:** Harrison’s first graders will learn about the science and aesthetics of the folk guitar, along with how it is played in different Latin American countries. They will learn traditional poems, songs and singing games set to live guitar with a native-Spanish speaking professional conservatory instructor. Marcelo Puig of Argentina will perform for parents on Día de las Madres, which is on May 10 in many Latin American countries.

**Native Plant Garden:** Allison Zeiser will expand a previously awarded Jeanie Ritchie Grant project at Oak Knoll Elementary to empower students to teach kindergarten through third graders about the role race has played in policy and how those systems can be improved. Staff will also receive support in facilitating these challenging conversations.

For more information about the grant program, go to mpaef.org/jeanie-ritchie-innovation-grants.

Email Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com
this school year (a 3.7% drop), said Woodside Principal Diane Burbank. Burbank said 61 students have dropped out since Aug. 1. Most moved out of the area because their parents changed or lost their jobs because of the pandemic’s economic impact. Of the remaining students who left Woodside, 15 remained in the district but enrolled at Redwood High for credit recovery, six moved out of the state, two switched among schools and four transferred to local private schools.

Students who did not enroll at M-A this year either moved out of the area, enrolled in other private or public schools, or chose to attend TIDE Academy (which was built to help reduce M-A’s enrollment) or East Palo Alto Academy, said M-A Principal Simone Rick-Kennedy.

The diminishing enrollment figures in much of the region are in line with an NPR report that student headcounts are droppe due to public school closures in 2020. Some families are choosing to switch to private schools, which reopened more widely than public schools, appealing to families fed up with children at home doing distance learning. Local public schools — including the Portola Valley, Menlo Park City and Las Lomitas districts — began phased reopenings in recent weeks, while Sequoia high school district students are continuing with distance learning.

The Las Lomitas Elementary School District saw enrollment drop 7.6% to 1,111 in the first week of Sept. 28, compared to 1,202 students during the same time last year. Although Las Lomitas district officials haven’t surveyed families, Superintendent Beth Polito said anecdotally she has heard some left the area as parents lost their jobs.

Enrollment numbers for the 2020-21 school year show the following:

- Menlo Park City School District is down 4.2%, from 2,992 last Sept. 10 to 2,808 as of Sept. 10. The decline is mostly in grades K-6, said Parke Treadway, the district’s public information officer.
- Portola Valley School District had 495 students as of Sept. 18 compared to 548 during the same time last year.
- Woodside Elementary School District is down just 1.06% from last year. There are 372 students as of Sept. 21 compared to 376 during the same time last year. Districts don’t anticipate the downturn to be permanent.

“We do expect that much of the decline is due to families moving either permanently or temporarily out of the area because of the pandemic,” said Treadway in an email. “If parents can work from home, many are choosing to relocate during this time. We expect many students to return once school has opened up again. Time will tell how the trend continues. This is happening in many districts around the area.”

Portola Valley School District officials surveyed 52 students who left the district this school year. They found half cited moving out of the area as their reason for leaving. Some 36.5% switched to private schools, while 13.5% cited the need to distance learn as their reason for departing, according to a report prepared by staff for a Sept. 24 school board meeting. Also worth noting: The number of new students the district expected to join decreased from 60 to 24 between Aug. 21 and Sept. 14.

The Woodside district, meanwhile, didn’t see much movement in enrollment.

Some board members have also cautioned against reading too much into this year’s data since there was so much disruption. Superintendent Austin said he expects a large percentage of students to return to the district.

“There hopefully is not ever going to be a trend that looks like last year: nothing about last year was normal,” Austin said during a recent school board meeting. “The report shouldn’t be normal either. We’re down about 880 students. What is more important is a percentage we’re down similar to surrounding school districts and expect a large percentage of that to return to us.” He said district officials aren’t predicting what that will be, but that they are confident families with children affiliated with Stanford University will return at some point, along with people who left for their second homes in Utah and Idaho.

“We will be open someday also. We also believe the tech industry will return at some point in time,” Austin said.

