When will I see you again?

Some pandemic-separated families cautiously adjust; a few take bold action

By Sue Dremann

The birth of a baby is normally cause for a large family celebration. In early February, Shounak Dharap expected his extended family to travel from India to Palo Alto to meet his new daughter, Aarchi. But then the COVID-19 crisis hit and turned the family’s plans upside down.

Even his wife’s parents who live in town can’t hold their new granddaughter, he said.

Weddings and births, the holidays and family gatherings, the ability to touch and hold a dear family member — even routine visits — have all been disrupted by the pandemic.

As the deadly virus’s spread continues to quash expectations of when life might return to normal, some residents said they worry when — or if — they will ever see their loved ones in person again. Three Midpeninsula families discussed how they are adapting to the new reality.

An infant born into a pandemic

Dharap and his wife, Laura Jefferson, hope Aarchi will grow up surrounded by the loving caresses of doting grandparents, playing face-to-face with playmates and joyfully celebrating all of life’s milestones with their family. But so far, Dharap and Jefferson have had to contain their lives in a small family bubble.

Being new parents, they had already expected some isolation and were taking precautions against exposing their daughter to others in the first months of her life.

But they had plans. Both work full time, and when Aarchi was born on Feb. 3, Dharap was on parental leave.

“I was supposed to go back to work on March 16; the shelter-in-place went into effect the next day,” said Dharap, an attorney and the vice president of the Palo Alto Unified School District Board of Education.

Dharap’s parents and his sister, who live nearby, care for Aarchi part time, but Jefferson’s parents, who live in the same Palo Alto neighborhood as his parents, cannot have physical contact with their granddaughter due to their age and higher risk for COVID-19, he said.

“We’re not even seeing them. We didn’t include them in our family celebration. In normally cause for a large family gathering. In fact, during the previous years in the district we have not seen them. The deaths have been replaced by the children’s swings, and they are now sitting in the backyard of their home in Palo Alto on Oct. 27. Instead of being surrounded by extended family after Aarchi was born, they created a small pandemic bubble and kept up with relatives far and near via Zoom.

Las Lomitas board president resigns over wife’s racist and misogynistic tweets about VP-elect Kamala Harris

Jon Venverloh calls wife Mehridith’s posts ‘reprehensible’

By Angela Swartz

A local school board president resigned his post on Nov. 8 after community members saw tweets from his wife making profane, racist and misogynistic insults questioning Vice President-elect Kamala Harris’ qualifications for office.

Mehridith Venverloh, the wife of Las Lomitas Elementary School District board president Jon Venverloh, took to Twitter in the early morning hours of Nov. 8. In one of the posts she said of the California senator and former state attorney general: “All she needs to be qualified is a Black (p----y) No brain needed.”

Jon Venverloh, a former Google executive, in 2018 joined the elected board that oversees Las Lomitas Elementary School in Atherton and La Entrada Middle School in Menlo Park. He issued a statement on Facebook Sunday announcing that he was stepping down from the board and condemned his wife’s tweets, which have since been deleted. Her Twitter account has also disappeared.

Shonidith Venverloh, the wife of Las Lomitas Executive Director, Jon Venverloh, issued an apology to Harris and community members on Facebook on Sunday, saying her “vulgar words crossed the line.” She said the comments were a result of changes in her medication.

Some of you know I suffer from a debilitating neurological disease, and as a result I take various medications,” she said. “Over the past several days I have been weaning off of my meds to prepare for a hospitalization that is scheduled to start tomorrow (Nov. 9). I believe that the change in my medication was a result of changes in her medication.”

Mehridith, who volunteered for the Mothers Together group at Menlo Church from 2012 to 2014, issued an apology to Harris and community members on Facebook on Sunday, saying her “vulgar words crossed the line.” She said the comments were a result of changes in her medication.

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See SEPARATED, page 21

See VENVERLOH, page 18

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November 13, 2020 | AlmanacNews.com | The Almanac 3
All donations to the Holiday Fund will be shared equally among the 10 recipient agencies listed on this page.

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

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

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

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

**Health Connected**
Serves over 5,000 students and their families each year through comprehensive sexual health education programs. Students learn to have ongoing communication with parents and to make informed decisions that will apply to their lives, now and in the future.

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

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

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

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

**St. Francis Center**
Helps low-income, working families become self-supporting members of the community by providing long-term solutions through educational programs for children and parents, as well as after-school programing at Siena Youth Centers. St. Francis Center also provides housing, food and clothing services to address short-term needs.

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

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

By Angela Swartz  
Almanac Staff Writer

Some 87 students returned to Corte Madera School this week after the first time since March. They came equipped with sweatshirts and jackets to weather the outdoor learning space that’s safer than being indoors amid the COVID-19 pandemic, but more difficult as the temperatures fall.

“Some of these kids have been very isolated,” said Shima, who has worked to get students off screens after months of online learning, she said. “It takes a little more than five days to start to see the change in the epidemiology after gatherings, she said. I don’t think it’s just to Halloween gatherings, for example, but I’d say locally we see that gatherings are a challenge.”

Health officials from Bay Area counties on Monday released recommendations for social gatherings and travel during the holidays. Gatherings should take place outdoors, with no more than three households. They should also be short — no more than two hours — and stable, meaning people should not participate in multiple gatherings with multiple households. People with symptoms or the coronavirus should not attend holiday gatherings. If symptoms develop after a gathering, all guests should be notified and tested for the virus.

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By Kate Bradshaw  
Almanac Staff Writer

Years in the works, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously Nov. 10 to approve landscaping plans to renovate and upgrade parts of Flood Park, a county-owned 21-acre park located at 215 Bay Road in Menlo Park.

Plans include retilatitizing the baseball and softball field, adding new multi-use sport fields in the outfield of the baseball field and on the southern side of the park, relocating tennis courts and installing a new all-abilities playground, among a number of other changes. In addition, the county proposes to create a bicycle pump track (a course of dirt berms and rollers built for BMX or mountain bikes), a demonstration garden, a basketball court, an amphitheater, volleyball courts, and renovated picnic and reservation sites.

The plan is expected to impact 72 trees but preserve all heritage trees and 92% of all trees within the park, according to a county staff report.

County supervisors approve 
Flood Park renovations

By Bay City News Service

While San Mateo County remained in the orange tier of the state’s Blueprint for a Safer Economy for a third consecutive week, health officials reported a slight uptick in COVID-19 cases for the first week of November.

During a presentation Tuesday to county supervisors, San Mateo Chief of Health Louise Rogers said the increase in cases mirrors the trend across the Bay Area, the state and the nation.

“At the winter approaches and it gets colder, we’ve been expecting an uptick,” Rogers said.

The county’s data dashboard shows that from Oct. 25 to 31, there were on average 437 new cases per day. From Nov. 1 to Nov. 7, the average was 66.6 new cases per day.

Rogers said it’s too soon to determine an exact cause for the increase.

“It takes a little more than five days to start to see the change in the epidemiology after gatherings, she said. I don’t think it’s just to Halloween gatherings, for example, but I’d say locally we see that gatherings are a challenge.”

Health officials from Bay Area counties on Monday released recommendations for social gatherings and travel during the holidays. Gatherings should take place outdoors, with no more than three households. They should also be short — no more than two hours — and stable, meaning people should not participate in multiple gatherings with multiple households.

People with symptoms or the coronavirus should not attend holiday gatherings. If symptoms develop after a gathering, all guests should be notified and tested for the virus.

Rogers also said students returning home for the holidays need to be vigilant by practicing social distancing, wearing face coverings, getting tested and remaining at home in relative isolation.

“After they (students) are home they’re going to want to see their friends,” Rogers said. “We really want to encourage people if they’re gathering at all to be outside. In the Bay Area, it gets a little chilly, but we can all manage that and it’s really much, much safer.”

When possible, residents are encouraged to gather for the holidays virtually and deliver meals to family and friends rather than holding traditional holiday dinners.

People are also encouraged to participate in holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas and Hanukkah by decorating their houses, attending holiday events outdoors and watching holiday movies at one of the Bay Area’s drive-in movie theaters.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) notes that several factors contribute to the risk of getting infected or infecting others with the virus, and family members need to consider those before planning to celebrate together. Those include the levels of COVID-19 in the communities in which they live and to which they’re traveling; the behaviors of other family members prior to the gathering (people who engage in risky behaviors endanger those who practice preventative measures); and the numbers of people who will be at the event — fewer is better.

