**Despite months to prep, why California lags on COVID vaccination**

By Ben Christopher/CalMatters

No one ever said that distributing a vaccine to tens of millions of Californians spread out across 58 counties in the middle of a pandemic would be easy. But Gov. Gavin Newsom came pretty close last October.

At a press conference on Oct. 19, the governor assured the public that California has “long been in the vaccination business.” That projection of confidence came just three days after the CEO of the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer announced the company would seek the regulatory green light for its new COVID-19 vaccine. California, the governor said, would be ready.

Roughly 19 million flu shots every year. The recent history of a mass Swine Flu inoculation program in 2009. An early partnership with the federal government to plan for the coming distribution campaign. A new “Logistics Taskforce” established within the governor’s Office of Emergency Services. The governor cited all this as evidence that “experience with vaccinations is well established here in the state of California.”

More than three months later, the state is still scrambling to deliver. And the mammoth logistical headache of inoculating a state desperate for a return to pre-pandemic normalcy has become a pressing political one for Newsom. According to the most recent federal data, California is still sitting on 40% of its allotted vaccine, putting it in the bottom third of all 50 states. The messaging also has been hard to decipher, with information from the governor’s office sometimes at odds with that being issued by the counties.

And Californians are not happy. A mere 22% approve of how well the pandemic would be ready.

Jeff Smith, Executive Officer for Santa Clara County

The top goals

When it comes to responding and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, Councilman Ray Mueller said he wanted the city to be more proactive about helping where it can to improve outcomes at a hyperlocal level. He said he was interested in seeing how the city can help to support vaccinations for underserved populations, and existing county and state efforts to support small business recovery and programs supporting child care providers. He said he favored assigning a staff member to working exclusively on COVID-19 response matters.

“There’s so much information that has to get out to the public — we are in the best position to do that with our stakeholders,” he said. “We are in the middle of something that has altered everybody’s life — and delivering on that right now is of critical importance.”

While other council members disagreed that it was the city’s role to get as involved with the COVID-19 response as Mueller suggested, there was a consensus that one significant piece of recovery for the city will be to restore its library and community services departments, where operations have been severely curtailed due to the pandemic. The city will need to figure out a plan for services like gymnastics and in-person classes to be restored, including details like who will teach them — contractors or employees — said City Manager Starla Jerome-Robinson.

Another big project coming up this year is planning for the 2022 RHNA, or Regional Housing Needs Assessment.
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- Joy R.

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Portola Valley’s new mayor lays out what to expect in 2021

By Angela Swartz

A new housing project up for review, preparing for wildfires and just trying to “keep the trains running on time” during the COVID-19 pandemic should make for a busy year for Portola Valley officials.

This is Maryann Derwin’s fourth time heading the Town Council as mayor since she was elected in 2005. She recently discussed the town’s priorities with The Almanac.

On Feb. 10, Derwin will begin to host virtual coffee chats, possibly with Vice Mayor Craig Hughes, for residents. This is in response to the influx of comments and questions residents have had during meetings, she said. The Zoom meeting ID for Wednesday’s virtual chat, which is from 8 to 9 a.m., is 969 6615 5815, with the passcode 582679.

Housing

The town kicked off meetings to review Stanford University’s proposed 39 housing units on part of 75 acres of university property referred to as the “Stanford Wedge” during a three and a half hour Planning Commission study session on Jan. 20.

Residents have had strong opinions about it, both in support and opposition, and Derwin said she hopes the civil discourse at the recent Planning Commission meeting will continue at all of the Stanford Wedge project meetings. She said she is excited to see the environmental impact review for the project, which is expected to continue.

The state requires the town to plan for and encourage construction of these housing units, but the town does not have to build the housing. In the past, second units have been Portola Valley’s most important source of moderate- or lower-income housing, and that program is expected to continue.

So far, identification of town-owned properties, which would be the cheapest to build on, has fallen short.

Wildfire prevention

In 2020, the community also dealt with the threat of wildfires and two related PG&E public safety power shutoffs.

In the summer of 2021, the town plans to conduct an emergency evacuation drill to prepare residents for potential fires.

Are modular homes the answer to Bay Area’s affordable housing demand?

Inside the latest chapter in one pastor’s bid to solve the region’s housing crisis

By Lloyd Lee

Two steel houses were delivered on the back of a big rig on Jan. 7 to a parking lot in East Palo Alto, one coming all the way from Pueblo, Colorado, and the other from Caldwell, Idaho. They’re not exactly ready-to-live-in homes, but possibly by Valentine’s Day or earlier, they can be.

For Pastor Paul Bains, that’s just part of the beauty and benefit of modular houses — factory-built homes that come ready-made in sections to be stacked or put together like Lego blocks. One of the newly delivered modular dwellings is a 960-square-foot, three-bedroom house made of three sections; the other is a 640-square-foot, two-bedroom home made of two sections.

The big-rig delivery marked a new chapter in the Palo Alto native’s 21-year pursuit to address homelessness in the Bay Area.

“My goal has always been to disrupt generational poverty,” Bains said. “You do that through education and home ownership, and this makes it much more affordable for people to own their own home.”

See MODULAR HOMES, page 17

Two school districts to ask voters to pass parcel tax measures this year

By Angela Swartz

There will be two parcel tax measures on local ballots this spring and next fall in an effort to maintain current educational programming and keep teacher salaries competitive. One measure is to fund the Portola Valley Elementary School District and the other is for the Menlo Park City School District.

During a Jan. 21 meeting, the Portola Valley school board adopted a resolution to authorize the district to call for a parcel tax election in May. It would generate approximately $1 million for the district annually. The cost of a special mail-in election is between $94,000 and $113,000, according to a Jan. 14 board agenda.

“This comes on the heels of the failure of Measure P, a parcel tax renewal measure for the Portola Valley district, last March.

“To avoid significant instructional program reductions and to protect the academic excellence of our schools, the administration along with the parcel tax advisory committee recommends the renewal of the measure at a reduced amount (by $110) to $471 per parcel,” according to a report prepared by staff for the Jan. 14 meeting. There would be no annual increase in the tax to adjust for inflation, said district Chief Business Officer Connie Ngo in an email.

The current tax, Measure O, funds advanced math, science and technology programming and the arts.

See PARCEL TAX, page 12
Menlo Park council OKs more inclusive design for Belle Haven pools

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

The Menlo Park City Council voted unanimously at a special meeting Monday to approve revised designs for the pools planned at the new community center in Belle Haven.

The community center, funded largely by Facebook, is set to include a pool area which is funded by the city. The City Council was facing a tight deadline to finalize the pool designs last week when Jennifer Johnson, a parks and recreation commissioner who has a child with disabilities, urged the council to adjust the plans to be more inclusive of the disabled community.

Specifically, she asked that the council try to add a so-called beach entry to the training pool, which is a very gradual slope and can be used by anyone.

The council suspended its plans to approve the pool designs Jan. 26 and asked that stakeholders meet to see what could be done.

“Essentially, there was a meeting of all interested parties, and staff took comments, and came up with a really nice design,” summarized Vice Mayor Betsy Nash, who was part of the group that met to iron out the details over the past several days.

In the revised plans approved Feb. 1, the training pool had an additional separated ramp with a gradual slope planned on one side of the pool. There are hand railings on both sides. There is also an entry ramp planned at the lap pool, lowering to a depth of 3 1/2 feet before dropping into the full lap-depth of 7 feet, said Assistant Public Works Director Chris Lamn.

“This is an example of your government in action, your government being responsive,” said Mayor Drew Combs. “Hats off to the staff for being willing to again get back into this and come up with a solution that works for all.”

In all, the approved plan is to have two pools, one a 7-foot-deep performance swimming pool for activities like lap swimming, swim meets and water polo, and the second a training pool that ranges between 3 1/2 and 5 feet deep, with an elongated staircase on one side and an accessible ramp along another side of the pool. In addition, the city has planned a “splash pad” area and play features for children to enjoy playing in water without having to swim. The project is estimated to cost $7.4 million.

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

Katherine Strehl, Menlo Park civic volunteer and Willows resident, dies at 76

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

Katherine Strehl, a former Planning Commission member and longtime civic volunteer who lived in Menlo Park for 30 years, died at home on Jan. 24 at the age of 76.

She had a 40-year career working in public affairs throughout the Bay Area, including as executive manager of external affairs for BART, manager of public affairs for Lockheed Martin, and at the Bay Area Council. She owned KS Public Affairs Consulting, which handled public relations for the California High-Speed Rail Authority. She also was a member of the California Transportation Commission.

Strehl was born in Oakland and graduated from Skyline High School before attending University of California at Berkeley, where she earned a degree in economics and sociology in 1977. In 1979, she earned a master’s degree in communications research from Stanford University. That year, she also graduated from the Coro Women’s Program.

She had many longtime friendships — among them former Almanac staff writer Pam Jones, who provided much of the information for this obituary, and with another longtime friend, Dennis Carter of San Jose, was present for the last week of Strehl’s life; and Carola Barton, a Santa Cruz residence who served on the board of the Valley Medical Center Foundation with Strehl.

Barton said she, Strehl, and two other women — Avis Stafford and Gayle Jones — joined the board around 1992, and the four quickly became friends. The four became known as The Dissenters, Barton said, since the women felt there was a lack of fiscal responsibility on the board and wanted to change that. Around 1994, she said, they all resigned at the same time in protest of the foundation’s raising expenses.

“It just speaks to the fact that Katherine didn’t put up with stuff that she didn’t think was right,” Barton said.

The four friends traveled together a number of times after their stint on the board, including one trip to Hawaii where Strehl revealed she’d spent time riding motorcycles around the island on a previous trip.

“That’s a side of Katherine you don’t usually hear. She was quite sparsely,” Barton said. “She was just a character, she really was, even to the end. She never took herself too seriously, and yet she was a very loving person and had so many friends who just adored her because she was a good friend herself.”

Through her work at Lockheed Martin and BART, she also got to know Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, who officiated Strehl’s wedding to husband Bill Dempsey in 2011. Jones said.

Over the years, Strehl became the “neighborhood go-to person” if you had questions about the Willows, whether it was about building a house, taking on a remodel, the crazy traffic...
Coronavirus central: State OKs reopening elementary schools in county

By Embarcadero Media staff

San Mateo County as of Tuesday had 36,214 cumulative cases of COVID-19, with 395 deaths. The rolling seven-day average of new cases ending Jan. 25 was 258. There were 122 people hospitalized. Santa Clara County as of Tuesday had 102,836 cumulative COVID-19 cases and 1,433 deaths. The rolling seven-day average of new cases ending Jan. 25 was 667. There were 463 hospitalized, 45 of which were new.

County K-6 schools may reopen for classes

Four Bay Area counties can now resume in-person classes at all public K-6 schools, after their rate of new coronavirus cases fell below the state’s threshold to reopen schools.

Public schools that have yet to resume in-person instruction in San Mateo, Santa Clara, Marin and San Francisco counties can now do so under the state’s school reopening framework, California Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly said Tuesday during a briefing on the state’s plans for reopening schools.