The Ravenswood Elementary School District, which has already experienced diminishing enrollment in recent years, also saw a dip. It ended the 2019-20 school year with 1,964 students and started the 2020-21 school year with 1,738 students.

**Finances**

The decreased enrollment numbers actually mean more funding per student since most local school districts in The Almanac’s coverage area are “community funded,” which means they receive most of their revenue from local sources, including property taxes. There are no state or federal block grants.

Little of their funding depends on the number of students, so decreasing enrollment actually means there are more funds available per student. Dips in enrollment are also affecting staffing needs, superintendents noted.

**Palo Alto Weekly reporter Elena Kadvany contributed to this report.**

**Email Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com**

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**CRIME BRIEFS**

**Alleged serial killer to stand trial after brain aneurysm**

John Arthur Getreu, the man accused of murdering two young women at Stanford University property in the 1970s, while on trial after being hospitalized with a brain aneurysm, the San Mateo County District Attorney’s Office said on Tuesday.

Getreu, 76, of Hayward, was scheduled to begin trial in late September for the murder of Janet Ann Taylor, 21, whose body was found along Sand Hill Road, west of Interstate Highway 280, on March 25, 1974. She had been stabbed.

The unsolved crime languished until 2017 when DNA evidence linked Getreu to another strangulation murder, the death of 21-year-old Leslie Perlov, who was found on the Stanford campus in Santa Clara County on Feb. 13, 1973. Santa Clara County sheriff investigators determined the DNA evidence at the crime scene and matching it with his DNA found on a discarded coffee cup they had retrieved while he was under surveillance.

San Mateo County sheriff investigators and the District Atty- ney’s Office arrested and charged him with Taylor’s murder in May 2019 after his DNA was found on the crotch of her torn pants.

Getreu’s trial was postponed after he was hospitalized with the brain aneurysm, which affected his speech and required physical therapy. On Nov. 2, he appeared in court in San Mateo County from jail by video. Judge John Bradley told the court that his health has improved so that the trial can resume. His case is set for trial on Jan. 7, with opening statements and evidence to begin on Jan. 25. His trial is expected to take a month.

Getreu is being held on $10 million bail in the Taylor case. He remains in Santa Clara County jail in San Jose for the Perlov case without bail.

He is also expected to stand trial for Perlov’s murder next year.

—Sue Dremann

**Motorcyclist Injured in collision with deer**

A motorcyclist was injured late Saturday afternoon (Oct. 31) after striking a deer on Highway 35 in San Mateo County.

A spokesperson for Cal Fire said Saturday evening that the motorcyclist was thrown from his vehicle after hitting the deer on Skyline Boulevard between highways 84 and 92. San Mateo County firefighters responded and the motorcyclist was transported to a local hospital and treated for his injuries, according to Cal Fire Battalion Chief Tim Shiffer.

—Bay City News Service

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**Sharon Graham Niederhaus**

February 23, 1942 – October 24, 2020

Sharon Graham Niederhaus was a 7th generation Californian, born on February 23rd, 1942 in San Francisco. She was the eldest of five siblings and the daughter of John and Charlotte Graham. She died peacefully on Saturday, October 24th in Palo Alto, California at the age of 78-years-old.

Sharon was a graduate of San Mateo High School. She received her BA in Sociology/Anthropology at Mills College. She earned five K-12 teaching credentials and taught in San Jose and Portola Valley. As the Director of Partnerships in Education for the San Mateo County Office of Education, she initiated and developed over 100 Adopt-A-School partnerships servicing more than 40,000 students. She was a networker bringing groups and individuals together for the benefit of all. In 1993, Sharon was inducted into the San Mateo County Women’s Hall of Fame. She went on to earn a Master of Liberal Arts degree from Stanford University in 2001. Based on her thesis at Stanford, she co-authored a book with her brother John Graham titled, “All in the Family: A Creative Guide to Successful Multigenerational Living.” She has given book talks all over the country, received national media attention and even discussed her book on the “Good Morning America” TV show.