Taking what may seem like extreme precautions can also help ensure that the holiday is a happy one — both during and afterward. The CDC advises people who decide to attend an in-person holiday gathering to strictly avoid contact with people outside of their household for 14 days before the event.

It does not mention getting tested for the coronavirus before the holiday, perhaps because the test doesn’t detect antibodies in people who are very recently exposed, although in combination with a 14-day pre-holiday quarantine, a negative test result could increase people’s peace of mind.

San Mateo County remained in the orange tier of the state’s Blueprint for Safer Economy, according to the state’s Tuesday tier announcements. This week’s tier assignment is based on data for the week ending Oct. 31, which the county has an adjusted

By Magali Gauthier

Fifth graders Amelia, left, and Tessa play with hula hoops after lunch at Corte Madera School in Portola Valley on Nov. 10. Fourth and fifth graders returned to in-person instruction for the first time this week.

Older students head back to classrooms at Corte Madera

By Angela Swartz  
Almanac Staff Writer

Fifth graders Amelia, left, and Tessa play with hula hoops after lunch at Corte Madera School in Portola Valley on Nov. 10. Fourth and fifth graders returned to in-person instruction for the first time this week.
California’s tumultuous relationship with the Trump administration — the state sued it more than 100 times while Trump frequently threatened to yank federal funding — the friendship between Newsom and Harris positions California for a vastly different dynamic.

“With Kamala Harris as vice president, we won’t have to feel like we’re walking on landmines all the time, because we know she’s not looking for ways to harm California,” said Daniel Zingale, Newsom’s strategy and communications director until retiring early this year.

“Quite the opposite: she is going to take the interests of our nearly 40 million people to heart.”

“We’re often left behind. So having a vice president will be good for the state.”

Former Gov. Jerry Brown

Harris could become an influential vice president in part because the office itself is more powerful than in earlier periods of American history, said Joel K. Goldstein, a Saint Louis University law school professor and scholar of the vice presidency.

Beginning with Jimmy Carter’s inclusion of Vice President Walter Mondale in the 1970s, he said, presidents started giving their VIPs an office in the West Wing, an open invitation to attend meetings and lots of access to confer privately with the president. This was how Biden experienced being Barack Obama’s second-in-command, Goldstein said, and the way he expects Biden to treat Harris.

When Biden announced picking Harris as his running mate, he envisioned her holding a significant role, saying he wanted Harris “to be the last one in the room,” as he weighed big decisions.

“The fact that she’s going to be in the room — in a lot of rooms — and that some of what she cares about are things that are important in California, that means that California will have influence,” Goldstein said.

“There’s likely to be responsiveness issues that California has in a way that give it some benefit.”

Here are three ways Harris could make a difference:

More attention from the federal government

Behind the scenes, Trump has issued disaster declarations to help California recover from brutal fire seasons. But in front of the cameras, he has ridiculed the state while it suffered, claiming California was neglecting its forests and dismissing concerns about climate change.

Recent wildfires, along with the coronavirus pandemic, have shown how much California relies on the federal government, state Sen. Toni Atkins, a San Diego Democrat.

“Whether it’s funding or broad policy changes,” Atkins said, “a Vice President Harris would absolutely help California cut through red tape.”

In Indiana, a close relationship between the governor and Vice President Mike Pence, himself a former governor of Indiana, has helped the state navigate the coronavirus pandemic, the Indianapolis Star reported this spring. GOP Gov. Eric Holcomb described contacting Pence when the state needed more test kits and federal funding to staff testing sites.

Delaware had a similar inside track during Biden’s vice presidency. Delaware Democratic House Speaker Peter Schwartzkopf told CalMatters he recalled Biden paying a visit to his home state in 2009.

“I said, ‘I see they just put you in charge of the stimulus program. I have a project that’s shovel-ready.’ Schwartzkopf described telling Pence that Delaware had a shovel-ready program. I have a project that’s shovel-ready, Schwartzkopf told Delaware First. “I have a project that’s shovel-ready, Schwartzkopf told Delaware First. “I have a project that’s shovel-ready, Schwartzkopf told Delaware First. “I have a project that’s shovel-ready, Schwartzkopf told Delaware First. “I have a project that’s shovel-ready, Schwartzkopf told Delaware First. “I have a project that’s shovel-ready, Schwartzkopf told Delaware First. “I have a project that’s shovel-ready, Schwartzkopf told Delaware First. “I have a project that’s shovel-ready, Schwartzkopf told Delaware First. “I have a project that’s shovel-ready, Schwartzkopf told Delaware First. “I have a project that’s shovel-ready, Schwartzko

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Suspect pleads insanity in killing of former Atherton town arborist

By Angela Swartz
Almanac Staff Writer

Francis Wolke, the man who allegedly killed former Atherton town arborist Kathy Hughes Anderson in her Menlo Park home on Dec. 12, 2018, pleaded not guilty of murder by reason of insanity in court on Monday, Nov. 9, according to the San Mateo County District Attorney’s Office.

Judge Stephanie G. Garratt held the pretrial conference in which Wolke entered the plea, according to the DA's office. Wolke, 28, and the prosecutor appeared by remote video, while defense attorney Connie O'Brien was present in court.

The court appointed two doctors to examine the defendant’s frame of mind, over the objection of Wolke’s attorney, who didn’t want doctors appointed, according to the DA’s office.

Police arrested Wolke after he was found at Hughes Anderson’s home on Valparaiso Avenue on Dec. 12, the day her body was found, and booked him into San Mateo County Jail on first-degree murder charges, according to a Menlo Park Police Department report.

Wolke had arrived in the Bay Area from Cincinnati just a few days before the killing, and there is no known relationship or contact between Wolke and Hughes Anderson, nor a motive for the crime, according to the DA’s office.

Wolke had an outstanding arrest warrant from the Santa Clara County Sheriff’s Office for prowling and possession of narcotics stemming from a 2014 case, according to Menlo Park police.

A jury trial is set for Jan. 25, 2021, at 9 a.m. This is the third setting of the jury trial date since Wolke’s court arraignment on Nov. 1, 2019.

The defendant remains in custody on $10 million bail.

Email Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com

Coronavirus updates: State braces for next wave

By Embarcadero Media staff

San Mateo County reported 75 new cases of COVID-19 on Nov. 10, bringing the county’s total to 26,972. Three more people have died, raising the death toll to 436. There were 107 people hospitalized, 13 of whom were new. The most recent seven-day rolling average of new cases per day stands at 146.

Positive test rates rising

California's rate of positive coronavirus tests has increased nearly 50% over the last three weeks, possibly portending the next wave of the pandemic, Gov. Gavin Newsom said Nov. 9. The state's 14-day positivity rate has risen from 2.5 on Oct. 19 to 3.7 Monday, according to Newsom. Likewise, the number of coronavirus patients within the state's hospital system has risen by nearly 29% over the last two weeks.

Those increases also come as the state continues to ramp up its testing capacity, as California is now averaging nearly 144,000 coronavirus tests per day. While the state has fortified its stocks of personal protective equipment, ventilators and intensive care unit beds in anticipation of the pandemic's next wave, Newsom said the recent case and hospitalization increases should be sobering for all residents of the state.

"We're starting to see people take down their guard, take off their masks, begin to mix outside their households," Newsom said. "We've seen some early indication related to Halloween. I'm very sober about that and that's what I was elected to focus on."

The effects of the statewide increase in new cases have trickled down to the county level and affected which businesses can reopen. Contra Costa and Santa Cruz counties moved to a more-restrictive coronavirus reopening tier Tuesday, forcing both to reduce indoor capacities for businesses like restaurants and gyms. Both counties spent two weeks in Tier 3, also called the "orange tier," before being sent back to Tier 2, the "red tier," on Tuesday due to increased rates of new cases.

The move will require both counties to pare the maximum indoor capacity of many indoor businesses from 50% to 25% or 100 people, whichever is fewer, while gyms must return to 10% of their maximum indoor capacity.

In addition, businesses like offices, card rooms, bowling alleys, gymnasiums, wineries and bars, breweries and distilleries at which food is not served and public and businesses must do everything that they can to follow safety protocols, including wearing masks, washing their hands and socially distancing themselves to try to slow the spread of the virus, she said.

"The sharp uptick in cases is a very worrisome sign in terms of what it will mean for our hospitals," Cody said, noting that the county is also seeing a rise in hospitalizations and could see a sharper spike as the number of cases continues to climb.