Ghaly said, “So, good news to see a number of counties below 25.”

Schools with grades 7-12 that have already reopened are also allowed to continue providing in-person instruction under the state’s reopening framework for schools.

However, schools with those higher grades that have not yet opened will have to wait for their county to leave the purple tier to do so, according to the California Department of Public Health.

Leaving the purple tier requires a county to record a rate of new cases per 100,000 residents below seven and a coronavirus test positivity rate below 8%.

Gov. Gavin Newsom has implored state legislators to approve $2 billion to support schools reopening amid the pandemic as the state works to vacinate wider swaths of its population.

The fate of that funding package and the timeline for how soon teachers can receive vaccinations remain up in the air and could hamper the number of schools that reopen before spring.

Information on the state’s plans for reopening schools can be found at schools.covid19.ca.gov.

Menlo Park police: No violent crime increase in 2020

When it comes to policing, 2020 was a unique year, according to an annual report from the Menlo Park Police Department describing crime counts and trends throughout the city last year.

Generally, there were far fewer demands for service and fewer interactions between police officers and the community due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the department announced. In addition, traffic enforcement trends shifted with fewer people commuting.

Still, throughout the year, police responded to more than 21,000 calls for service, conducted more than 3,600 traffic stops, more than 870 bike and pedestrian stops, arrested 750 people and wrote 2,800 reports, according to the department.

There was also no increase in reported violent crime over the previous year, with 47 incidents reported in 2020, the same number as in 2019. There were no reported homicides in 2020. The percentage of violent crimes solved dropped to 40.4% in 2020

With vaccinations ramping up, the county is starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

As of Jan. 28, the county has administered 185,535 doses of vaccine — of which 147,838 were first doses and 37,697 second doses — making up 8% of all county residents over 16 years old, Fenstersheib said.

Fenstersheib and Dr. Jennifer Tong, associate chief medical officer for the county’s medical center, emphasized equity as a “top priority” in vaccination distribution.

This means ensuring vaccine availability to residents 65 years and older, the Latinx community and individuals living in East San Jose.

So far, the county has made “substantial progress” in vaccinating those 75 years and older, Fenstersheib said.

About 28.8%, or 1 out of every 4 residents 75 years and older, have received the first dose of vaccine.

This is significant as residents 65 years and older made up 80% of COVID-19 deaths.

“Again, with the high mortality rate in our senior citizens, getting the vaccine into the arms of our seniors in this community will go a long way to preventing further deaths and hospitalizations,” Fenstersheib said.

Comprehensive COVID-19 coverage


CalMatters and Bay City News Service contributed to this report.

LEHUA GREENMAN

“Ultimately, the greatest lesson that COVID-19 can teach humanity is that we are all in this together.”

650.245.1845 COMPASS

REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman

Seeing Property During Covid

Dear Monica: A property came on the market last week that seemed perfect but because of COVID rules it sold before I was able to get in to see the property. Do you think this was fair? Jim G.

Dear Jim: The 2021 real estate market has begun and it is very active. Covid rules require agents to space appointments at certain times so that two unrelated groups are not in the property at the same time. This is easier to do if the property is vacant but if it is occupied, showings can be more restrictive. Some sellers have children who need remote learning and can only be out of the house after classes are finished for the day, and many are uncomfortable having lots of buyers tour their home.

Because of tight rules, some buyers are making non-contingent offers on a property without having seen it and some sellers opt to accept such offers. If the supply of properties improves, which it should, buyers will have access to more homes.

Contact me at monica@monicacorman.com: Office: 650-465-5971, COMPASS. WSJ Nationally Ranked. Real Trends Bay Area Top 100 Agents

LET’S DISCUSS:

Read the latest local news headlines and talk about the issues on Town Square at AlmanacNews.com
Health officials: Prioritize older adults amid COVID-19 vaccine shortages

By Sue Dremann

The scarcity of COVID-19 vaccine doses throughout the Bay Area has caused health officials in eight counties to urge all health care providers to prioritize injections for residents ages 65 and up because of the virus’ high mortality rate among older people.

Bay Area health departments are collaborating with medical providers to get the shots into people’s arms as quickly as possible. Marin, Napa, Santa Cruz and Solano counties are prioritizing residents ages 75 and older. Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties are prioritizing people ages 65 and older. The shift to an age-based system for the vaccines is in keeping with the state’s policy and is in addition to continuing vaccinations for Phase 1A-eligible health care workers, many of whom are now expecting their second doses, according to a joint press release issued Feb. 3.

“Across the region, most COVID-19 deaths have been in the 65-and-up age group. Thus, focusing vaccination efforts on those at greatest risk of death will have the biggest immediate impact on saving lives,” county officials said in the statement.

The older demographic is bearing a staggering proportion of COVID-19-related deaths. As of Jan. 28, upward of 80% of the deaths are among the 65-plus age group, according to the release. This older demographic makes up 81% of deaths in Santa Clara County and 84% in San Mateo County. Other counties also have high numbers of deaths in this age group: Contra Costa, 82%; Marin, 92%; Napa, 79%; San Francisco, 83%; Santa Cruz, 90%; and Solano, 78%.

“Three out of four COVID-19 deaths in Marin are among residents age 75 or older,” said Dr. Matt Willis, public health officer for Marin County, which has the highest per capita older adult population of any California county. “A vaccine offered to a resident above age 75 is 300 times more likely to save a life than a vaccine offered to someone under the age of 50.”

The Bay Area continues to receive only a small fraction of the doses needed to vaccinate residents ages 65 and older, much less than the broader occupation-based system the state has included in Phase 1B Tier 1, including educators, food and agricultural workers, and emergency services personnel, health officials noted.

Weekly dose allocations from the state, which is based on a formula officials said is designed to ensure fair distribution across California, have slowed compared to shipments in December and early January. At the current pace, it would require several weeks to offer a first dose to all older adults who would like to be vaccinated, they said.

“We need to be direct and honest with the public that, although we want to vaccinate everyone right now we just don’t have enough vaccine to do so. Given limited supply of vaccine, we must prioritize vaccinating those at greatest risk of death or serious illness. We are anxious to vaccinate a much broader segment of the population, and are ready to do so as soon as vaccine supplies allow,” Santa Clara County Health Officer Dr. Sara Cody said.

The limited vaccine supply is causing widespread inability to make new appointments, and in some cases, can lead to cancellations of existing appointments. Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines require a second dose a few weeks after the first; the need for second doses limits the number of people who can be newly vaccinated each week, the region’s health officials said.

Also on Wednesday, President Joe Biden’s administration and Gov. Gavin Newsom announced separately that they are launching a pilot mass-vaccination effort in the state. They will initially be opening centers at the Oakland Coliseum and at University of California, Los Angeles where they expect to begin vaccinating a minimum of 6,000 people a day. Federal officials also said they are increasing vaccine distribution to states by 20%.

People would be able to make appointments through the state’s Salesforce platform.

Woodside: Highway 84 weekday shutdown beginning Monday

By Julia Brown

Beginning Monday, Feb. 8, Highway 84 in Woodside will be fully shut down between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. on weekdays until the end of the month for planned tree removal work by Caltrans, according to a Feb. 3 traffic advisory from the agency.

“The fuel break project, in coordination with the Woodside Fire Protection District and funded by a U.S. Fire Service grant, will lead to the closure of the major thoroughfare during weekday work hours through Feb. 26, according to Caltrans. Highway 84 will be closed to traffic between Portola and Fox Hill roads, with work estimated to take two to three weeks. No work will take place on holidays or weekends. Crews will be removing 25 eucalyptus and two Monterey pine trees ‘identified to be hazardous to the traveling public due to concerns over falling limbs and fire danger,’” RocQuel Johnson, Caltrans District 4 public information branch chief, said in an email Wednesday.

For people traveling eastbound on Highway 84, the detour will be at Skyline Boulevard to Kings Mountain Road to get back on the highway, according to Caltrans. For westbound motorists, the detour will be at Kings Mountain Road, turning left at Skyline and back on Highway 84.

Caltrans had announced Feb. 1 that the project’s work hours would be 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays, but work hours were revised Wednesday afternoon “to accommodate morning commuters and limit inconvenience to the traveling public,” Johnson said.

Woodside Town Manager Kevin Bryant said in an email Wednesday morning that a weeklong full closure of Highway 84 “is very uncommon,” and added the town was lobbying Caltrans to allow one lane to remain open while crews complete the tree removal work.

“The closure would have a major impact on residents of Woodside and the surrounding areas who would have to add substantial time to make routine trips,” Bryant said.

Asked why the full road closure is necessary, Johnson said it’s a move to protect motorist safety and accommodate equipment necessary for the project, “including one crane with a 26’ wide footprint when its stability outriggers are fully extended,” she said.

“The closure will also protect the public from work zone hazards created by the volume of material marked for removal from certain sections of the project area,” Johnson said.

Email Julia Brown at jbrown@almanacnews.com
Palo Alto banned from bringing back residents-only requirement for Foothills Park

By Gennady Sheyner

Palo Alto is permanently barred from limiting access to visitors to Foothills Park on the basis of residency under an injunction that a U.S. district court judge signed off on Monday, Jan. 25.

The injunction, which was issued by U.S. District Judge Edward Davila, is the product of a settlement between the city and a coalition of plaintiffs that included the American Civil Liberties Union, the NAACP and residents from Palo Alto and other Peninsula cities. The City Council approved the settlement on Nov. 2, at which time it also voted to repeal the 1965 ordinance that restricted access to the 1,400-acre preserve to Palo Alto residents and their guests.

The permanent injunction that took effect Monday ensures that the city will not be able to reverse that decision. It states that the city and its employees are “permanently enjoined from restricting or prohibiting access to Foothills Park on the basis of Palo Alto residency.” It also prohibits the city from “discriminating between Palo Alto residents and non-residents in access to Foothills Park,” though the prohibition does not apply to facilities within the park.

The injunction also officially snuffs out Palo Alto’s earlier plan to bring the issue of Foothills Park access to voters in 2022. That was part of the plan the council approved in August, at which time it also launched a pilot program that would allow up to 50 nonresidents into the park daily. In September, the coalition of plaintiffs filed the lawsuit, charging that the policy violates First Amendment rights, including free speech and freedom of assembly.

The lawsuit also stated that the city’s ban on nonresidents “traces its roots to an era when racial discrimination in and around the City was open and notorious” and cites mid-20th century policies such as redlining and “block busting” that prevented Black people from buying homes in Palo Alto.

It is long past time to relegate this unlawful exclusion to the dustbin of history,” the suit states.

The council approved the settlement on Nov. 2 by a 5-2 vote, with council members Greg Tanaka and Lydia Kou dissenting, paving the way for the city to officially drop the residents-only restriction on Dec. 17.

The injunction prohibits the city from placing on a future ballot or supporting “any referendum or initiative that has the purpose or effect of prohibiting or restricting access to Foothills Park by nonresidents of Palo Alto.”