Sharon will be remembered not only for her many accomplishments and contributions as a pioneer and leader in the community, but for her loving, supportive, generous, gracious and positive Spirit. She uplifted everyone she connected with and encouraged people to pursue their dreams. She also had an attitude of gratitude and frequently referred to herself as, “The luckiest woman on the planet.” She had an amazing ability for self-acceptance and was able to model that for everyone that knew her. Further, Sharon’s 40-year marriage to her husband Don, was a positive role-model of unconditional love for all of their family and friends.

Sharon is survived by her husband, Don Niederhaus, sister Mary Ellen Wehrli, brothers John and Bill Graham, daughters Karen Mehringer and Kris Bidwell, step-daughters Heidi Collins and Kirsten Kim, step-son Greg Niederhaus, her grandchildren Tori, Miranda, John and Brenna Bidwell, Nicolas Kim and Chris Collins.

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Lehua Greenmann contributed to this report.
or vote-by-mail ballots received after Wednesday, Oct. 28.

There are 442,637 registered voters in the county, and voter turnout is currently at 51.7% or 228,724 ballots cast, but will certainly climb as the count continues.

The race has been shaped over the past few months by the controversies and obstacles for each candidate.

Fennell reported that he felt discouraged from running for the seat after a phone conversation with Housing Commission Chair Karen Grove and Planning Commissioner Michele Tate in late June. Both women are involved with the policy advocacy group Menlo Together.

Tate in late June. Both women are involved with the policy advocacy group Menlo Together.

Menlo Park’s District 3 representative will have some big issues to deal with. Among the top issues are: an upcoming mandate from the state to zone to more than 3,000 housing units within city limits; how the City Council should zone the large USGS property on Middlefield Road that’s soon to be vacated; continued decisions about whether and how to pursue the construction of grade separations to separate the Caltrain rail line from Menlo Park streets; and how to move forward with selecting a new police chief and engaging in reforms to promote racial equity within the community.

In an email Nguyen sent to her friends and supporters, she thanked a number of residents and former city officials for their support. She said she also experienced some negative incidents. While out distributing door hangers, someone followed her and her daughter and removed them, she said. With limited campaign funds, she said, she could not afford to send out mailers and felt she had to campaign by going door to door, which was difficult due to a recent surgery.

“Your thoughtfulness has touched me deeply,” she told her supporters. “As for my own race, (win) or (lose), I know I have conducted myself with honor and integrity.”

Fennell, in an election night interview, added that while there are still many votes to count, if the later results continue to reflect the earlier ones and he doesn’t win, he still plans to get more involved with city politics.

“I’m just excited to see that I had a significant number of people who wrote them or if they were nonetheless, his ticket for the seat.

Specifically, he said, he’ll be keeping an eye on how Wolosin follows through on her campaign goals and will work on holding elected officials accountable.

In this race, he said, he got a taste for city politics, was able to generate some votes and connect with a lot of neighbors and community members. He added that he plans to build on the success he has experienced and may consider running again, "especially if we don’t see the type of changes that we need."

“The athlete in me understands that sometimes you don’t reach success the first go-around,” he said.

District 5

Menlo Park’s District 5 race, which represents the first district-based election for the westernmost part of Menlo Park, including Sharon Heights, is uncontested, with incumbent Ray Mueller seeking a third term.

In an email statement, Mueller said he was grateful to be reelected.

“We have some challenges ahead of us, navigating the budget impacts of Covid-19. Our infrastructure downtown is aging badly and needs investment. Additionally we will need to work together collaboratively with all our city stakeholders to determine how to equitably add state mandated housing across the city,” he wrote.

“One of the benefits of serving a district is being able to focus and provide a higher level of constituent service to residents. I look forward to working closely with neighbors, our school district leaders, and our small businesses to really keep our community thriving and our quality of life high for the families and residents who live here.”