As of Nov. 9, the county has had a cumulative total of 26,747 confirmed COVID-19 cases, 264 of which were new, according to its online COVID-19 data. There have been 433 deaths since the pandemic began, including...
San Mateo County buys hotels to shelter seniors and homeless

By Kate Bradshaw

San Mateo County will soon be able to provide long-term shelter to more people when it acquires two converted hotels in Redwood City and Redwood Shores, thanks to a major state grant.

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors voted 4-0 at a special meeting Nov. 5 to authorize purchases for the 75-unit Pacific Inn Hotel at 2610 El Camino Real in Redwood City and the TownePlace Suites Hotel in Redwood Shores at 1000 Twin Dolphin Drive.

The Project Homekey program is more than $33 million, and the county agreed to pay $12.75 million in local matching funds, according to a press release.

VIRUS UPDATE

continued from page 7

three that were announced Monday. There are currently 103 hospitalizations, 19 of which are new, according to the county’s dashboard. People ages 18 to 34 are showing the most cases and hospitalizations, 19 of which are Monday. There are currently 103 hospitalizations, 19 of which are new, according to the county’s dashboard. People ages 18 to 34 are showing the most cases and hospitalizations, 19 of which are south of the county when the northern area has needs for such facilities as well.

Others were supportive. Diane Warner of Redwood City said she is 86 and struggling with finding supportive housing for a 57-year-old son with mental illness.

“I strongly support your pur- chase of hotels to meet his need for a place to live,” she wrote.

County Manager Mike Calla- gy said that the project provides a quick solution by converting existing facilities to housing rather than building them from the ground up.

“Even before COVID-19, the county was working to protect residents who were on the verge of losing housing due to the high cost of living and rent in the Bay Area. And, from day one of the county’s response to this pandemic, we’ve been innovative and strategic in how we keep our residents safe, especially for our homeless, seniors and at-risk populations,” he said in a press release.

Homelessness in San Mateo County was on the rise before the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the point in time count that’s conducted every other January in odd years. The 2019 count indicated that homelessness was up 20% from 2017.

The county has also used state funds from the program to house homeless residents at high risk of developing complications from COVID-19 in a hotel that allows social distancing and other protective measures, called “Bayfront Station.” That program is expected to be phased out later this year, according to the press release.

Three new cases were reported Monday. The number of active cases is now down to 113.

Cody said.

Health leaders don’t have a clear explanation of what’s causing the surge, such as specific superspreader events. The rise does come nine days after Halloween. It’s possible many people are developing “pandemic fatigue” and might be less careful about following local health protocols, she said.

The county’s last sharp spike was in July. Restrictions and health protocols, she said.

Another resident, Vivian Crisman, asked why the two pur- chases were focused in the southern end of the county when the northern area has needs for such facilities as well.

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Council favors issuing bonds for new Belle Haven community center

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

Despite a pandemic-ravaged budget, the Menlo Park City Council is exploring ways to fund a new pool, play safety and sustainability additions to the new community center that Facebook has proposed to rebuild to replace the Onetta Harris Community Center, senior center and youth center in Belle Haven.

Facebook has offered to build a two-story community campus building with new youth facilities, a senior center, health and fitness facilities, a library area, locker rooms, improved parking and a breezeway to improve access to Kelly Park. The building is being designed by architecture firm Hart Howerton. According to city staff, the value of Facebook’s offer is about $40 million.

In recent meetings, the council has expressed interest in moving forward with plans for additional improvements for the new community center, which adds millions of dollars in costs to the city it would be required to pay.

The biggest of these items is a new pool, set to cost $7.4 million, according to staff. Other items the council says it wants to fund are upgrades to make the new structure more sustainable and safe for instance, making it seismically sound to function as a Red Cross evacuation center; capable of providing backup power; and possessing solar carports, a recycled water connection and underground utilities, among other items.

Some items, like the solar carports and renewable energy microgrid, could be paid for with a power purchase agreement using tax credits. Assuming those items could pay for themselves in a swap with a power purchase agreement, the council was tasked with coming up with $9.8 million in additional funds to pay for the new pool and other items, according to staff.

The council agreed Nov. 10 to plan on raising about $1 million through grants and donations. Elyse Stein, president of the Menlo Park Library Foundation, said that the foundation had already done some research to gauge the community’s interest in supporting a fundraising campaign.

Although city staff recommended the council also use $2 million of its unassigned general fund balance toward this project, council members did not favor doing so — the city currently has a tight budget due to COVID-19 related economic impacts. Instead, they favored drawing on voter-approved general obligation bonds from the city’s Measure T.

The measure, approved in 2001, permits the city to issue a series of bonds to raise up to $38 million to improve recreational facilities. About $24 million has already been spent, and about $14 million remains.

“We have such an uncertain economic situation with the pandemic ... and Measure T funds are specifically for this purpose,” said Councilwoman Betsy Nash. “I would propose not to dip into the general fund.”

While the council discussed the possibility of issuing bonds for all of the remaining $14 million to make high-priority improvements to parks identified in a recently completed parks master plan, ultimately it agreed to cap its current discussion at the amount needed for the new community center — about $8.8 million, assuming that grants and donations can raise about $1 million.

“Measure T raises people’s taxes,” said Councilwoman Catherine Carlton. “Let’s keep them at the lowest rate possible, especially if we can get grants, donations, or other funding.”

The rate for residential and commercial property owners would be set at a specific amount — likely an increase of somewhere between $20 and $30 — per $1 million of the property’s assessed value, according to Dan Jacobson, assistant administrative services director.

These bonds wouldn’t take effect until December 2022, according to staff.

See COMMUNITY CENTER, page 15

School board election updates: Little change in races since election night

Votes are still being counted in last week’s local school district board races, but the same candidates who were ahead on election night are still leading.

Below are semi-official results posted by the San Mateo County Elections Office on Monday, Nov. 9. These results include all ballots except for provisional ballots.

Sequoia Union High School District

Two newcomers have held their leads to fill two contested seats on the Sequoia Union High School District’s governing board. District residents, for the first time, voted based on the geographical area of the school district where they reside.

With nearly 70% of votes counted, Rich Ginn, a parent and business owner, pulled ahead in the race for the Trustee Area C seat, which represents Woodside, West Menlo Park and Portola Valley, with 38% of the votes. Thelma Ackerman, the former principal of Oak Knoll and Encinal Elementary School District’s governing board, and Georgia Jack, who initially led on election night, has nearly 34% of the vote, while Shamar Edwards, school principal, has 28.3%.

Candidate Shawneece Stevenson has more than 71% of the vote in Trustee Area E, which includes Menlo Park neighborhoods east of Highway 101 as well as East Palo Alto. Jacqui Cebrian, who dropped out of the race in September to support Leng is an anesthesiologist and former president Jon Venverloh, who resigned on Sunday, Nov. 8, after his wife posted racist and misogynistic tweets about Vice President-elect Kamala Harris over the weekend.

Las Lomitas Elementary School District

Jason Morimoto and Jody Leng are ahead to fill two open seats on the Las Lomitas Elementary School District’s governing board that governs Las Lomitas Elementary School in Atherton and La Entrada Middle School in Menlo Park.

With more than 79% of votes counted, Morimoto was leading with 42.2% of the vote. Leng had nearly 33% and Molly Finn had 27%.

Morimoto, Leng and Finn are all newcomers. A financial executive, Morimoto said closing equity gaps in the district is his top priority. Finn is a teacher at Entrada in a program that focuses on financial oversight and COVID-19 safety.

Leng is anesthesiologist who was the only physician in the district’s Pandemic Recovery Planning Committee, which aided in the district’s COVID-19 response.

The school board will soon have to decide how to fill the seat of former president Jon Venverloh, who resigned on Sunday, Nov. 8, after his wife posted racist and misogynistic tweets about Vice President-elect Kamala Harris over the weekend.

Menlo Park City School District

Francesca Segre and David Ackerman are leading the race to fill two open seats on the Menlo Park City School District’s governing board.

With a little more than 80% of votes counted, Segre has nearly 47% of the vote, Ackerman has over 39% and Robert Maclay trails behind with 14%.

Ackerman, the former principal of Oak Knoll and Encinal schools, has been on the school board for four years. Ackerman has endorsed Segre, 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.

—Angela Swartz

Ravenswood City School District

Vote totals for newcomers Brouwnyn Alexander and Jenny Varghese Bloom indicate that they have won the two seats on the Ravenswood City School District Board of Education.