With the preserve now open to all, Palo Alto has seen a surge of visitors, particularly on weekends and holidays. One weekend in late December, shortly after the park was opened to all, the preserve saw roughly six times as many visitors as in the prior year.

Even before the November decision, the number of Foothills Park visitors has been on the rise. According to a report from Daren Anderson, division manager at the Community Services Department, about 272,608 people visited the park last year, an increase of 42.5% over 2019, when the park saw 156,250 visitors. The report states that visitation levels have remained consistent over the years at about 150,000 people annually, with somewhat higher levels in 2011 and 2012.

Before the policy changed on Dec. 17, the city had turned away 4,260 vehicles in 2020 because of resident status, up by 13% from the prior year. The city also reported 523 “dog turn-aways” last year, an increase of 55.2% from 2019 (dogs are not allowed at the preserve on weekends and holidays).

Now, spurred by stories about hazardous traffic conditions and environmental degradation, the council is preparing to institute new restrictions for visiting dogs.

San Mateo County plans to pair cops with mental health workers to help those in crisis

By Kevin Forestieri

Starting in September, four police departments in San Mateo County will welcome a new staff member to the force: a mental health clinician, ready to be deployed into the field.

Following a wave of police reform efforts across the Bay Area, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors voted last month to launch a program that embeds mental health professionals into several law enforcement agencies. The hope is that the added expertise will help cops better respond to people experiencing a mental health crisis and avoid conflicts that can be fatal.

Under the program, the cities of Redwood City, San Mateo, Daly City and South San Francisco will each have a full-time clinician responding to 911 calls, dispatched alongside a sworn officer to incidents involving someone suspected of having a mental health crisis. Though working in a tag team, it will be up to the clinician to assess those in crisis and “exercise their independent judgment” for how to handle the situation.

In less extreme cases, clinicians will refer those in crisis to mental health services. In cases where the person is a danger to themselves or others, they will be placed in a psychiatric hold and transferred to a medical facility. The pilot makes no mention of arrests and jail transport, and makes clear that the goal is intervention over incarceration.

“I think this is going to make a world of difference in peoples’ lives,” said Supervisor Carole Groom.

The pilot, which will cost $876,000 split between the cities and the county, has been spearheaded by Supervisor Don Horsley a retired law enforcement officer who served as San Mateo County’s sheriff for 14 years. He said people suffering from a mental illness are often dealing with issues. Sheriff’s deputies stopped Chinedu Okobi in 2018, who later died, and Ramzi Saad, 55, who was killed by Redwood City police following Taser use. Police routinely find themselves doing social work, responding to non-violent and non-emergency calls related to mental health, drug addiction, poverty and homelessness, Horsley said.

He remembers handling his own encounters with the mentally ill, well, but that he didn’t have the formal training or background to identify symptoms and act accordingly.

“There were times where you could get exasperated,” he said. “I didn’t really understand schizophrenia as a young officer, and what I said to someone who is schizophrenic could be dramatcally misinterpreted.”

The police chiefs in San Mateo and Redwood City were quick to jump on the idea of a pilot and were eager to partner with the county, Horsley said. South San Francisco and Daly City later came on board, while smaller cities to the south did not make a push for participation. While the county has buy-in from top police officials, Horsley said he believes the rank-and-file officers will be open to change.

The pilot comes at a time when activists along the Peninsula and throughout the Bay Area are calling for police reform, including changes to the way communities respond to non-violent emergency calls. In lieu of armed officers, social workers and health care staff may be better suited to respond to those suffering from drug abuse, mental illness or homelessness.

See FOOTHILLS PARK, page 15

See MENTAL HEALTH, page 18
Redwood respite: 10 places in the Santa Cruz Mountains you can still seek out sequoias

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

When it comes to getting outside, there are few landscapes that help me get out of my head and feel like I’m escaping the world outside more than a grove of giant redwoods.

These majestic, sometimes ancient, trees tower as the tallest species in the world, and since they grow only along the Pacific coast, having them in the backyard of the Peninsula feels extra special.

The CZU August Lightning Complex fire, which burned 86,000 acres in the Santa Cruz Mountains, has shut down well-loved favorites like Big Basin, Butano State Park and Pescadero Creek County Park, among others. But luckily, plenty of areas are still open and offering access to redwoods which are worth seeking out on their own terms.

Purisima Creek Redwoods
Open Space Preserve

Half Moon Bay
Parking: free/no dogs

Purisima Creek Redwoods is a 4,711-acre open space preserve operated by Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MROSD), offering abundant second-growth redwoods, a creek, shade and ferns to enjoy.

The forest was logged in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and most of the trees are around 100 years old. However, stumps from much wider trees that were probably about 1,000 years old before they were felled are still visible, according to the space’s website.

Go to is.gd/purisimal for more information.

Bear Creek Redwoods
Los Gatos
Parking: free/no dogs

Located just south of Los Gatos, this relatively new open space preserve covers about 1,430 acres — including hundreds of acres of redwood forests — and 6 miles of trails, with more on the way. It was once slated to become a golf course and luxury development and remains home to protected species, according to MROSD.

It tends to fill up on weekends, according to open space district spokesperson Leigh Ann Gessner, so mornings and weekdays work best for a visit.

Go to is.gd/bearcreek1 for more information.

Huddart Park
1100 Kings Mountain Road, Woodside
Parking: $6 (seniors free, M-F; vets always free with ID) no dogs

Huddart Park, located in the Woodside hills, offers about 900 acres of lush forest to explore, with plenty of second-growth redwoods to shade the trails.

Carla Schoof, San Mateo County Parks recommends the following three trails:

• Chinquapin Trail (create a 7-mile loop by using Dean and Crystal Springs trails)

• Chickadee and Redwood Nature trails, which are great for families with young children

• Skyline Trail, which connects Huddart to Wunderlich Park.

Go to parks.smcgov.org/huddart-park for more information.

Sam McDonald Park
13435 Pescadero Creek Road, Loma Mar
Parking: $6 (seniors free, M-F; vets always free with ID) no dogs

During the wildfires this fall, parks staff worked alongside paid and volunteer firefighters to create a fire break along Old Haul Road in Pescadero and keep the fire from spreading to the county’s Sam McDonald and Memorial parks.

Sam McDonald Park, which contains about 400 acres of redwood forest, connects to Pescadero Creek County Park, which sustained fire damage. As a result, all of the trails that connect to that park are closed and marked with signs and barricades. However, visitors may access other areas of the park, Schoof said. She recommends seeking out the Heritage Grove Trail, which offers views of old growth redwoods just a short hike from the parking lot.

Go to parks.smcgov.org/sam-mcdonald-park for more information.

Loma Mar Redwoods
Loma Mar
Parking: free

These redwoods are somewhat hidden, accessible only via unmarked trails, but are popular with hikers. About 170 acres of this forest were added about five years ago to San Mateo County’s Memorial Park, Schoof said. To reach the small parking area, drive toward Memorial Park but continue past the main park entrance another mile west.

The area can also be accessed from Highway 1 on Pescadero Creek Road. On a recent Sunday afternoon, I had the roughly 1-mile trail nearly all to myself.

El Corte de Madera Creek
16040 CA-35, Redwood City
Parking: free/no dogs

This open space preserve is less popular with hikers due to its heavy use by mountain bikers, said Gessner.

In addition to lush, forested trails, the open space offers a few unique features. There is a trail to see tafoni sandstone formations, which are shaped like natural indentations in sandstone boulders, and just across Skyline Boulevard on Cal Water land is the Methuselah tree, a nearly 2,000-year-old behemoth of a redwood.

Go to is.go/edcsmp for more information.

Portola Redwoods State Park
9000 Portola State Park Road, La Honda
Parking: $10 (dogs restricted in most areas)

Further toward the coastside and deeper into the Santa Cruz Mountains you’ll hit Portola Redwoods State Park. This area is adjacent to areas that were burned, and as a result, a number of trails in the park are currently shut down, including the Coyote Ridge Trail, the Pomponio Trail, and the service road beyond Summit Trail. In
GOALS
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Housing Needs Assessment, which mandates that the city plan for thousands of new housing units — one recent proposal indicated Menlo Park may have to plan for 3,075 new housing units, including 1,218 designated as affordable to low- and very low-income households.

While the assessment is done every seven to eight years, this assessment cycle will look different from previous ones, said Cara Silver, interim city attorney. There will be a lot of housing units to accommodate and required discussions about fair housing and environmental justice, she said.

In addition, the city has partnered with PG&E, Facebook and the San Francisco Creek Joint Powers Authority to submit a grant application to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for a project to protect areas near the Dumbarton Bridge from flooding and sea level rise. The city is expected to learn whether the funding proposal, for $50 million, will be approved in the summer. In the meantime, it is working with the other agencies to iron out how the project would proceed if approved.

Mayor Drew Combs pushed back on the recommended goals and said he wanted to better reflect what residents want the City Council to accomplish. “I have a concern that a lot of those goals are things that aren’t having direct impacts on residents enough,” he said.

A quiet zone?

When it comes to what the residents want, there was no shortage of nearby locals, including Atherton Town Council member Rick DeGolia, sharing impassioned pleas to look into making the Encinal and Glenwood rail crossings into a “quiet zone.”

Atherton was the first community along the Caltrain line to create a quiet zone at its Fair Oaks crossing and is working to install one at Watkins Avenue, DeGolia explained. To do so, the rail crossing must be fitted with what’s called a “quad gate,” blocking vehicle and pedestrian access in all directions when the train is approaching. Otherwise, train operators are mandated to blow the horn starting about a quarter-mile from each crossing, he said.

And with four crossings in Menlo Park, residents noted, the noise can be incredibly disruptive for daily living. Residents talked about how their lives go on pause whenever a train passes by, since nobody can hear anything else, and how the train routinely wakes up sleeping babies. Radu Mihaescu, who said he has lived in several locations near the Caltrain tracks in Menlo Park, added that the noise can have public safety impacts too — once, he and his neighbors failed to hear a crime taking place near their homes since they all wore earplugs to bed because of the train.

“What was an irritant has grown into an unbearable problem,” said Martin Mazner, stating that the number of trains on the Caltrain line has tripled over the past 15 years.

The council asked staff to look into how much it would cost to install such gates at the Encinal and Glenwood rail crossings. Replacing all of the gates would be estimated to cost $1 million per crossing, while adding new ones would be estimated at $500,000 per crossing, said Public Works Director Nikkii Nagaya.

Leaf blower ban?

Another frequently voiced problem was that a number of residents urged the council to act on was that of gas-powered leaf blowers. Such blowers, residents said, pollute the environment with their relatively high carbon emissions and cause respiratory issues by blowing dust and particles around. They are also very noisy. Residents urged the council to ban gas-powered blowers and only permit electric ones.