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

PORTOLA COUNCIL

continued from page 5

Stanford University would build 27 single-family homes for faculty and 12 affordable multifamily units on vacant property it owns along Alpine Road. Hufty did not support it due to concerns about wildfire hazards on the property. While the other candidates said more fire mitigation work may be needed on the site — and Aalfs and Wernikoff expressed doubt that the project would be approved should local fire officials deem the site inappropriate — they did not come out against the proposal.

In addition to tackling housing and wildfire safety related matters, the council can also expect to be involved in continued conversations about racial equity issues and policing moving forward. After the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in May, the council formed a Race and Justice Subcommittee — made up of Vice Mayor Maryann Derwin and Councilman John Richards — that has spearheaded various efforts to engage residents and the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office on issues related to policing, race and implicit bias, including creating a page on its website to collect public comments and launching a series of virtual town hall meetings on racial equity and policing in September. Last month the town hosted a virtual panel entitled "Policing, Race & Justice in the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office," which included Sheriff Carlos Bolanos, District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe and Rev. Lorrie Carter Owens, president of the San Mateo County chapter of the NAACP, among others.

Aalfs and Wernikoff funded their own campaigns, with each spending around $3,000, according to campaign finance documents filed last month. Hey and Hufty reported that they did not reach the $2,000 reporting threshold required to file campaign finance documents.

Council members in Portola Valley serve four-year terms and do not have term limits. The council has five members — Aalfs, Wengert, Derwin, Richards and Craig Hughes.

The new council will be seated in December, after the election results are certified.

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It’s always so interesting to read your comments in the Local Scoop member email — and I’m sure I’m not the only reader who wants to give you all a huge THANK YOU for all the work you’ve been doing. You’ve outlined all the challenges — and you’ve overcome them! Thanks for everyone’s work!

- Debbie M.

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ARTISTS PONDER PANDEMIC PARENTING AND ‘HOLDING IT TOGETHER’
Timely exhibition heralds the reopening of Palo Alto Art Center’s main gallery

Story and photos by Karla Kane

The playful-yet-poignant new exhibition at the Palo Alto Art Center, “Holding it Together,” is a collection of new works by artists that examine the experience of parenting during the pandemic in all its often chaotic, frustrating, humorous and sweet glory.

The show is a reunion for Bay Area artists (and parents) Alexandra Bailliere, Karen Leslie Ficke, Benicia Gantner, Amy Hibbs, Jenny Hynes, Jill Miller, Robin Mullery, Ashley Lauren Saks, Trevor Tubelle and Vanessa Woods, who first came together for a residency led by Mullery at the Art Center in conjunction with the 2018 “Care and Feeding: The Art of Parenthood” exhibition.

Mullery, a Palo Alto resident, mother of third graders and member of the Calabarley Artist Studio Program who also works as a therapist, reached out to the rest to suggest organizing a group show exploring their experiences during the COVID age.

“I had the idea to see what we’re all doing right now in this really crazy time,” she said. “Sometimes it’s hard to find other parent artists because we’re so isolated.”

Mullery’s piece, “Mama?”, installed in the center of the gallery, consists of 19 concrete balls in various sizes and conditions—some suspended like moons and planets in an imagined galaxy, some cracked or misshapen, smashed upon the floor. Concrete as a material interests her, she said, because of its mix of strength and fragility. “Mama?” speaks to how the life “pause” caused by the global pandemic has revealed many hidden cracks and ruptures in U.S. society, from social injustice to the climate crisis, and how humans are seeking connection and resilience in hard times.

The concrete balls also represent how she, as a parent, has felt more than ever the pressures to juggle aspects of her life, with the acknowledgment that many goals or plans may remain unfinished or broken; a mama bearing “the heaviness of it all.”

Bailliere, who called the original residency experience very meaningful for the opportunity it provided to connect with others who were juggling identities as parents and artists, has contributed three different projects to “Holding it Together.” “Tiger King Bingewatch,” with its titular nod to the popular Netflix documentary, is a hand-sewn “pandemic quilt,” started enthusiastically, Bailliere said, when she assumed the shelter-in-place order would only last for a few weeks. As it stretched on, the quilt expanded and “could continue to grow but may never be completed,” she said.