The election count released by the San Mateo County assessor and chief elections officer showed Alexander, a former Belle Haven Elementary School teacher, has maintained her first-place finish with 3,133 votes, or 23.2% of the votes counted; Varghese Bloom, whose daughter is a Ravenswood kindergartner and whose son attends the district’s preschool, has secured second with 2,928 votes, or 21.7%. In third place, incumbent Marielena Gaona Mendoza has 1,899 votes, or 14% of the votes.

Only 9% of the county’s ballots remain to be counted, and Gaona Mendoza, a special education teacher, would have to win almost all of the outstanding ballots — and Varghese Bloom almost none — to advance into the No. 2 slot.

—Elena Kadvany

San Mateo County Community College District

In the San Mateo County Community College District race for Trustee Area 5, which includes parts of Menlo Park, East Palo Alto and Redwood City, Menlo Park resident John Pimentel was leading with 23,967 votes (50.6%); Redwood City resident Lisa Hicks-Dumanske had 19,999 votes (42.2%) and Blair Whitney had 3,408 votes (7.2%).

—Kate Bradshaw
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Atherton council condemns state bills that override local zoning

By Angela Swartz
Almanac Staff Writer

The Atherton City Council voted 5-0 in favor of a resolution on Nov. 4 condemning potential legislation that could put California cities and towns on the hook to allow more housing to be built in their communities. Council members vocally opposed Senate Bill 50, proposed legislation introduced by state Sen. Scott Wiener, D-San Francisco, which would have relaxed zoning standards for residential developments along transportation corridors. The bill failed to pass the state Senate in January.

The declaration states “the town of Atherton is opposed to the current practice of the legislature of the state of California of continually proposing and passing multitudes of bills that directly impact and interfere with the ability of cities to control their own destiny through use of the zoning authority that has been granted to them.”

Each community knows what’s best to determine how to meet housing goals within their local communities,” said Vice Mayor Elizabeth Lewis. “For Atherton we have to take a really strong position for this. Legislation (like SB 50) doesn’t take into consideration topography or open land space.”

State legislators have indicated they will continue to introduce legislation that will override local zoning ordinances for the development of affordable housing in conjunction with mixed use and/or luxury condominium and apartment housing, according to a report prepared by town staff.

Council member Bill Widmer said he doesn’t like the state mandating what communities will look like.

“We should be able to determine our own fate,” he said. “We should be able to manage our own destiny and keep the character of our town… A developer not here anymore or with an agenda would decide ‘This is what I’m going to build here’ and override what we do.”

Widmer cautioned against the resolution going so far as to leave room for a lawsuit against the town.

The resolution is modeled after one passed in Beverly Hills in 2018. The Atherton resolution also vows town officials will explore ways to protect the ability of cities to retain local control over zoning as each individual city within the state tries to suit itself in determining how the zoning in their city should be allocated in order to meet the housing needs of the community.

Email Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com

Atherton City Council

Incumbent Elizabeth Lewis and newcomer Diana Hawkins-Manuelian have maintained their election night leads for two open seats on the Atherton City Council. Incumbent Cary Wiest is trailing behind the two.

With almost 75% of votes counted, Lewis is leading with 36.3% of the vote. Hawkins-Manuelian has 26%, while Wiest has 22.5% and newcomer Christine David has 15.2%, according to semi-official results posted by the San Mateo County Elections Office on Monday, Nov. 9. These results include all ballots except for provisional ballots. 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 she opposes the town detaching 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. —Angela Swartz

Portola Valley Town Council

Portola Valley Mayor Jeff Aalfs and challenger Sarah Wernikoff appear headed for election to the Town Council, with each holding 40% and 32.7% of the vote, respectively, according to unofficial results released by the San Mateo County Elections Office last updated Monday, Nov. 9.

Retired family physician Mary Hufty and technologist Angela Hey, who serves on the town’s Bicycle, Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Committee, sit in third and fourth place, respectively. Hufty has received 20.3% of the vote, while Hey has 7.1%.

Wernikoff, a Portola Valley School District volunteer with a background in web-based product management, was the first candidate to pull papers for the Town Council race, deciding to run after learning that Ann Wengert, who has served on the council for 13 years, was not running for reelection.

Aalfs, who joined the school district in 2011 and works in energy and green building consulting, 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, along with another issue that concerns both of those subjects — the proposed Stanford Wedge project, in which Stanford University would build 27 single-family homes for faculty and 12 affordable multi-family units on vacant property it owns along Alpine Road. Some residents, including Hufty, have come out against the proposal over concerns about mitigating wildfire risk on the property, and Woodsie Fire Protection District officials earlier this year raised concerns about possible fire hazards with the project.

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. After the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in May, the council formed a Race and Equity Subcommittee that has spearheaded efforts to engage residents and the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office on issues related to policing, race and implicit bias.

Menlo Park Fire Protection District

Menlo Park Fire Protection District board incumbents Rob Silano and Virginia Chang Kiraly maintain a comfortable lead in their bids for reelection, according to numbers released by the San Mateo County Elections Office on Nov. 9. Chang Kiraly has won 37.9% of votes cast, while Silano has received 37.6% of the vote. Only 118 votes separate them.

Form er fire board member Peter Carpenter and investment professional Sean Ballard, who is chairperson of the district’s Community Crisis Management Advisory Board, trail with 13.9% 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 2018 campaign. Carpenter and Ballard campaigned together throughout this year’s race.

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. Chang Kiraly said that the board would be better at providing broad oversight rather than micromanaging operations, and with being respectful toward fellow directors.

None of the candidates

Election briefs: Updates on local races and Measure RR

Menlo Park City Council

In Menlo Park’s race for the District 3 City Council seat, which encompasses the middle section of the city, candidate Jen Wolosin was in first place with 1,600 votes (59%), Chelsea Nguyen trailed with 712 votes (26.2%) and Max Fennell had 402 votes (14.8%) as of the most recent numbers reported before The Almanac’s Wednesday press deadline. The race for the District 5 council seat was uncontested, and incumbent Ray Mueller had received 2,625 votes.

As of Nov. 9, the San Mateo County Elections Office estimated it had about 31,000 ballots left to process countywide, which represented provisional ballots and ballots submitted under conditional voter registrations. —Kate Bradshaw

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COMPLAINTS cont'd from page 5

case rate of 2.2 cases per day per 100,000 population, a 1.3% test positivity rate and a 2.5% health equity quartile positivity rate.

Statewide, there are on average 8.4 new cases per day per 100,000 and the test positivity rate is 3.4%.

Next week’s blueprint data chart will reflect COVID-19 numbers for the first week of November. Advancing to the least restrictive yellow (minimal risk) tier requires an adjusted case rate of less than 1 per 100,000 and a test positivity rate of less than 2%, which San Mateo County would have to meet for two consecutive weeks.

While the county’s test positivity rate already meets the yellow tier’s criteria, its case rate remains a challenge.

“The yellow tier seems pretty out of reach at this point given what we’re seeing in the region,” Rogers said. In the Bay Area, only San Francisco has reached the yellow tier.

Rogers said the county should focus on helping businesses operate safely in the orange tier. The county’s COVID-19 compliance unit is educating businesses about regulations and ensuring they remain compliant.

Launched on Oct. 19, the unit’s engagement team has engaged with 65 businesses, and the compliance unit has visited 212 sites, County Manager Mike Callagy said at a media briefing last Wednesday. People can report a non-compliant business by calling 200 complaints have been submitted so far.

“The highest number of complaints are in San Mateo, Redwood City, Daly City and South San Francisco. No surprise, they are the big cities that we have,” Callagy said at the Nov. 4 briefing. “The most common type of business to receive complaints are restaurants, bars and fitness centers.”

Callagy said that the unit is focused on indoor operations, and the most common types of violations are not wearing masks or practicing social distancing.

During Tuesday’s board meeting, Supervisor David Canepa expressed concern about the economy if the county went back to the red (substantial risk) tier, which would increase restrictions on businesses and activities.

Canepa asked how the county could reinforce its efforts to “crush the virus.”

“What I’m hearing from people is that fatigue is setting in,” he said. “How do we really double down? It’s more critical now than ever. Because if we don’t make the appropriate adjustments, our economy will crash.”

“Until the vaccine is really out, we’re not going to crush (the virus) so we’re going to manage it,” Rogers said. “In the next several months, what’s really imperative is that we deal with the gatherings.”

Rogers encouraged people to stay vigilant and get tested, adding that there’s no barrier to testing. The county provides free COVID-19 testing at the San Mateo County Event Center and rotating sites throughout the county.