Previously, the Environmental Quality Commission did not recommend a ban because the batteries of electric-powered blowers weren’t considered to be as powerful or reliable, but the technology has improved since then, said Mueller. Enforcement is also a challenge — for instance, should gardeners or the homeowners who hire them be penalized when rules are not obeyed? Currently, the city has some electric leaf blowers but staffers don’t use them all the time because the batteries tend to run out before a full work day is over, Nagaya said.

Ultimately, the council decided to refer the matter to the Environmental Quality Commission again and ask its members to develop a recommendation as part of its work plan this year.

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com
and technology programs; reading and writing programs; art and music programs; reduced class sizes; and retention of teachers for the district’s two schools, Ormondale and Corte Madera, according to the district website. Measure O, which expires on June 30, generates about $1.2 million for the district annually. District staff asserted that the measure “must be renewed” to maintain these programs.

Measure O passed in 2013 with 69% of the vote. It consolidated two expiring measures: Measure C (with an annual tax of $290 per parcel) and Measure D ($168 per parcel), and increased the rate by $123 per parcel to $581, Ngo said.

During a Dec. 17 governing board meeting, trustees discussed the possible future role of the Portola Valley Schools Foundation. If the renewal fails, the district would have to rely more heavily on the foundation, trustees agreed.

Menlo Park City School District
The Menlo Park City School District governing board voted in December to put the renewal of Measure X, its $360-per-parcel tax, on the November 2021 ballot. The district’s governing board began looking at potential areas to cut costs by $1.5 million during the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years, respectively, to help address deficit spending that could result from 2019’s teacher salary hike (88% of the district’s 2020-21 budget will go toward staff salaries, according to the district).

“One of our primary responsibilities is that the district does not go bankrupt,” said board president Sherwin Chen during a Dec. 17 meeting. “I think it is appropriate that we’re super conservative as we model out a budget. The cost of being wrong is huge; that’s layoffs and that’s a cost we want to avoid at all costs.”

During the meeting, trustee David Ackerman said teacher salaries are the last place he is willing to make budget cuts. “I don’t want our staff to have to carry the burden to get us through,” he said.

Other trustees noted that the district can’t take any potential cuts off the table. In 2019, the board had preliminary discussions about putting a measure before voters to renew or replace 2017’s Measure X, which expires in 2024, at a higher taxation rate. It passed in 2017 with an initial annual rate of $360 per parcel.

Two weeks ago, the district began a process of determining the strategy and scope of a replacement parcel tax that would provide greater long-term financial solvency, according to a presentation prepared by staff for the Jan. 21 meeting.

At that meeting, Burmeister recommended that the board pursue various ways to cut costs, which include:

- Elimination of the director of finance position and creation of a new classified-level position
- Elimination of the directors of technology and human resources and the creation of one new combined position: assistant superintendent of talent & technology
- Agreement of the implementation of “combination classes” in those cases where doing so would save the need to hire another full-time teacher at certain schools/grade levels and still maintain class size goals.

With implementation of a 5% raise for district teachers during the 2019-20 school year, the district’s required reserve funds will drop below the minimum amount specified in board policy — at least 15% of total annual spending — by the 2022-23 school year (below 10%) without a higher level of tax revenue, according to the district.

Last February, the school board voted to hold off on placing a parcel tax measure on the November 2020 ballot. According to a December presentation from Whitehurst/Mosher Campaign Strategy and Media, a political consulting firm hired to advise the district on the parcel tax, the November 2020 election showed that voters in San Mateo County and neighboring areas were supportive of local school measures at a high rate, despite the pandemic. All school bond measures and parcel taxes within San Mateo, Alameda and Marin counties were approved. Some 70% of school bond measures and parcel taxes passed in Santa Clara County.

Both the Portola Valley and Menlo Park City school district measures would require two-thirds voter support to pass. 

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Renovated Home on Nearly 1.1-Acre Lot

Tucked away on a sprawling corner lot of nearly 1.1 acres, this updated home of over 3,700 square feet includes 6 bedrooms, 4 bathrooms, ample privacy, and an ambiance that is undeniably Atherton. Enjoy a warm, welcoming feel in this home, as rich Mediterranean oak floors extend throughout, and natural light fills the space. Extensively renovated, this home offers a traditional floorplan that includes the dramatic living room with a spectacular wall of glass, a modern kitchen with a delightful breakfast nook, an elegant formal dining room, and the family room with a wet bar and fireplace. Numerous updates include solid core doors, Lutron-controlled lighting, high-speed coax and Cat6 data lines, and much more. Plus, you will find great space for outdoor enjoyment in the expansive backyard with a pool and hot tub. Close to numerous parks, as well as downtown Menlo Park, this home also enjoys access to top-ranked Menlo Park schools including Laurel Elementary, which is just steps away, and it is just moments to sought-after private schools (buyer to verify eligibility).

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VACCINATION

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With Newsom now facing an increasingly credible recall effort, the slow, sputtering vaccine rollout raises the question: Didn’t the state have a plan for this?

Originally yes, it did — although the governor’s Office of Emergency Service isn’t responding to questions about those early preparations. During that Oct. 19 press conference, Newsom said that a state-organized public health force had been working on a vaccine distribution plan for months. Public health experts say the state’s initial approach was modeled on the tried-and-true approach it uses to distribute flu shots — a plan that placed the bulk of the administrative onus on county governments, with the state serving a standard-setting and advisory role.

In the past, giving local health officers that flexibility “has been very advantageous,” said Dr. John Swartzberg, an infectious diseases specialist at the University of California, Berkeley School of Public Health. “Unfortunately, during a pandemic, that approach can make it very difficult to implement things. And I think the state has recognized that.”

So last week, Newsom announced Plan B: proposals that he promises will simplify and speed up the process of pumping out vaccines.

What went wrong with the initial plan, and shouldn’t the administration have anticipated these hiccups?

Many public health experts say most of the factors that have slowed the state’s inoculation plan, from the pandemic itself to the state’s control: California’s size and complexity, a fragmented public health care system spread over 58 counties, unstable federal leadership and the challenges of transporting, storing and administering current COVID-19 vaccines.

But some of the hurdles may be of the administration’s own making.

The state’s initial distribution framework, which prioritized Californians by occupation group, underwriting medical conditions and housing status, may have slowed the process by creating a system that was difficult to administer and hard for the public to understand.

And some critics bemoan what they see as the governor’s penchant for making vague, premature announcements prior to consulting those most affected.

Jeff Smith, executive officer for Santa Clara County, is one of those critics.

“For the past year, the entire approach that the governor has taken to the pandemic has been disorganized and petulant,” said Smith, who disagrees that county governments are sitting on unneeded vaccines. “When he feels like he’s getting bad press, he does something. And the things that he does are not things and they’re not driven by scientific decisions.”

A vaccine rollout that is unprecedented

No matter how much blame Newsom deserves, Democratic consultant Garry South said the governor is sure to get the lion’s share.

“I’ve seen this movie before,” said South, former campaign manager to Gray Davis, the only governor in California history to be successfully recalled. Davis, South noted, was booted from office in large part for his handling of the state’s electricity crisis in 2001. “The governor gets blamed not for the problem, but for not solving the problem.”

Swartzberg said the governor’s struggle was not for state struggling. Vaccine production has been slower than many experts expected. Public health authorities say the outgoing Trump administration neither provided the guidance nor the necessary funding to states. The Pfizer vaccine must be stored at -94 degrees Fahrenheit, while the Moderna version can be kept at a balmy -4 F. Once thawed, both have a short shelf life.

“I would be hesitant to make any really strong judgments right now as to where things have gone wrong,” said Demo-

‘There have been so many fits and starts and changing directions of the vaccine rollout that it’s really tied the hands of counties.’

GRAHAM KAUS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR THE CALIFORNIA STATE ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

granular, when — day by day — we critique it.”

It’s no coincidence that the states that seem to have had the most success in pushing out vaccines — West Virginia, the efforts warn to medical experts, could face a mere fraction of Los Angeles County’s and with nothing close to the linguistic and cultural diversity, said Jeff Good, chair of the Department of Pharmacy Practice at Chapman University. He sits on the state’s Drafting Guidelines Workgroup, a panel of experts that help determine which of the county health departments should receive vaccines first.

“We’re in a class by ourselves,” he said.

In explaining the slow rollout last week, the governor likened changing policy to “shifting course” on a “large ship.” But given how fragmented the state’s health care system is, with vaccine distribution responsibilities managed by 58 county governments, nine multi-county health care networks, and at least half a dozen pharmacy chains, “it’s more like a flotilla,” said Anthony Wright, director of Health Access and a member of the state’s vaccine advisory committee.

The state’s early planning efforts, also the admixture of bad timing, said Tony Ion, a senior vice president of the California Endowment. Vaccine deployment planning took place just as the state’s COVID caseloads were peaking once again and hospitals in Southern California were turning away ambulances.

The very people you need to sit back and do the analysis and research and the planning are caught up managing the day-to-day issues related to the just incredible surge we saw over the past 12 to 14 months, Ion said.

“The Pfizer vaccine must be stored at -94 degrees Fahrenheit, while the Moderna version can be kept at a balmy -4 F. Once thawed, both have a short shelf life.”

And many of those folks are working up there (in Sacramento) are — they’re burnt. They’ve just been running the game plan is.”

In mid-January, for example, the governor announced a simplified eligibility plan. Once counties finish vaccinating health care workers, next in line will be teachers, child care workers, agricultural workers and emergency responders, and Californians over the age of 65 by the end of February that counties will move through their populations solely by age.

But demonstrating just how politically fraught vaccine distribution is, the governor’s core local public health threats to eclipse our memory, said Jeff Smith, executive officer for Santa Clara County, argued that the state’s decision to bring in a company to ensure that doses are accurately being administered is a “solution looking for a problem” and based on inaccurate data. In an email exchange he shared, an employee with the California Department of Public Health estimated that 24,159 doses that were “unaccounted for.” Smith said the real number is zero.

“The main problem right now is the amount of vaccine that’s available for the utilization or distribution,” he said. “This one-size-fits-all (approach) hiring an insurance company is really just a political effort to try to take the blame for not having a confident approach to the pandemic.”

Smith noted that the county was only informed of the Blue Shield decision an hour before it was made public.

To critics, the Blue Shield announcement is part of a pattern of unclear and premature communication from the administration.

In mid-January, for example, the governor announced all Californians over 65 were now eligible for the vaccine. But that was a state recommendation, a sudden change on many Californians who set about scrambling for their dose. Some counties expressed frustration, noting that limits on vaccine supply would make it impossible to vaccinate all residents over that age anytime soon.

“If there’s an expectation in a community that’s now eligible and can hop into a

See VACCINATION, page 15
provider or make an appointment and get it, but we can’t deliver that, that’s a very difficult place to be,” said Knaus at the California State Association of Counties.

For Newsom, California’s vaccine delay poses a quandary. He has long made big, ambitious goal-setting a hallmark of his political style. When running for governor in 2018, he promised to introduce a state-funded single-payer health care system, despite a prohibitively high price tag and no obvious political pathway in the Legislature. He also vowed to oversee the construction of 3.5 million new homes — which would require the state to break its annual construction record by 36% every year for eight years.