Two large oil paintings were inspired by senior citizens she got to know while leading virtual art workshops, who impressed her with the way they were handling the loneliness and isolation with grace and dignity. And a series of small oil paintings represent her early attempt to complete one painting a day, a goal often “hijacked by something one or all of my three teenage sons did which took my attention away from the practice of completing these daily works,” including a skateboard crash resulting in a trip to the emergency room.

These pieces, like several in the exhibition, exemplify what every parent knows: Trying to work while at home with children involves a whole lot of interruption.

During the 2018 residency, Mullery said the group members began referring to each other jokingly as “momrades” (mom comrades), with Trevor Tubelle as the comrade, “dadrade.” For “Holding it Together,” Tubelle has created a whole-wall installation representing a project titled “QuaranTine Walk Drawings.”

“When the pandemic started, I was stuck at home with my family just like everyone else on the planet and I realized I would not be able to go to my studio to make art. So I needed to figure out how to not go insane from being around my kids day and night and to somehow keep my creative mind alive, not to mention keeping my body from falling apart from inactivity,” he said. In late March, he began going on walks around San Francisco, making quick drawings on small scraps of paper and leaving them on display in situ. By June, he had created 40.

“I’ve been visiting the drawings periodically to document how they fare over time in terms of weathering (sun, rain, wind) and other factors outside my control (e.g. graffiti and vandalism),” he explained. At the Art Center, Tubelle has drawn a map on the wall representing all the neighborhoods he visited on his walks (with wires radiating from a center nail, representing his home), along with photos of the drawings showing their changes over time, plus data on the dates and locations. As many of the drawings are still intact, he said, the project will continue.

For Hibbs, “2020 has been a year of extremes in my art-making practice. At times, I’ve been creatively immobilized for weeks while caring for my kids, home schooling, or just plain worrying about the world,” she said. “But the lack of running around dropping kids off and picking them up has also unlocked some unexpected time during which I’ve deepened my practice.”

In “Holding it Together,” Hibbs’ works demonstrate how she’s found inspiration, naturally, from the world right outside her door. Her cyanotype prints are based on plant waste she’s photographed around her San Jose neighborhood. She’s also included one of her compost prints, in which she places a pile of compost from her home/yard on a piece of synthetic paper, “letting the process of decay mark the paper with inky organic patterns.”

Visitors to the exhibition have a chance to take part in another of Hibbs’ compost-centric works. Just inside the lobby sits the “Transformation Station,” where all are invited to write down or draw a negative thought or fear. These are shredded and added to an adjacent worm compost bin. They’ll be transformed by the worms into life-giving fertilizer, to be spread around the Art Center’s grounds in the spring, literally turning negatives into positives. Fittingly, Hibbs worked in collaboration with her daughter on the project.

“My hope is that this piece is both cathartic and fun,” she said. The exhibition encompasses a variety of works in other media, including sculpture, photographic collage, video installation and more.

“Holding it Together” is the first show to be installed in the main gallery since winter—the Peninsula Photo Contest is currently installed in the smaller Glass Gallery. Art Center Director Karen Kienzle said the creation of this show, as well as the ability to physically reopen the gallery, has come as a pleasant surprise after the cancellation of the previously planned “Safe” exhibition, she said. For the time being, the Art Center will err on the side of caution and open at 25% rather than the 50% capacity allowed by the county, Kienzle said. She is also committed to each exhibition having a virtual presence, for those unable or uncomfortable coming to an in-person show, so a photo tour will be available on the center’s Flickr page.

In addition to feeding their worries and frustrations into the Transformation Station, community members are also invited to participate in the show by submitting photos of how their families are “holding it together” during these times (send via Instagram to @paloaltoartcenter, email to artcenter@cityofpaloalto.org or text 650-646-5344). These will be added to the gallery walls throughout the duration of the show, which runs until Dec. 12. The Art Center is open Tuesday-Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. More information is available at https://tinyurl.com/y9ppp5z8.

Email Karla Kane at kkane@almanacnews.com

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