For a full testing schedule, visit smgov.org/testing.

Regarding the risk of moving into the red tier, Rogers said that it would not happen as early as next week, but could be later on if numbers don’t change.

The state’s blueprint rules say that if a county’s case rate and test positivity numbers fall into a less restrictive tier for two consecutive weeks, the state will review the most recent 10 days of data for signs of improvement before determining whether a county will move back or remain in its current tier.

Palo Alto Weekly staff contributed to this report.

COMMUNITY CENTER cont’d from page 10

Offering services during construction

The council approved a plan for how the city would continue to provide the many services that, pre-pandemic, were offered on-site while the new building is under construction.

Senior services and recreation classes would be temporarily moved or accommodated at the Arrillaga Family Recreation Center and Burgess Park campuses, and the city would increase transportation between the Belle Haven neighborhood and these facilities.

For recreation classes, the city plans to set up a pilot program to modify the program fee structure to encourage residents to participate in classes regardless of their ability to pay.

For the after-school program, the city would seek to set up portable classrooms for students at the far end of the Kelly Park parking lot. According to staff, the city has set aside about $1 million for providing these interim services.

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

TOWN OF WOODSIDE
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PLANNING COMMISSION
NOVEMBER 18, 2020 6:00 PM

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Daniel Gibson
Planner: Sara Filipi, Associate Planner

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Joanne Olsen
Planner: Sage Schaan, Principal Planner

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After cyclist's death, work restarts on Kings Mountain pullouts

By Heather Zimmerman

The wooded, winding mountain roads of Woodside draw many for recreation, whether it’s bicyclists or drivers en route to hiking trails or the coast, but the blind curves and narrow shoulders often become dangerous when both motorists and bicyclists are present.

Cyclist Frank Masterson, 69, of Millbrae was injured on Kings Mountain Road in August in a collision with a driver who was passing another bicyclist near a blind curve and later died in the hospital. The driver moved to pass a cyclist and crossed into the oncoming lane, colliding with Masterson, who was riding in the opposite direction, according to a report by Woodside town officials and a San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office deputy at town Circulation Committee meetings.

The fatal collision happened at the intersection of Kings Mountain Road and Huddart Park Road, according to a California Highway Patrol log, along a stretch of Kings Mountain Road maintained by San Mateo County.

Although the incident took place on the county’s portion of the road, it spurred the town to restart a project to add bicycle pullouts and signage along the roughly mile and a half of Kings Mountain Road under Woodside’s jurisdiction, where the conditions are similar to the county’s portion.

The pullouts project had been approved by the Town Council about a year ago but was one of a number of projects put on hold at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, Woodside Public Works Director Sean Rose said in an interview.

According to a town staff report, the project stemmed from concerns shared by residents of the area and members of the town’s Circulation Committee. A study looked at measures put in place by communities with similar safety issues on narrow mountain roads, such as Mill Valley and Sausalito.

The project will place five to six bicycle pullouts on the uphill side of Kings Mountain Road — where it’s most likely that cars will try to pass cyclists who are traveling more slowly — plus signage along the road indicating that pullouts are ahead.

The pullouts will be placed along the road between Entrance Way and the Huddart Park entrance, and each will be at least 100 feet long and about 4.5 feet wide. The pullouts will offer the ability for bikes to pull behind to allow cars that are traveling behind them uphill to pass the bikes without crossing the double yellow line. So it just kind of relieves the pressure to do that,” Rose said, noting that crossing the double yellow line is illegal.

As part of the project, additional signage will instruct drivers not to pass and warn of blind curves. The downhill side will also have signs encouraging those on the road to slow down. The center stripe on the road will get refreshed, Rose said, adding that reflectors added for better visibility.

The signage and striping improvements will be done in coordination with the San Mateo County Public Works Department, which is pursuing a similar project on the county-maintained portion of the road.

With the project restarted, Rose said that he will take the project back to the Town Council for its next meeting on Dec. 15 for approval of the project design and authorization to award a construction contract. If approved, he said he expects construction to start in early 2021.

Email Heather Zimmerman at hzimmerman@almanacnews.com

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Avenidas Village
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VENVERLOH continued from page 1

between right and wrong when I made the posts. There is no excuse for what I wrote, but I ask for your understanding that my state of mind was far from normal last night.”

In an email to The Almanac, Jon said “Mehrdith is not a racist in the least; she personally has done a lot of great work for underprivileged communities.” He said in the past she has often used sarcasm and exaggeration when trying to make a point.

“In this case I believe she was trying to be humorous and sarcastic and completely missed the mark, possibly because of the situation with the meds,” he said in an email to The Almanac. “Her remarks are atrocious and unacceptable nonetheless, and she is now devastated, broken and deeply sorry.”

Community response

The reaction from district parents and other community members was swift. Several people reached out to The Almanac and posted on social media denouncing Mehrdith’s comments.

This kind of behavior hurts people of color more than any other demographic in that wealthy school (district),” said district parent Antonio Altamirano. “As I said in my tweets, I’m saddened to see that it took this level of racism for people to take action. Regardless of the economic power or wealth of an individual, respect is important for a community to be welcoming. I am sad that my half-Black, half-Latinx children are exposed to this kind of ‘leadership’ — money does not equal capability.”

School board members William Steinmetz, John Earnhardt, Diane Honda and Dana Nunn condemned the posts in an email to parents on Monday morning, calling them “abhorrent,” and saying that the “racially-based and gender-based hatred contained in the posts does not reflect the values of our school district or our community.” They also said they were grateful for Jon’s hard work for the district.

“The egregiousness of these posts has undermined Jon’s ability to serve effectively on our governance team,” they said. “We are deeply saddened that this happened and are committed to take action to address the harm done to our community. We acknowledge that there is much more that we can and should be doing to confront and address racism and inequality every day, and we commit ourselves to that task.”

Menlo Park council member and district parent Ray Mueller condemned the tweets in a statement, noting that regardless of political affiliation, people should celebrate that Harris will be the first woman and first woman of color to hold the vice president’s office.

“The candid truth is the words before us today were easy to spot and denounce,” he said. “But the real work before us required to make change to address institutional racism is much more difficult and that is the ultimate challenge to which we must hold ourselves accountable… But also use this moment to reflect and understand more clearly and more personally the racism and sexism she and every woman and person of color has had to endure and overcome, to achieve and lead.”

Filling vacant seat

Jon and two others were the only candidates for three open seats on the governing board in November 2018, so the election was canceled and the three were appointed. At the time, he said he had a personal stake in the district as a parent to four daughters who would, or already did, attend district schools.

Jon served on the Las Lomitas Education Foundation’s executive board from 2010 to 2016 before he and his family relocated to Zurich, Switzerland, for his then-job as director of operations for Google Shopping product management. The Venverlohs are currently Atherton residents.

Jason Morimoto and Jody Leng are leading to fill two open seats on the school board on the November ballot, according to the latest results posted at 4:30 p.m. on Nov. 9.

In the coming weeks, the board will need to decide whether it will appoint someone to fill Jon’s spot or hold a special election, said Superintendent Beth Polito in an email.

Email Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com
in an interview with CalMatters. "We’re often left behind. So having a vice president will be good for the state."

California’s progressive policies could spread

Curb greenhouse gas emissions. Raise the minimum wage to $15 an hour. Give workers paid family leave. Those are policies Biden and Harris say they want to see across the nation, and that California has already approved.

"California in many ways is a laboratory for policy change. That is a huge asset that a vice president from California will bring to the nation," said Karen Skelton, a Democratic strategist who was Al Gore’s political director when he was vice president.

Vice presidents are typically charged with specific policy initiatives. Given Harris’ career as a prosecutor and California’s climate policy leadership, Skelton said, Biden may want her to help run the White House.

"California’s liberal experiment has created the largest homelessness in the nation, highest gas taxes, widening income inequality, near bottom rates in K-12 reading and math scores, eliminating parental choice for education, and a criminal justice system where the human trafficking of a child is not considered a violent crime. Enough is enough."

The last time a Democrat was in the White House, California’s plan to cut greenhouse gases and smog-forming pollution from cars became a model for a national standard. Obama hosted California legislator Fran Pavely at the White House as he announced new nationwide rules mirroring those she wrote into state law.

Trump has had the opposite effect on California’s effort to combat climate change. He’s yanked California’s authority to set its own standards and rolled back federal fuel economy rules, setting off a legal battle that may sputter when Democrats are back in the White House.