That shoot-for-the-moon approach may serve the governor well on the campaign trail, said Dan Schuur, a professor at USC’s Annenberg School of Communications who has worked the press operations for Republican politicians such as former Gov. Pete Wilson and the late Arizona U.S. Sen. John McCain.

On most issues, making big, inspiring promises and then failing to fully deliver “hasn’t caused him any problems because most voters aren’t paying close attention to the day-to-day machinations of government,” said Schuur.

“But when it comes to COVID, they are paying close attention.”

CalMatters is a Sacramento-based nonpartisan, nonprofit journalism venture that works with more than 130 media partners throughout the state, including The Almanac.

Foothills Park

Foothills Park. On Jan. 19, the council directed staff to prepare an emergency measure that would lower the cap on the number of people who can visit Foothills Park at one time from the current level of 750 to 400 (though staff has leeway to raise it to 500). Prior to last November, the visitor cap was 1,000 visitors.

The council, meanwhile, is moving fast to rewrite the rules for Foothills Park access. On Monday, council members voted 6-1 to approve the emergency ordinance establishing the $6 entry fee and capping the number of visitors who can be there at one time at 400. The vote came just days after the Parks and Recreation Commission held its own review of Foothills Park policies, with most commissioners agreeing that the city’s new system should also include an annual pass. And while they didn’t reach a consensus on a visitor limit, most suggested that the 400-person cap is too low and favored a cap of 600 or 650 visitors.

The commission is scheduled to revisit the issue and make a formal recommendation on Foothills Park policies on Feb. 11.

‘It is long past time to relegate this unlawful exclusion to the dustbin of history.’

NAACP and ACLU’s lawsuit against Palo Alto

The commission is scheduled to revisit the issue and make a formal recommendation on Foothills Park policies on Feb. 11.

New website, myturn.ca.gov, which notifies users when it is their turn for a vaccine.

The state is scheduled to receive more than 1 million doses of the vaccines this week, which Newsom said is “an encouraging sign.”

California has now tripled its number of daily vaccinations; it has risen from being at the bottom tier to the top quarter of U.S. states for vaccine administration, he said. The state is also reallocating about half of the 170,000 doses that remain in storage at CVS Pharmacy to Kaiser Permanente to use in minority and low-income communities where virus infection rates have been high, he said.

The state is also seeing improvements in case and hospitalization numbers, which state Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly on Tuesday attributed to regional stay-at-home orders and an increase in public adherence to social distancing, mask wearing and travel protocols. One month ago, the state had 60,000 new cases; today, it has 10,501 new cases, he said. The seven-day positivity rate has dropped from 14.3% on Jan. 7 to 6.1% today. The state also has a 22% decline in intensive care unit occupancy.

Health officials warned, however, that they are concerned about new variants that could be more infectious. The state has 150 cases of the U.K. variant and 960 cases of the West Coast variant, Newsom said. With the mid-February and to institute the weekday fee in mid-March.

While most council members agreed Monday to enact the new restrictions, council member Alison Cormack, who regularly volunteers at Foothills Park, suggested that the city may have acted too quickly in adopting an emergency ordinance without carefully considering what the visitor limit should be and without including an annual pass or discounts for certain visitors, including students and low-income residents. The city has created a situation that “harms Palo Alto residents who use Foothills Park often,” she said.

“Throwing out our favorite number for a capacity limit is a pretty careless way to make policy,” Cormack said.

Email Gennady Sheyner at gsheyner@paweekly.com

Karl Handwerk

Karl was born in Nuremberg, Germany and passed away in Woodside, California due to complications from a fall. Karl was an apprentice at Le Meridien Grand Hotel Nuremberg in Hotel and Restaurant Management. When he moved to Woodside he opened, Barbarossa Restaurant. Karl loved taking walks with his dog, Casey, along the trails in the Woodside Glens. He always said, “Life is not a race, life should be a stroll in the park.”

Karl was nicknamed “The Mayor of the Woodside Glens”. He often went to Half Moon Bay to enjoy the local eateries. He loved a good meal!

Gail Blach

Gail Dolores Blach passed peacefully into the gates of Heaven. She was 84. A life-long resident of Menlo Park, she is survived by her loving and faithful husband of 61 years, Richard Blach, her sons, Daniel and Matthew, both of Napa and her granddaughter, Emily.

Her sister, Sr. Joan Marie Derry, a retired Catholic nun in the Sisters of the Holy Family order, and her brother, Fr. Daniel Derry, a parish priest currently serving at Madonna del Sasso Church in Salinas, also survive her as do many nieces and nephews from both the Blach and Derry families.

Gail, a lifelong Menlo Park resident, was the fourth child of six. Her parents, Edward and Helen Derry, her brothers, Nancy Madigan Neajsmich Derry and her brothers, Edward Jr. and James Derry, predeceased her.

Gail had a love of holiday celebrations. She was born two days before Thanksgiving and wedded to Richard the day after Thanksgiving in 1959 at St. Raymond’s Church on Santa Cruz Avenue in Menlo Park. Dick and Gail were the first couple to be married at St. Raymond’s after it was built. Following the passing of her mother, Gail and Dick took over the joyful Blach-Derry holiday celebrations hosting family, friends, priests and nuns for more than 30 years. Dick is the last surviving member in a family of eleven brothers and sisters.

Gail, a robust person people, truly loved a good story — a characteristic she shared with her husband. With a broad, rosy-cheeked smile and good-humored Irvingish insistence, she would use friends and visitors to dive into a more in-depth tale so she could capture all the details, often while enjoying her favorite cocktail, a Canadian Club whiskey with 7-up. Gail had an inquiring mind and she enjoyed good company as well as being “in the know.”

Throughout her life, Gail attended Catholic schools, graduating from Menlo Park’s St. Joseph’s Elementary School, Sacred Heart High School in 1954, and attending San Diego College for Women (now the University of San Diego) before “coming home” and graduating from Notre Dame de Namur in Belmont. She went on to earn her teaching credential from San Jose State University.

Gail taught fourth grade at Hillview Elementary School in Los Altos for four years, then substitute taught at St. Raymond’s and Nativty schools in Menlo Park.

Gail met the love of her life by way of introduction from one of their mutual friends, the Fire Chiefs, Thomas F. Cuff. The firehouse was next door to Gail’s family’s longtime business, Derry’s Feed and Fuel on Oak Grove Avenue, owned by her father and, in addition, Chief Cuff’s daughter was married to Bob Blach, Gail’s soon-to-be husband’s brother. Gail and Dick, who had recently finished his service in the Air Force, were introduced at an area event.

Throughout her life, Gail supported many organizations while raising her two sons including St. Francis Center Redwood City, the Medical Mission Sisters in Los Altos and the Corpus Christi Monastery in Menlo Park.

She enjoyed playing bridge with friends, swimming and tennis.

Her main focus was always on family, gatherings for any happy occasion and showering her two sons and grand-daughter with love and affection.

In her later years, she became a Good Samaritan for many friends and family members who reached out to her in times of need. She would spread the word among friends and family as well as numerous Catholic organizations asking for prayers, comfort and the Lord’s help.

Contributions in Gail Blach’s memory may be made to Corpus Christi Monastery, 215 Oak Grove Avenue, Menlo Park, CA 94025, 650.322.1801 -or- St. Francis Center, 151 Buckingham Avenue, Redwood City, CA 94063, 650.365.7829, scristina@stfranciswc.org.
PORTO VALLEY

continued from page 5

Derwin said. The town’s Emergency Preparedness Committee discussed setting up neighborhood leaders to help with emergency response during a Jan. 7 meeting, according to meeting minutes. The town is also hoping to purchase a trailer to use as a command post during emergencies, the minutes state. The town has also put $130,000 in work toward vegetation management, she said.

In April 2019, the Town Council formed a committee to look at ways to reduce the threat from wildfires. The committee’s recommendations include adopting “reach codes” that go beyond state requirements for in all new construction, such as banning all combustible roofing and fencing materials, requiring ember-resistant vents and enclosed eaves, and multi-pane tempered glass windows and skylights.

Conversation on race and equity

In 2020, the town began a series of conversations about race and equity and plans to continue this into 2021, Derwin said. She said it’s important to keep conversations about racial equity and the Black Lives Matter movement active.

Derwin would like to host a conversation on the history of housing disparity in town similar to ones held in Menlo Park on “The Color of Law” about housing segregation as a result of historic U.S. government-backed policies. The Menlo Park talks aim to educate residents about how policies such as red-lining led to a segregated Menlo Park.

Derwin said she hopes the town can host a talk in the near future about the history of the Ramaytush Ohlone tribe that lived on the Peninsula, including in Portola Valley. In December, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed a resolution to read a land acknowledgment statement at the beginning of every meeting.

In November, the council approved an acknowledgment that Portola Valley was previously inhabited by Ramaytush Ohlone peoples and that “acknowledges the violent history of the land that it dwells upon ... and recognizes that it has, and will continue to, profit from laws and policies of the indigenous Ohlone peoples, and commits to an ongoing effort to dismantle these legacies.”

Town Manager Jeremy Dennis said in an email that the town plans to reach out to the tribal leaders in the next month or so to continue the work the council began last year on this issue.

The tribe began consulting with The Scape Martinez Project team on one panel of a multi-panel mural in East Palo Alto in December. Part of the mural will feature the Ramaytush Ohlone across history.

Town Historian Nancy Lund is working on finding a way to recognize the early European immigrants of Portola Valley, Derwin said.

“I want to honor our immi-grants and educate the community about them,” Derwin said.

Poet laureate

Derwin, a retired writer who acknowledges her degree in writing from University of Illinois at Chicago, is hoping to establish a town poet laureate.

“I would really love to do that this year,” she said. “Especially now that poetry has become sexy because of the incredible (Nationale Youth) Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman at the inauguration.”

Email Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com

OBITUARIES

Local residents who died recently include: Dr. Mary Kim Hom, 65, a Menlo Park resident, on Jan. 13; Karl Handwerk, 83, a Woodside resident of 54 years, on Jan. 13; and Ray Board, 84, a longtime Menlo Park resident, on Jan. 14; and Katherine A. Strehl, 76, an executive manager at BART and Menlo Park resident, on Jan. 24.

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

Mary leaves behind her husband Tom Cooper, her mother Tom Cooper, and ten nieces and nephews. She is survived by her husband, Tom Cooper, and her mother, Tom Cooper, and ten nieces and nephews. She is survived by her husband, Tom Cooper, and her mother, Tom Cooper, and ten nieces and nephews.

Mary was a fierce advocate for her family and anyone in need. She always went out of her way to help others, from frequenting a struggling local market, to bathing her neighbor’s skunk-sprayed Siamese cat in tomato juice. In every aspect of life, Mary chose her own path, unequivocally staying true to herself and living on her own terms. Her adventurous spirit and playful, caring nature will be deeply missed by all who knew her.