More Californians in federal government

Vice presidents historically have brought people from their home states to Washington to help them run their own offices and other government agencies, said Goldstein, the vice presidential scholar.

"Mondale brought in a bunch of people from Minnesota, Bush brought people from Texas, and Pence has brought in a lot of people from Indiana," he said.

Pence has been especially influential in shaping the Department of Health and Human Services, a reflection of his longtime interest in cutting funding for Planned Parenthood, Politico reported last year. The article cited numerous high-level department officials with ties to Pence and Indiana, including cabinet secretary Alex Azar, who was an executive at an Indiana-based drug company when Pence was governor; Surgeon General Jerome Adams, who was an Indiana public health official; Medicaid leader Seema Verma, who advised Pence on health policy when he was governor; and Verma’s deputy chief of staff, who was Pence’s legislative director when he was governor.

Californians expect Harris will also tap her home state network.

"She’s got a pretty big rolodex," said Goldstein, in an interview with CalMatters. "I’m sure she would want to have many of her longtime trusted staff and others join the administration."

John Peschong, a GOP supervisor in San Luis Obispo County, worked in the White House under President Reagan. He recalled numerous Californians Reagan brought with him to Washington.

"The influence from the state comes with the people brought on board to run the various federal government departments," Peschong said. "There’s a lot of folks (Harris) would probably try to move into the administration that are not public names right now."

CalMatters reporter Rachel Becker contributed to this report. CalMatters.org is a nonprofit, nonpartisan media venture explaining California policies and politics.

California has already approved. That is a huge asset that a vice president will be good for the nation, and that California did all the work for him. We’re often left behind. So having a vice president will be good for the state."

HARRIS

continued from page 6

Corte Madera

continued from page 5

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Portola Valley district maintains AA+ credit rating

By Angela Swartz
Almanac Staff Writer

The Portola Valley School District has maintained its double bond credit rating from financial services company Standard & Poor’s, according to an Oct. 27 press release. The company warns that wildfire risk in the district could impact its finances in the future.

Last year, Standard & Poor’s upgraded the district’s general obligation bond credit rating two levels, from “AA-” to “AA+,” the second-highest possible rating an issuer can achieve. “We have worked hard to maintain our credit rating for the benefit of local taxpayers,” said the district’s Chief Business Official Connie Ngo.

The district has benefited from stable revenues which have contributed to strong financial results and the maintenance of “very strong” available reserves, Standard & Poor’s said in an Oct. 21 letter to the district.

“(District) management doesn’t anticipate major cost pressures in the near term, leading us to expect the district to maintain very strong available reserves,” the letter states. “The stable outlook reflects our expectation the district will be able to maintain a very strong available fund balance.”

Although Standard & Poor’s rating outlook is generally for two years, it sees some increased uncertainty because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent recession during the next 12 months. Standard & Poor’s doesn’t view COVID-19 as having a uniquely strong effect on the district’s credit compared to other school districts.

The district has elevated environmental risk given its exposure to earthquakes and wildfires (since the district lies in a forested area), Standard & Poor’s wrote.

A higher credit rating results in lower borrowing costs for taxpayers when bonds are sold, district financial adviser Chris Hiatt said in the district press release. He noted last year that it’s “very rare” for a school district to receive a double rating upgrade.

“The affirmation of the ‘AA+’ credit rating is a great result for local taxpayers,” she said.

The district’s rating was updated as part of its upcoming $39.5 million Measure Z general obligation bond issuance to fund projects in the district. This will be the final issuance of bonds from Measure Z. Measure Z, a $49.5 million bond measure, passed in November 2018. The measure is intended to fund repairs, renovations and new buildings on the district’s two campuses.

Standard & Poor’s generally reviews four factors in assessing a bond issuer’s credit rating: finances, management, debt and pension obligations and the local economy.

Email Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com

ELECTION BRIEFS
continued from page 14

Jail inmate death
The death of an inmate Tuesday, Nov. 10, at the Maguire Correctional Facility in Redwood City is under investigation, the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office said.

The inmate was found unresponsive during a housing pod security check shortly after 2 p.m. and was given CPR, but was pronounced dead at the scene.

The preliminary investigation indicates a possible suicide, the Sheriff’s Office said. Once family is notified, the San Mateo County Coroner’s Office will identify the inmate, officials said.

—Bay City News Service

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game nights on Zoom, he said. That is virtual, along with a few from work, although most of it is in-person — through a computer screen.

“My extended family is in India, and 10 to 15 people planned to come to meet the baby. Now we have weekly or monthly calls through Zoom,” he said.

It’s not the way the couple envisioned raising their child, he said. They always thought they would limit their screen time as they grew. But Dharap finds it fascinating to watch Aarchi when she meets family on screen.

“She reacts to people on Zoom in the same manner as if they were in person. With some people, she makes a ‘gimme, gimme’ motion with her hands. She’s developing a shocking familiarity with the camera app on the phone. She knows something special is happening. When the camera goes on, she sits up. Everybody says she’s a lot like me — a ham,” he said.

When the holidays arrive, the family will also miss some of their traditions. Nov. 14 begins the five-day Hindu celebration of Diwali, the ‘festival of lights,’ symbolizing the victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance. But the virus will put a damper on their plans this year, he said.

“Diwali is a big celebration at my parents’ but it’s not happening this year. It’s a little sad. A baby’s first Diwali is a big deal. We’ll do a little something at home,” he said.

While they try to give their daughter more social exposure, Dharap and Jefferson’s own social isolation as new parents is compounded by COVID-19.

“You hear about reprivileges new parents get such as to go out on a date night,” he said, but he and Jefferson can’t bring in a sitter or a family member to watch the baby, and there aren’t many places they can go anyway.

Like many people, most of their social interactions come from work, although most of that is virtual, along with a few game nights on Zoom, he said.

In January, the couple plans to re-evaluate and possibly expand their social bubble. One thing to consider: child care. Because of his work with school reopenings nearby, and Susannah Halliburton had a life in Washington state. Their brother makes the East Coast his home. Being close by meant that Jyllian took on the caregiving responsibilities in the past until the work became too much and then she hired caregivers.

When the COVID-19 epidemic took root, she could only see her mother, Mary Ann Halliburton, from afar at The Sequoias.

“It was really stressful. I used to be able to give her a hug and give her a kiss. Now a caregiver brings her down to a checklist,” she said in late August.

She tried to take her mother special things for her birthday and holidays: Easter eggs in a basket; cake and candles for her birthday. Everything went through the checkpoint.

“It was disheartening,” said Jyllian, Avenidas senior center’s director of community engagement and the Door-to-Door transportation/delivery program.

During prior quarantines at The Sequoias, she knew that frail seniors often declined due to isolation, including her mother.

“I saw that even with short quarantining what they would do to her,” she said, noting her mother is an extrovert. “Personally and professionally, I had a bad feeling.”

Starting about June or July, she saw a marked decline in her overall demeanor. We could see that physically and cognitively. It has been steadily improving both physically and cognitively. It has made a huge difference in her overall demeanor. We could see that physically and cognitively. It has made a huge difference in her overall demeanor. We could see physically and cognitively. It has made a huge difference in her overall demeanor. We could see physically and cognitively. It has made a huge difference in her overall demeanor. We could see physically and cognitively. It has made a huge difference in her overall demeanor. We could see physically and cognitively. It has made a huge difference in her overall demeanor. We could see physically and cognitively. It has made a huge difference in her overall demeanor. We could see physically and cognitively. It has made a huge difference in her overall demeanor. We could see physically and cognitively. It has made a huge difference in her overall demeanor.
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Philippe Rey honored with Kiwanis Angel award

Nonprofit director talks about youth mental health during the pandemic, spike in demand for services

By Elena Kadvany

Philippe Rey, executive director of nonprofit Adolescent Counseling Services (ACS), has won the ninth annual Kiwanis Angel Award for his decades of work supporting youth mental health in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. The Kiwanis Angel Award, sponsored by the Menlo Kiwanis Club of Palo Alto, honors an individual who has had a significant, positive impact on children and youth and provides a $2,500 contribution to the recipient’s organization. It was set to bestow the award on Rey in a virtual award reception on Nov. 12.

Rey, a native of Switzerland with a doctorate in clinical psychology with a concentration in child and family therapy, first joined Adolescent Counseling Services in 1998 as director of the Caravan House, a now-closed group home for teen girls. He went on to become associate director and has been the agency’s executive director since 2004.