Mary leaves behind her husband Tom Cooper, children Emily, and Emily and Robert Cooper, mother Pauline (Po Yuen) Hom, brothers Leland and Daniel Hom (Alice Hom), sisters Marilyn, Margaret and Sharon Hom (Lance Feng), and ten nieces and nephews.

A memorial service will be planned post-Covid. Until then please share any memories at https://www.weremember.com/mary-hom/2x1m/memories.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to Doctors Without Borders, the Pacific Art League, or a charity of your choice.
**NEWS**

**MODULAR HOMES**

continued from page 5

Bains and his wife, Cheryl, founded East Palo Alto’s We Hope nonprofit in 1999, which now operates 100-bed shelters in San Francisco, a 74-bed shelter and Safe Lot RV parking program in East Palo Alto and mobile fleets that provide showers, bathrooms and laundry services in 17 cities, across four counties, according to Bains.

But to address homelessness more directly, a problem made worse by the pandemic, the pastor is venturing into affordable housing development with his new nonprofit, United Hope Builders.

“We cannot solve a homeless problem without having housing, no matter what,” he said.

Through a partnership with InddieDwell, an Idaho-based B corporation that manufactures modular housing and modular facility to meet the demand.

In September, the company announced that it will open a second site that will break ground on one site that will produce around 400 homes per year at a minimum for the Bay Area, Bains said.

United Hope Builders will construct a roughly 60,000-square-foot factory by leasing seven acres of the old Romic Environmental Technologies site on Bay Road. The facility will churn out steel modular homes like the two recently delivered to East Palo Alto’s RV Safe Lot at 1798 Bay Road.

A burgeoning trend in housing

Prefab homes are not a new concept, but they’ve become an increasingly popular answer to the Bay Area’s affordable housing crisis.

In August, as part of San Jose’s goal to provide emergency housing for the homeless, the city broke ground on one site that will host more than 100 beds, using modular dwellings that each cost $980,000, according to a report from San Jose Spotlight.

Sand Hill Foundation, the nonprofit arm of Sand Hill Property Company of Palo Alto, purchased the modular units for the San Jose project, Bains said.

As another sign of the demand for modular housing, Factory OS, a 3-year-old Vallejo-based modular housing factory, recently completed 1,000 housing units, according to multiple media reports, and raised $55 million in Series B funding, receiving support from tech and finance corporations such as Facebook, Google and Morgan Stanley.

In September, the company announced that it will open a second facility to meet the demand.

“The floodgates have opened,” Bains said. “I’m getting inquiries every single day about this product and people wanting to come see it.”

Two of the most attractive reasons for the shift toward modular homes lie in time and cost.

“Modulars can reduce construction expense, but most importantly, reduce (construction) time sometimes by as much as 40,” said Michael Brownrigg, United Hope Builders’ chief of staff.

In 2019, the average cost of building affordable housing in the Bay Area was $664,455 per unit. According to the Bay Area Council Economic Institute, an economic and policy think tank that figures include construction, land acquisition, materials, labor and legal fees, among other costs, unique to the region.

Brownrigg couldn’t yet provide the total price tag for a United Hope Builders modular home, due to some of the uncontrollable variables beyond construction, but he is certain that modular units will cost a “small fraction” of the typical new home.

“Even when you peel all those different expenses away, we still think we’re much more competitive from a cost point of view,” he said.

Construction time is also a big selling point, especially for a region where supply can’t meet the demand.

Unlike traditional stick-built homes, modular homes are put together off-site in a factory, without any of the on-site construction delays that might arise from factors like weather.

Solving the land problem

There are, however, hurdles both generic to any type of affordable housing development and unique to modular housing, Brownrigg said.

“Challenges for all of us in the Bay Area is the availability of land — I’d actually put that as No. 1,” he said. “Then, No. 2, just the red tape and cost of building.”

One way United Hope Builders wants to address issues of land availability is by targeting “non-traditional landholders” such as the churches and other religious organizations throughout the Bay Area that own often wide-open parking lots. Citing research from U.C. Berkeley’s Terner Center for Housing Innovation think tank, Brownrigg claims there are about 5,000 acres of unused land controlled by religious organizations in the Bay Area.

“We think there’s an opportunity to work with other mission-aligned people in the Bay Area who want to create great, beautiful, environmentally sound, affordable housing,” he said.

And to move through red tape, Brownrigg said modular units can come already compliant to state code before developers have to put them together.

Specific to modular housing, however, one of the biggest hurdles is facilitating the shift in the housing industry’s approach to development, where, traditionally, design decisions such as flooring, windows and appliances are made over a longer period of time rather than early-on as required with modular houses.

A study on modular construction by McKinsey and Company, published in June 2019, found that while modular homes can cut the development schedule by 20% to 50% and construction costs by 20%, “modular projects currently tend to take longer to design than traditional projects” because of the early decision-making process.

“Design decisions need to be made upfront and changes later in the process are both more costly and more difficult,” the study said. “The industry is not used to working in this way.”

This, as a consequence, also requires larger down payments at the front end, and Brownrigg finds that it can discourage some developers who may rely on low-income housing tax credits to fund an affordable housing project.

Without greater control of the construction process, Brownrigg said, a developer may be nervous to pull tax credits early on since there are very strict deadlines between the moment tax credits are issued and when a tenant moves into the property.

“If [developers] missed the deadline, they put at risk their allocation of future tax credits, which for an affordable housing developer is like an existential threat,” he said. “I think we have a solution to that. I think we can find a way to finance that sort of downpayment stage so the affordable housing developer doesn’t have to.”

To date, United Hope Builders has raised $4 million through foundations and private investors, some of the largest investors include Anastasia Vournas and Bill Uhrig, who is the owner of Three Cities Research investment firm, and both helped lease the factory site on Bay Road, according to Bains. To get the factory open by the third quarter of this year, the organization will need to raise another $2 million.

With the opening of United Hope’s factory, Bains also hopes to bring around 100 jobs to East Palo Alto, where employees will earn equity by owning 20% of the factory.

The organization is projected to produce around 400 homes per year at a minimum for the Bay Area, Bains said.

At the headquarters already delivered, two families who are clients of WeHOPE will be surprised with them soon, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on the site planned for Valentine’s Day.

**News**

E. Louis (Lou) Filippi passed away peacefully at his Atherton home on January 10, 2021. He was 80.

Lou was a graduate of CSM where he studied architecture and was later enlisted in the Army where he served as a draftsman in Florida and then in San Francisco’s Presidio. Lou went on to lead American Terrazzo as the President, continuing a 100 year tradition of the family owned and operated business.

His most prized work was not at the office, it was in his beautiful gardens that he tirelessly created, lipping an unlit cigar in Atherton where he was a resident for almost 75 years. He didn’t need to travel to see the world’s beauty; he created a piece of it that he and everyone around him could always enjoy. People would often stop by for a quick visit and find themselves staying for dinner because of his warm and gracious hospitality and generous offering of his wife’s fresh baked treats.

He leaves behind his wife of nearly 45 years, Jeannine and four children – Anna-Marie, Nicholas, Evan & Juliana along with their spouses and four grandchildren who all imagine him reading this with his coffee at heaven’s kitchen table. A private entombment was held on January 15 at The Italian Cemetery. Lou loved flowers. In lieu of sending, plant something in your garden and enjoy it as he would.

**Obituary**

Katherine A. Strehl

October 4, 1944 – January 24, 2021

Katherine Strehl, a 30-year Menlo Park resident, died at home on January 24, 2021.

She was 76.

Katherine’s 40-year career in Bay Area public affairs and service was founded on a commitment to collaboration among business, government and community.

Katherine was Executive Manager of External Affairs for BART, Manager of Public Affairs for Lockheed Martin, and worked at the Bay Area Council. She also was a member of the California Transportation Commission.

Her involvement in Menlo Park included serving on four commissions, most recently the Planning Commission.

Katherine was a longtime supporter of the Commonwealth Club, serving on its Silicon Valley Advisory Board and embracing its mission of education and connectivity to policy makers and great intellects.

Katherine was born in Oakland, graduated from Skyline High School, earned a degree in economics and sociology from UC Berkeley in 1977, and earned a master’s degree in communications research from Stanford University in 1979. She was a graduate of the Coro Women’s Program in 1979.

She is survived by her husband, Bill Dempsey, whom she met while they were both involved in California environmental issues and Bill was at The Nature Conservancy. Her many friends, family and colleagues will miss her.

A celebration will be held once the Covid threat has passed.

addition, the Iverson Trail to Tiptoe Falls is currently closed due to Covid-19 restrictions, and the bridge of the Coyote Ridge Trail between Portola State Park Road and Escape Road is damaged and unsafe to cross. The Coyote Ridge Trail is closed at the IV trail junction and at Portola State Park Road. Camping in all state parks is currently shut down due to the pandemic.
Go to is.gd/portola2 for more information.

Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park
101 N. Big Trees Park Road, Felton Parking: $10/ dogs restricted in most areas
Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park is also open, but the adjacent Fall Creek Unit is partially closed. During the wildfires in August and September, the Felton park was used to shelter people who had been evacuated from their homes. The Buckeye Trail between river crossings is closed, making hiking between Buckeye Trail and Big Rock Hole impassable.

In addition, the following trails are closed: Lost Empire, Pine Flat, Sunlit, Tan Oak, Big Ben, Ridge, S-Cape and North Fall Creek (between Cape Horn Trail and Big Ben Trail), according to the State Parks Department.
Go to is.gd/cowell2 for more information.

Castle Rock State Park
15451 CA-35, Los Gatos Parking: $10/ no dogs
Castle Rock State Park offers more than 30 miles of trails, including a number of staff-recommended hikes at is.gd/castlehike.
There are a number of trail and facility closures in effect including the Falls Overlook, interpretive shelter, connector trails leading to Castle Rock Trail Camps and the trailhead for Skyline to the Sea Trail, the Castle Rock Trail Camps, the amphitheater at Castle Rock, all picnic tables/benches, Sempervirens Point and the overlook dirt parking lot. Access the latest trail advisories at parks.ca.gov by going to the Castle Rock page.
Park staff advise visitors arriving at busy times on weekends and holidays to try alternate, and free, parking areas along Highway 9 south of Skyline Boulevard (Highway 35).

Wilders Ranch State Park
1401 Coast Road, Santa Cruz Parking: $10/ no dogs
This coastside Santa Cruz park offers both ocean and redwood views; the best trails for redwoods are the Old Cabin, Enchanted Loop, Woodcutters, Long Meadow, and Twin Oaks trails, according to parks staff. Access recommended trails at is.gd/wilders2.

And Big Basin?
According to state parks staff, “There is no set date or timeline for the reopening of parks damaged by the CZU Lightning Complex Fire” — including Big Basin and Butano state parks.
The State Parks Department is continuing to assess damage from the initial fire and additional damage from seasonal weather, and is balancing several key priorities: offering public recreation, allowing natural resources to recover and protecting people from the safety problems created by fire-damaged infrastructure, trail systems and park lands, according to parks staff.