Adolescent Counseling Services, located in Redwood City, provides therapy, specialized support groups and other mental health resources to local youth, parents and schools. Previously headquartered in Palo Alto, the nonprofit worked with Palo Alto Unified for years but now serves districts in East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and in other area schools. All teens regardless of school can access the nonprofits’ services. The nonprofit also runs an adolescent substance abuse treatment program and Outlet, a longtime LGBTQ+ support program.

The critical mental health needs among youth was already pronounced before the pandemic. One out of five individuals ages 10-25 are struggling with a major mental illness, and suicide is the second leading cause of death among people ages 10-34, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These numbers have increased during the pandemic, Rey said in an interview, with schools closed and teenagers grappling with isolation and other challenges. ACS has seen an increase in substance use among teenagers and a spike in demand for Outlet’s services.

“Since March we’ve actually seen a deterioration of mental health and an increase in the struggles, especially with that age group,” he said.

At the start of shelter-at-home order, Adolescent Counseling Services immediately switched to a tele-therapy model to serve teens remotely, which has brought both challenges and unexpected benefits. Some teenagers, without the prompting of someone at school or a watchful parent, wouldn’t show up to virtual appointments or group sessions — particularly in the substance abuse program, where virtual therapy proved less effective. The nonprofit has since brought those youth and families back for in-person treatment. ACS also started a support group for parents of teenagers who are attending out-of-state substance abuse programs.

But telehealth also enabled Adolescent Counseling Services to vastly expand its reach and to reach teens in areas without strong mental health services. Rey said. The nonprofit has seen teenagers from the Central Valley or as far away as Alabama and Georgia participating in Outlet’s LGBTQ+ support services — some from literally inside their closets, he said.

The nonprofit saw “huge demand” at the start of the pandemic, particularly because ACS doesn’t turn away anyone who can’t pay for services. (The $2,500 Kiwanis award money will fund services for low-income families who can’t afford them.)

“There were a lot of families whose parents had lost their jobs, therefore losing their insurance. Their kids still needed to be seen and supported in therapy,” he said. He still hears from many parents that private therapists have long wait lists.

On the other end of the spectrum, some teens who were bullied or who struggled at school for some reason have found respite at home and have seen their mental health improve, Rey said.

Adolescent Counseling Services has set a goal to double the number of clients it serves annually, from 5,000 youth to 10,000 by 2021. Internally, Rey said, he’s focused on supporting staff members, who are working long, hard days to meet this unprecedented need. He holds socially distanced meetings with

FLOOD PARK
continued from page 4

the mitigations is that there is a required 100-foot buffer from park neighbors on Del Norte Avenue. In addition, park visitors will have to get a permit to use sound amplification devices, and practices times will be limited to between the hours of 9 a.m. and 8 p.m.

Supervisors had previously set aside about $16 million for the project.

The next steps for the project will be for the county parks department to put out a request for proposals to find a design firm to develop plans in more detail. The design process is expected to include public outreach and take about a year to complete, according to staff. Then the designs would be brought to the board of supervisors, and the first phase of construction would take about 12 to 18 months to complete.

The first phase includes: rehabilitating the old ballfield and adding the new multi-use field, and building the new soccer/lacrosse field, basketball court, sand volleyball courts, pump track, walking path, tree-lined promenade and drop-off and pickup centers, and adding new utilities for water, gas and electricity. It would also include renovating an adobe restroom building.

The second phase would include building new restrooms, playgrounds, an adventure play area, an amphitheater and drop-in picnic sites and planting a demonstration garden, and the third phase would include rehabilitating the adobe administration building on-site, building group picnic areas with shade and adding exercise stations along pathways.

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

LEGEND

Compass

FLOOD PARK, located off of Bay Road in Menlo Park, is set to undergo major changes in the coming years after the county Board of Supervisors approved a plan that includes a new sports fields, a pump track, an adventure play area and a demonstration garden.

LEHUA GREENMAN

“There are always new, grander challenges to confront, and a true winner will embrace each one.”

650.245.1845 COMPASS

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

The Almanac AlmanacNews.com November 13, 2020
Woodside council OKs public EV chargers at Town Hall

Electric vehicle owners might soon be able to top up their car’s charge at Woodside Town Hall. The council approved the installation of four electric vehicle chargers in the Town Hall parking lot. The council approved an agreement for $23,588.50 with charger company PowerFlex. Public Works Director Sean Rose said that it was possible that construction to install the chargers could start soon, possibly late next month or in January.

In February 2020, the council directed town staff to explore installation options for four to six EV chargers that would be available for public use, as well as to open up by town employees and in the future, town fleet vehicles. The council voted to separate a bid for upgrading electrical infrastructure, which Rose said is estimated to cost between $65,000 and $85,000. During the meeting, the council sent back to staff for further study a proposal to add three public parking spaces, via an easement, at Woodside Village Church. The spaces were made available to the town through an easement with the church to help provide more parking for the nearby library.

The council asked staff to explore alternative options to both the number of spaces and their placement.

—Heather Zimmerman

PORTOLA VALLEY BRIEFS

Emergency training webinars

The Woodside-Portola Valley Community Emergency Response Team is offering online training sessions this fall and winter starting with a first aid kit webinar this Saturday, Nov. 14.

The first meeting, scheduled from 4-5 p.m., will teach people how to organize their first aid kit, what each item does, and how to recognize similar items. Attendees will also hear how CERTs can enhance these skills especially during the coronavirus pandemic.

Upcoming sessions include one on radio training from 3-5 p.m. on Dec. 12, and on command post training from 3-5 p.m. Jan. 16. Visit wpv-cert.org/events to view and register for upcoming webinars.

Town kicks off first-ever ‘hensus’

While the period for collecting information for the U.S. census ended last month, the town of Portola Valley has undertaken a population survey of its own.

Residents currently raising hens and collecting their eggs are being asked to take the town’s first-ever “hensus,” an online poll to gather information about the number of hens in town, the number of eggs produced per week, the types of breeds being raised and whether hens have been killed or injured by predators.

“In the mid-1800s, the immigrants who settled here raised horses and cattle, grew hay, barley, wine grapes and loads of produce including strawberries. Today, there were egg farms, a large one located near what is now the Portola Valley Garage,” according to an email from the town. “While we have lost much of our agricultural past, one part that harkens back to the egg farm days still remains — the raising of backyard chickens.”

At a Town Council meeting last month, the council created a subcommittee made up of Vice Mayor Maryann Derwin and Councilman John Richards to work on the hensus. Council member Craig Hughes suggested adding the hensus to the town’s general plan and conducting it every decade in conjunction with the U.S. census as a way to promote participation.

To take the hensus, visit portolavalley.net/for-residents/hensus.

—Julia Brown

PAID OBITUARY

Ronald P. Reis
Feb. 11, 1947 - Oct. 31, 2020

If the true measure of a life well lived is achieving heartfelt happiness, then Ronald P. Reis, known to all as Ron, was a master of living well. The longtime Menlo Park resident welcomed all with smiles of enthusiasm and often a joke or two. He was friends with many, most of whom shared his passion for family life, golf, tennis, card games, magic tricks and a good laugh.

On Saturday, Oct. 31, Ron’s joyous life came to an end as he lost his long battle with lymphoma at UCSF Medical Center. His loving wife Barbara and their family were at his bedside. The music of Carole King and James Taylor, his favorites, was playing softly.

Ron Reis was a native San Franciscan who was raised on the Peninsula. His parents were Bob and Kato Mendelsohn Reis. Kato was a classical pianist and music teacher who taught piano to Ron and his brothers. Bob Reis was the founder of DataSafe, a South San Francisco-based records management company where Ron served as executive vice president during his second professional career. Ron and his brother, Tom Reis, co-owned and managed the company.

Ron graduated from Woodside High School, where he was senior class president in 1964, and received both an undergraduate and a master’s degree from the University of Redlands, where he played varsity tennis. Ron then pursued a Ph.D. in speech pathology and audiology from Kent State University in Ohio. He was a teaching assistant there during the infamous National Guard shootings of students on May 4, 1970.

After receiving his degree in 1973, Dr. Reis chaired the speech and audiology departments at a physical rehabilitation hospital in northeast Ohio where he met his future wife, Barbara. They were married on May 10, 1975, and soon after their marriage they relocated to Denver, Colorado, where Ron joined the faculty of the University of Denver as an assistant professor of speech and audiology.

While in Denver, the couple welcomed their first two children, Klari and Peter. Six years later the family moved to Bakersfield where Ron directed Mercy Center, a multipurpose community wellness center that was part of the Mercy Hospital system. The lure of the Bay Area drew the family back to the Peninsula a few years later when Ron joined DataSafe, the family business. The following year, 1987, Michael Reis, the family’s third child, was born.

Ron retired from DataSafe in 2010. The years following retirement were filled with world travels and the joys of seeing their three children succeed in their chosen careers and be happily married. Daughter Klari is a San Francisco-based artist with an international reputation. She and husband Michael Isard have two beautiful children, Otto and Phoebe, who lovingly called their grandfather, Ronpa. Son Peter is also a professional artist whose works sell worldwide. He and wife Kay Panchal reside in Richmond, Michael Reis is married to Olivia Maki, and they are the owners of the Redfield Cider Bar and Bottle Shop in Rockridge in Oakland. Ron was fond of saying that it doesn’t get any better than seeing your kids married to wonderful people and loving what they do.

Ron and Barbara enjoyed an active social life and traveled whenever they could, most recently to Egypt, Jordan and Israel. They were frequent concert and theatergoers who appreciated an eclectic mix of the arts. The couple shared a love of fine art, particularly modern and contemporary works. They were frequently seen at the Anderson Collection and the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford, where Barbara is a docent. Ron was also an active member of the local Sons In Retirement (SIRs) professional men’s organization.

In addition to his beloved wife, children, and grandchildren, Ron is survived by his three brothers, Tom (Julie) Reis of San Francisco, Brian (Prudence) Reis of Foster City, and John (Karen) Reis of Menlo Park, as well as their families and many cherished friends.

Persons wishing to donate in Ron’s name should consider the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, or LifeMoves, an organization dedicated to breaking the cycle of homelessness in local communities. Ron served as a former board member of LifeMoves, sharing his signature optimism and hope.

A celebration of Ron’s life will be arranged post-Covid. Not surprisingly, he requested his memorial to be an ice cream social.
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Wild dream logic and storytelling: Stanford TAPS creates a musical ritual

New play, ‘Beyond the Wound is the Portal,’ debuts online this week

By Karla Kane

Dreams, deep feelings and the phases of the moon are channeled by Stanford University Department of Theater and Performance Studies’ (TAPS) new production, “Beyond the Wound is a Portal,” which creators describe as an “immersive musical ritual.” The show, presented via Zoom Nov. 12-14, will be the first full-scale, live production for TAPS since COVID-19 restrictions struck the theater world earlier this year.

Director Haruna Lee and around 40 collaborators (including the seven-student cast) have developed the show together, based on a line by author/activist adrienne maree brown: “dream beyond the wound.” This prompt “tells us to use the medicine of our imagination and bring that to the wounded parts of our community,” said the Brooklyn-based Lee (TAPS’ Moher Visiting Artist for 2020-21).

“From there, we really started looking at our own wounds and dreams to mine for content — there was a lot of deep excavation,” Lee said. “We’re excited to be inventing new things with the students, with other musicians, with instrumental orchestra and some vocals recorded and mixed in advance and other vocals performed live. "All of the leads will be singing live over Zoom through at least three or four different pieces of software — some of which is being created in this moment for this moment — that we’re all knocking on wood will work the way we want them to," she said.

The show is organized into eight parts, starting with waxing crescent and ending with the new moon — connected to a feeling of darkness and transgression, Lee said. “The most violent moment of the show happens when there is the most light, while the new moon — the moment of the most darkness and mystery — is when we are reclaiming ourselves.”

“Live theater in the COVID-19 era is full of challenges, both logistically and artistically,” Lee said. “How do we do set design? How do we show that we’re in a car, a club, together?” she said. Despite the limits of the virtual format, "I am still searching for that piece of connection that dance brings us.”

Costume designer and TAPS lecturer Becky Bodurtha, representing the show’s large design and technology team, has had to transcend the physical boundaries as well, helping the actors find ways to best embody their characters and create set design in their own spaces, while also creating digital and animated elements to enhance the visual experience.

With creators spread out across the globe, “we have rehearsals in different time zones; all our eating and sleeping patterns are based around the show,” Ashkin said with a laugh.

The show will perform Thursday-Saturday at 7 p.m., with access at taps.stanford.edu.

Admission is free, with a hope that attendees will make a donation to nonprofit organizations selected by the student cast. For audiences, the creators hope the show will also be a time “to be with each other and tap into our aliveness as humans together,” Lee said. “We’re doing that through song and humor, and lots of wild dream logic and storytelling.”

More information is available at taps.stanford.edu.

Diana Khong, Morgan Gwilym and Alexa Luckey are cast members in “Beyond the Wound is a Portal” by Stanford University’s Department of Theater and Performance Studies.
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TWO local eateries Weather COVID by getting creative

By Elena Kadvany

As local restaurateurs, already hit hard by the pandemic, brace themselves for a difficult winter, there are a few local bright spots. Italian restaurant Vina Enoteca in Palo Alto has reopened with a variety of new offerings. In Los Altos, a favorite cafe that threatened to close is staying alive thanks to a new owner.

Vina Enoteca reopens, adds market, pop-ups

Three months after pressing pause on dine-in service at Vina Enoteca, the Palo Alto Italian restaurant is reopening with a new market, pop-ups and a more casual pizza and pasta concept.

On the market, pop-ups

Scordella said he’s making another notable but less visible change: a 20% service charge that will be shared equally between front- and back-of-house workers. The goal is to address the inequity of tipping, which allows waiters and bartenders to earn more than kitchen staff.

“Tipping is a source of equity in many other industries,” he said. “I want to make sure those who work in the kitchen are compensated fairly as well.”

The cafe will reopen with indoor and outdoor seating to serve pastas and pizzas, keeping the menu casual, accessible and “family-friendly,” Scordella said. This is also driven by COVID economics: It’s no longer financially feasible to run a 200-seat restaurant with tight margins, he said.

Vina Enoteca baking program

Vina Mercato will be open Tuesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The restaurant also resumed serving fresh pastas for takeout last week. You’re available for pickup or delivery Thursday-Saturday, 5-8:30 p.m.

Another pop-up will also be moving to Vina Enoteca: Local baker John Shelsta will be picking up his baked goods the last Saturday of the month, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Red Berry Coffee Bar

As local restaurateurs, already hit hard by the pandemic, brace themselves for a difficult winter, there are a few local bright spots. Italian restaurant Vina Enoteca in Palo Alto has reopened with a variety of new offerings. In Los Altos, a favorite cafe that threatened to close is staying alive thanks to a new owner.

Red Berry open pre-pandemic, was a lively community gathering spot in Los Altos.

Los Altos rallies to keep Red Berry open

When the Los Altos community heard that Red Berry Coffee Bar would be closing in August, customers rallied to keep the much-loved cafe alive.

Efforts resulted in Stacy Savides Sullivan, Los Altos resident and owner of Los Altos candy store Sweet Shop, taking over the business. Red Berry’s original owner, Jeff Hanson, will be staying on through the end of the year to help with the transition.

Hanson opened Red Berry at 145 Main St. in 2014, bringing a multi-roaster coffee concept to downtown Los Altos. This summer, he said his lease was close to expiring and the financial losses of the pandemic made it difficult to renew.

“We were 10 days away from possibly shutting down the shop and liquidating but I had a bunch of customers who really, really love the place,” he said.

They found Sullivan, who has spent many hours drinking coffee with friends and family at Red Berry and working in the cafe’s upstairs space so much it became like a second office.

“We love Red Berry,” Sullivan said. “We really do want to keep the essence of it.”

Things will mostly look the same at Red Berry, with some updates. The current employees will stay on, Sullivan said, and continue to serve the same coffee drinks and food, though she wants to add savory pastries, more specials and possible collaborations with Sweet Shop. She plans to add online ordering and make the cafe’s hours more consistent.

The cafe is operating outdoors only right now, with a new parklet, but she looks forward to safely reopening inside, which has been a gathering space for many in the community.

“I really enjoy anything I can do to build community and connection, fun and people getting together. This has always been one of those places— it’s a social, interactive cafe,” Sullivan said.

Like at Sweet Shop, Sullivan will donate the cafe’s proceeds to local nonprofits: JCS Training Lab, located at 1000 El Camino Real, Atherton, CA 94027, San Mateo County JCS Training Lab, located at 1000 El Camino Real, Atherton, CA 94027, San Mateo County

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