A few tips
■ Some parking lots have been filling up on weekends. People should make backup plans if their preferred destination is full, or plan to come back another less busy time — earlier in the day or on a weekday, Gessner said.
■ Destinations that are closer to cities tend to draw more visitors, but those that are more remote tend to have less parking, so both can pose challenges at busy times, she said.
■ While the pandemic continues, the state recognizes that outdoor activity is critical for mental health and physical health, state parks staff said. People should stay local, plan ahead to find out what is open, wear a face covering, practice physical distancing and avoid gatherings with people outside the immediate household. Access more information at is.gd/spcovid.
Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

Mental Health
continued from page 9

Last year, Oakland created a new program called the Mobile Assis tance Community Responders program, or MACRO, which has emergency medical technicians and trained members of the community responding to emergency calls without the presence of an officer. Unlike the pilot in San Mateo County, MACRO does not include mental health professionals, which are costly and difficult to recruit, and do not have sworn officer authority.
Some argued the San Mateo pilot doesn’t go far enough in creating a firewall between social work and law enforcement. At the Jan. 12 Board of Supervisors meeting, Redwood City Councilwoman Lissette Espinoza-Gar nicia said she could not be more “vehemently opposed” to having police ride along with the clinician to respond to suspected mental health crises. She said the insistence on having cops at the scene is predicated on the idea that people suffering mental health issues are presumed to be violent.
“I disagree with folks saying this is a way of decriminalizing mental health when you’re literally sending in mental health clinicians with a paramilitary force,” she said.
Horsley said he understands the criticism, and that multiple outreach programs run by the county are exactly that — social work without police. But he said there are situations, like when someone is armed or barricaded with a weapon, where the clinician simply cannot work solo.
“There are those cases that require an immediate response, and law enforcement should always be there to stabilize the scene,” he said.
Email Kevin Forestieri at kforestieri@mv-voice.com

CRIME BRIEF

Burglar steals new TVs
Three new televisions still in their packaging were stolen from an unlocked guest house in the unit block of Selby Lane in Atherton sometime between Jan. 25 and 29, according to an Atherton police press release Jan. 30.
The burglary is the 12th reported in town since Oct. 1. Residents are encouraged to lock and secure all doors and windows when leaving their home for any length of time and to always set the security alarm.
Anyone with information is asked to call the Atherton Police Department at 650-688-6500.
—Julia Brown

Atherton police have reported 12 burglaries in town since Oct. 1. Data courtesy Atherton Police Department.

AlmanacNews.com
February 5, 2021

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The Almanac
RESOLUTION NO. 2235 - (2021)
RESOLUTION OF INTENTION TO ANNEX CERTAIN TERRITORY TO THE
WEST BAY SANITARY DISTRICT ON-SITE WASTEWATER DISPOSAL ZONE
Lands of Kavanaugh

The District Board of West Bay Sanitary District finds and determines as follows:

A. This Resolution of Intention is adopted pursuant to the District’s “Zone Master Annexation Resolution” ("ZOMAR"), which was adopted by the District Board August 12, 1996. The provisions of ZOMAR are incorporated by reference into this Resolution of Intention.

B. The District has received an application to annex a parcel of real property (the “Parcel”) to the District’s On-Site Wastewater Disposal Zone (the “Zone”). The Parcel is described in Exhibit “A” attached to this Resolution of Intention and the description contained in the Exhibits are incorporated by reference. The name and address of the applicants and the number, type, volume and location of on-site wastewater disposal systems which are proposed to operate on the parcels to be annexed are described in Exhibit “B” attached to this Resolution of Intention and the information contained in the Exhibit are incorporated by reference.

C. The applicants have demonstrated to the satisfaction of the District Board that the Parcel constitutes “real property” for the purposes of Section 2(b) of ZOMAR in that:

X. All of the conditions described in Subsections i., ii., iii., iv. and v. of ZOMAR Section 2(b) are satisfied; or

Other conditions exist which demonstrate that the Parcel will benefit directly or indirectly from the activities of the Zone. If applicable, those conditions are also set forth in Exhibit “B” and are incorporated by reference.

D. All of the conditions and requirements of ZOMAR Sections 2(a), 2(c), 2(d) and 2(e) have been fully satisfied.

In consideration of the foregoing findings and determinations,

IT IS RESOLVED by the District Board as follows:

1. It is the intention of the District Board to annex the Parcel to the Zone pursuant to the provisions of ZOMAR and applicable provisions of law.

2. In conjunction with a meeting of the District Board to be duly and regularly called and conducted, the Board will conduct a Public Hearing for the purpose of considering all matters pertaining to this Resolution of Intention.

The time, date and place of the Public Hearing are:

Date: March 10, 2021
Time: 7:00 PM
Place: West Bay Sanitary District Offices, 500 Laurel Street, Menlo Park, CA 94025 & via Zoom

At the Public Hearing, all interested persons will be heard.

3. This Resolution of Intention shall be published and copies shall be delivered to the persons and entities as specified in ZOMAR Section 2(e)(i).

4. A true copy of this Resolution of Intention shall promptly be filed for record in the office of the County Recorder of the County of San Mateo.

5. The District Manager shall cause the matters set forth in Sections 3 and 4 of this Resolution of Intention to be completed as directed.

EXHIBIT “A”

Date: September 10, 1963
Approved by: Wayne Sanitary District
Place of Acceptance: West Bay Sanitary

Geographic Descriptions

All lot, tract and property situate in Santa Clara County, State of California, described as follows:

Beginning at the southeast corner of West Bay Sanitary District #117.

And to the point of beginning:

Chain No. 1 South 35° 00’ 00” West, 60.61 feet along the boundary line of existing subdivision.

Chain No. 2 East 0° 35’ 00” North, 59.61 feet along the boundary line.

Chain No. 3 South 35° 00’ 00” West, 344.18 feet to the corner of Alaska and District.

Chain No. 4 East 0° 35’ 00” North, 515.53 feet to the boundary line of West Bay Sanitary District #118.

Chain No. 5 South 35° 00’ 00” West, 312.23 feet along the boundary line of District boundary of on-land property.

The aforesaid property is all of the legal description described as defined in the above described deed and is not to be used on the basis for any purpose of the land described.

EXHIBIT “B”

Exhibit B Map of 3-2-22

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MENLO POLICE
continued from page 7
from 59.5% in 2019.
Property crimes, which include burglary, larceny, auto theft and arson, were nearly flat, rising by 0.65% over the previous year, with 776 property crime reports taken compared with 771 in 2019.

There were six complaints that were investigated internally in 2020. Three were sustained. One was for conduct, one for safety and the third was for performance, according to the report. Of the other three cases, one was not sustained, one was withdrawn and one was determined to be frivolous.

The number of internal investigations was down from 10 in 2019, according to the department.

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

COMMUNITY BRIEFS
continued from page 10

Library hosts virtual film screening for Black History Month

Between 6 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 20, and 5 p.m. on Monday, Feb. 22, the Menlo Park Library is hosting a virtual film screening of the film “Healing from Hate: Battle for the Soul of a Nation.” The film follows activists from a group called Life After Hate that works to deradicalize white nationalists.

The film will be available for those 48 hours for free at is.gd/mpfilm.

At 6 p.m. on Feb. 22, director Peter Hutchison is set to talk about his experiences making the film with the community. People can register for the event at is.gd/mpfilmtalk.

Police phone line scheduled for maintenance

The Menlo Park Police Department announced it will undergo system maintenance on its non-emergency phone lines, including its general number, 650-330-6300, on Tuesday, Feb. 9, between 5 and 10 p.m.

People should call 650-325-4424 for non-emergency matters. They will still be able to access 911 via phone and text.

—Kate Bradshaw

Feb 25 2021 / AlmanacNews.com / The Almanac / 19
Dear Gov. Newsom:

Don't ignore the disabled in distributing vaccine

By Jennifer Panighetti

I am being told — along with hundreds of thousands just like me — by the state of California that we are not worth protecting from this virus.

In December, the CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommended that people with high-risk medical conditions be given the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as non-frontline health care workers. But in late January, you completely scrapped that plan. Instead, you are recommending a basic age-based grouping in prioritizing vaccine distribution. By doing so, you are neglecting the health and safety of all Californians with disabilities.

We disabled people often need help with the basic activities of daily life: getting in and out of bed; eating; bathing; Not everybody with disabilities lives in long-term care facilities that have been devastated by COVID-19, and not everybody with a disability is elderly; yet we are susceptible to the same dangers. We rely on kind, loving people who come into our homes to do essential work for us every day. Sometimes our caregivers work even when they are sick because there is no other option for us.

We need the compassionate care of our government. We are at a much higher risk of getting and dying from COVID-19, and we are helpless to stop this on our own. It is not our fault that we need the help of multiple people every day, or that our lungs don’t work at full capacity, or that our immune systems are compromised. Your citizens are begging for help. No, we are dying for help. Do not leave us to flounder in the ocean without a lifeboat. We will not survive.

Gov. Newsom, you must expand access to the vaccines to those of us whose lives depend on it.

I am woman.

I am creative.

I am an athlete.

I am a granddaughter.

I am a sister.

I am a colleague.

I am disabled.

I have a voice.

And I will use it.

Jennifer Panighetti lives in Mountain View.

Letters


Yes, I have noticed the many construction projects either taking place now, or just completed on El Camino Real — and more are proposed in North Menlo Park.

Menlo Park and Stanford University have both talked about eliminating global warming, but neither have followed through. Both are into high-density housing. How many people can we cram into a telephone booth? There is no way residents can depend on passive solar energy to heat their water, their homes, their bodies, dry their clothes or open a window for a cool breeze of fresh air in a high-density community.

Yes, the development could have an active solar panel (solar panels), but what happens when the power goes out? How much pollution and toxic chemicals result from manufacturing solar panels and backup batteries? Where do the batteries go when their useful life is gone? To hazardous waste?

What if a natural disaster or wildfire occurs? Will people in the community be able to get out of the area in a safe and harmonious way? Rusty Day’s opinion stated: “As one fire expert recently remarked, ‘houses are fuel bombs’ that release exponentially more intense thermal energy over a much longer duration than vegetative wildfires.’”

The last 11 months we have been going through a health crisis. We are told to wear a mask and keep 6 feet away from each other. Will high-density housing support or hinder the spread of COVID-19 — or some similar illness?

Where is our food going to come from? This experience has reinforced in me the need for all of us to grow our own food and be more dependent on the sun for our daily needs with passive solar energy having priority over solar panels. This means houses and office spaces cannot be jammed up against one another. It also means property owners need to keep their trees and bushes cut back short and thinned out so everyone can reap the benefits of the sun.

Bottom line: We don’t need more housing and jobs, but fewer people. What is affordable today will not be affordable tomorrow, if we don’t have a balanced population in the Bay Area. This can be done through education: family planning, and hiring people locally instead of hours away. Let’s support each other in contributing to a healthy planet.

Jackie Leonard-Dimmick
Walden Avenue, Atherton

Thank you Woodside fire district

Fire Marshal Don Bullard’s repeated, candid warnings about the dangers of over-development in hazardous, fire-prone settings, such as Stanford’s proposed Wedge project, exemplify the district’s mission to protect life, property and the environment through prevention, education, preparedness, and emergency response.

During the Planning Commission’s Jan. 20 meeting on Stanford’s proposed project, Bullard explained clearly why a densely clustered development of 27 houses at the mouth of a steep canyon is a dangerous design, and how fire could rapidly spread up into the surrounding community. Despite strong pressure to push this project through, Bullard fulfilled his responsibility to educate us all about the hazards and risks we confront. Thank you.

Now our attention must turn to Portola Valley’s town officials responsible for initiating, reviewing and approving Stanford’s project. Will they prioritize our residents’ public safety over private development and stop or substantially change this reckless project? Or will they persist in pushing private development at the risk of public safety?

Last August, we were extremely lucky that the CZU fire started many miles away and did not reach us. With the ever-increasing impact of global warming on our fire-prone lands and vulnerable housing, we must act now to prevent future disaster. Please help me appeal to the Town Council to immediately prioritize our safety above development and to stop promoting developments whose extreme hazards threaten us all.

Don Barnby
Spruce Avenue, Menlo Park

What’s on your mind?
From City Hall politics and the schools to transportation and other pressing issues, the Almanac aims to keep readers informed about our community. But we also want to hear from you.
Tell us what’s on your mind by sending your letters to letters@AlmanacNews.com. Or snail-mail them to: The Almanac, 450 Cambridge Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94306. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. You can also submit a longer piece of 450 to 600 words for consideration to publish as a guest opinion column. Questions? Email editor@AlmanacNews.com, or call 650-223-6537.
"Before Fiddler" celebrates the richness of klezmer music

Streaming Hershey Felder musical about author Sholem Aleichem to premiere Feb. 7

By John Orr

Hershey Felder has spent most of the past year in lockdown in Italy, where he happened to be living when the pandemic struck.

But rather than sit around wishing he was doing shows, the pianist/actor/playwright (and TheatreWorks Silicon Valley favorite) has become a major theatrical force, producing several of his biographical musicals — "George Gershwin Alone," "Claude Debussy: A Paris Love Story," "Irving Berlin," "Beethoven," and "Hershey Felder: Tchaikovsky, Live from Florence" — for livestreaming from his Italian home.

But with his next role, as author Sholem Aleichem in "Before Fiddler — Live From Florence," Felder enters new territory. "Before Fiddler" is not one of his older works, modified for streaming. It is an all-new show, written for the screen. "I'm looking forward to seeing the result as much as anybody," Felder said during a recent Zoom interview, "because it's a premiere — this one is being constructed first for the screen. Film has to be less of a performance, and more of a capture ... It is literally what comes out, comes out."

The show is a happy confluence of coincidences.

"You always have ideas for shows," Felder said, speaking of himself. "I thought, 'Maybe one day, I'll do a show about Sholem Aleichem.' Then, here in Florence, I was introduced to Klezmerata Fiorentina, who are all first-chairs in (the orchestra of the) Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. I heard Klezmerata Fiorentina play, and I thought, 'You know, this might just work.'

"Sometimes a show happens just because the elements just happen to be there. Klezmer music essentially echoes through the history of Judaism, especially in the joyful tunes heard at weddings. It developed as a named genre in central and Eastern Europe in the early 20th century, and has enjoyed popularity in the United States. Klezmer loudly proclaims both happiness and sadness, music that imitates, according to the show's press release, "talking, laughing, weeping and singing."

Klezmer can be almost anything, and wildly innovative, involving extreme musicianship and boisterous performances. It often features multiple melody lines, and can make use of almost any kind of noisemaker as a musical instrument. Its influences can be heard in many types of modern music, including in such swinging big band-era performers as Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw.

It is fun music, generally speaking. Felder's show can be expected to be extremely fun. For one thing, he plays several parts in the show, including as two different women. He's never played a woman before.

"I fit perfectly into a dress — you can't imagine," he said via Zoom. "I am playing a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. It's very, very funny."

And he is not alone in the show, unlike most of his composer stage shows — "Before Fiddler" has a cast of 30 performers, including Klezmerata Fiorentina.

Sometimes referred to as the "Jewish Mark Twain," Aleichem, as a press release announcing the production notes, is a central figure in Yiddish literature.

"Tevye's Daughters," a collection of tales about Tevye the milkman, was published in 1894, and eventually became the basis for the beloved musical "Fiddler on the Roof." Felder's show is based on Aleichem's novel "Stempenyu: A Jewish Novel," which was published in 1888. "Stempenyu" is the story of an itinerant klezmer musician, a talented violinist, who seduces a woman in every town he visits. Although married, he falls in love with a married woman in one of the towns, and emotional complications ensue.

Felder said he is performing "Before Fiddler" in Aleichem's voice, and that it "is very romantic, the story of his life, and something he wrote."

"Originally, I set it somewhere in Kiev, but realized I could use Florence as locations in Kiev, and also in Italy ... Tomorrow, we will go to his (Aleichem's) house in Nervi, on the Italian Riviera. We'll be able to set it where it actually took place." Italy was also featured in Felder's Tchaikovsky show, because that great composer also lived in Italy for a while — not all that far, really, from Felder's home.

Felder's live shows have proved hugely popular, and have helped many theaters maintain their production budgets. The livestream versions offer a more intimate look at his performances.

"Before Fiddler" is being produced by Felder's company, Hershey Felder Presents, but he is again partnering with TheatreWorks to promote the show, and donating a portion of the proceeds back to TheatreWorks.

"Most of what I make from these shows goes away, is donated away," Felder said. "I am giving away most of it; the rest goes into production."

"I think they (online audiences) are buying it for the entertainment value. If I can help others, why shouldn't I?" he said. Despite the challenges faced by artists during the pandemic, "I am able to pay my staff. I wanted to make sure I could continue paying them."

The performance launches live on Sunday, Feb. 7, at 5 p.m. Tickets for the livestream are $55 per household, and include a week of on-demand access after the Feb. 7 performance. More information is available at hersheyfelder.net.

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995 Fictitious Name Statement
THE MIDNIGHT RAVEN
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File No.: 286326
The following person(s) is (are) doing business as:
The Midnight Raven, located at 1250 Arguello St. Apt. 7, East Palo Alto, CA 94303, San Mateo County.
Registered owner(s):
ZOIE YOUNG
1885 East Bayshore Rd. #82
East Palo Alto, CA 94303
This business is conducted by: An Individual.
The registrant commenced to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on Jan. 19, 2019.
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on January 19, 2021.
(ALM Jan. 29, Feb. 5, 12, 19, 2021)

HUMBLE HELP STUDIO
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
File No.: 28617
The following person(s) is (are) doing business as: Humble Help Studio, located at 1250 Arguello St. Apt. 7, Redwood City, CA 94063, San Mateo County, USA.
Registered owner(s):
VAHRAM ANTONYAN
1250 Arguello St. Apt. 7
Redwood City, CA 94063
This business is conducted by: An Individual.
The registrant commenced to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on Jan. 19, 2019.
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on January 12, 2021.
(ALM Feb. 5, 12, 19, 26, 2021)

THE COIN BROKER
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
File No.: 285417
The following person(s) is (are) doing business as: The Coin Broker, located at 23 Shasta Lane, Menlo Park, CA 94025, San Mateo County.
Registered owner(s):
JIMMIE JOE BEER
This business is conducted by: An Individual.
The registrant commenced to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on May 1980.
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on January 13, 2021.
(ALM Feb. 5, 12, 19, 26, 2021)

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Marketplace

Real-life couple Chris and Marah Sotelo play Jamie and Cathy in Palo Alto Players’ “The Last Five Years.”

By Karla Kane

A love story: What could be more simple, or more complex? The highs and lows of a relationship are chronicled in time-bending fashion — and song — in Jason Robert Brown’s musical “The Last Five Years,” which Palo Alto Players is currently offering as an on-demand video stream.

The two-person, one-act show opens brief windows into the romantic life of Jamie (Chris Sotelo) and Cathy (Marah Sotelo), from their breathless and giddy early courtship to their partnership’s sad demise. The gimmick — and it’s a good one — is that while Jamie’s story is revealed chronologically, Cathy’s is told backward, with one brief intersection where they exist on the same plane. For much of the show, each half of the couple is alone on their part of the stage, responding to the ghost of the other. Through parallel vignetted, from opposite perspectives, we watch wunderkind author Jamie’s career take flight while aspiring actor Cathy’s stalls. We see them boost each other, stew in jealousy, and make and betray vows, almost entirely through Brown’s pop-folk score, enhanced by minimal but effective set and props (in this version, designed by Scott Ludwig, and an especially delightful touch are the credit sketches by artist Natalie Long). The show was filmed by videographer Grant Huberty from Palo Alto’s Lucie Stern Theater.

That’s right. “The Last Five Years” was performed in person on the real stage, directed by Palo Alto Players’ Artistic Director Patrick Klein, with vocal direction by Dolores Duran-Cefalu. As you may have guessed by their last name, Marah and Chris Sotelo are married in real life, which allows them to perform together mask-free, and also gives their fine performances an extra layer of intimacy and poignancy. As noted in the pre-show text, the eight-person cast and crew took care to ensure health and safety for all involved. Their efforts are much appreciated.

ARTSCENE

Palo Alto Players’ production ponders the highs and lows of love

Intimate musical ‘The Last Five Years’ is streaming through Feb. 14

By Karla Kane

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The prospect of watching a play in the lockdown era is different — and often less appealing — than it was before. Yes, that energy that comes from being transported en masse to another world inside a theater is impossible to replicate. No, local theater groups cannot be expected to magically transform into professional film studios in a few months. Yes, it is hard to focus when watching on a screen at home, interrupted by the myriad distractions of life.

On the other hand, watching on-demand, as is possible with “The Last Five Years,” makes the show more accessible to those who couldn’t otherwise make it out to a theater (plus, there can be more snacks, bathroom breaks, pajamas and cats on laps).

All this to say, Palo Alto Players have succeeded in creating a quality production, complete with good lighting, sound and editing that’s actually a (bit-tersweet) pleasure to watch. “The Last Five Years” may be just the perfect choice for this sort of intimate offering. And I’ll admit, when the Sotelos appeared for their curtain call, even though they couldn’t hear me, I clapped.

No, it’s not the same experience as “normal” theater. But what it is, is lovely.

Access to “The Last Five Years” is pay-what-you-will: $25-$100 per household. On-demand video stream is available through Feb. 14. For tickets or more information, go to paplayers.org.

Chris and Marah Sotelo star in the two-person, one-act show that opens brief windows into a couple’s romantic life.

Email Karla Kane at kkane@paweekly.com

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