A year of living 6 feet apart

Here’s what Midpeninsula residents are taking away from a year of life in a pandemic

By Jocelyn Dong

W e’ve been through a lot this past year. Our collective life-and-death battle against a threat we can’t see has challenged us in ways previously unimaginable. But the tide seems to have turned in our favor in this war none of us wanted to fight, and talk of vaccines has replaced our nonstop worrying about the effects of the pandemic.

But we’re different people now. During the past 12 months, we’ve had to defend ourselves and each other using unconventional weapons: awkward conversations with loved ones about what is and isn’t safe, carefully arranged but vaguely furtive gatherings, strategic runs to the grocery store and stripped-down living.

We lost track of time but found there were things we valued more than the busy pace of our pre-COVID lives: family, health, friendships, the great outdoors, resilience.

We used to have no problem filling our schedules with activities — always going, going, going — and yet under a seemingly endless stay-at-home order, we sometimes had to urge ourselves to keep on going. This, too, shall pass.

One year in, we asked our readers to tell us about their experiences during this time of living 6 feet apart. They responded with personal tales of what they’ve learned, felt, been challenged by and continue to face. It’s been a mixed bag of boredom, loneliness, anxiety and hardships, but also gratitude, charity toward strangers, opportunity, deepened relationships and determined hope.

We also asked them for their takeaways from this unprecedented, and hopefully not-to-be-repeated, year. Readers who responded include mental health professionals, educators, parents and retirees from along the Midpeninsula. Here are some of their stories. Find more online at AlmanacNews.com.

I’m a psychiatrist, an associate dean at Stanford University School of Medicine, and on the front lines in the hospital. I’m an Asian woman who experienced discrimination and then became temporarily disabled in the middle of the pandemic. I’m a mother, wife and daughter to elderly parents in two different nursing homes. But the worst — and best — experience of this pandemic was when my 90-year-old father got COVID-19. Against the odds, he survived.

‘My 90-year-old father got COVID-19. Against the odds, he survived.’

See 6 FEET APART, page 12

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The orange tier designation COVID-19 cases per 100,000 purple — is based on a county’s to worst, yellow, orange, red and Bay Area to reopen to the orange 17. The county is the first in the Economy on Wednesday, March 11. "I feel like the sun is shining in Woodside is among the local businesses The Pioneer Saloon

Seven months later, M-A freshmen meet on campus for first time

By Angela Swartz Almanac Staff Writer

On a sunny day last week, 72 freshmen stepped on Menlo-Atherton High School’s campus for the first time — seven months after the school year began. Officials at the Atherton school decided it would be nice to give new students, who have been attending classes from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, the chance to meet in person for community building activities. Effective March 10, students who opted to be part of a freshmen cohort will be on campus two Wednesdays, from 2:30 to 4 p.m. "It came out of brainstorming: How can we get freshmen to feel welcomed and feel a sense of community in person, and do something where they can make a mark?" said Principal Simone Rick-Kennel. Activities for the groups of 12 students include scavenger hunts, along with art and landscaping projects, said Rick-Kennel. Students get to choose their service projects, so it may be anything from painting clay pots to putting up temporary fencing to aid in social distancing around campus. The district’s classrooms have been closed for in-person learning since March 2020, except for small groups of at-risk students. In-person learning is scheduled to return.

San Mateo County moves to less restrictive orange tier

By Sue Dremann

For the first time in months, San Mateo County moved to the less restrictive orange tier on the state’s COVID-19 Blueprint for a Safer Economy on Wednesday, March 17. The county is the first in the Bay Area to reopen to the orange tier since November 2020. The tier system — from best to worst, yellow, orange, red and purple — is based on a county’s COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people and its positive test rate. The orange tier designation means businesses can increase their operations since case rates have decreased. Shopping malls, restaurants and offices can reopen indoor services with some modifications. County Board of Supervisors President David J. Canepa expressed excitement about the news. "I feel like the sun is shining again on San Mateo County as moving to the orange tier marks that we are making a true comeback. It means that there is no longer a substantial risk of catching COVID in this county. Now we must minimize the risk if we want to move to yellow and then green to complete this historic comeback," he said in a statement, referring to a new green tier that is under development. That means respecting the health orders of social distancing, frequent hand washing, avoiding large crowds and most importantly wearing your damn masks, especially if you are going to enjoy a pint during St. Patrick’s Day," Canepa said.

Lawsuit against Laurel PTO, principal alleges financial misconduct

By Angela Swartz Almanac Staff Writer

According to allegations in a Laurel School parent’s lawsuit, the school’s parent teacher organization (PTO) used illegal means — quid pro quo payments — to boost its fundraising. After she raised the issue in hopes of resolving it, PTO members and the principal retaliated against her and her daughters, she claims. The suit, which names Laurel Principal Linda Creighton and several current PTO board members as defendants, was filed in San Mateo County court on March 8, by Jaclyn Foroughi. Foroughi is the mother of five children, three of whom have attended Laurel School, and is a lecturer at Stanford’s Graduate School of Business.

Her complaint alleges that while serving for four months as financial secretary for the nonprofit, volunteer-led Laurel PTO starting in August 2019, she discovered parents paid field trip fees as "donations" to the school so that their employers could match the funds. These fees should have been ineligible for corporate matching funds since they were not actually donations — paying for a field trip does not meet the IRS definition because the donor receives a tangible benefit — like a field trip to Outdoor Ed camp, according to the suit.

A quid pro quo contribution is a payment made to a charity partly as a donation and partly for goods or services, according to the IRS. For example, if a donor gives a charity $100 and receives a concert ticket worth $40, the $40 value of the ticket is not tax-deductible.

The lawsuit claims that Creighton knowingly continued to advocate soliciting funds from parents and corporations in an illegal manner and even kept "secret books" on these donations, breaching her fiduciary duties to PTO members by using the misleading term "donations and failing to affirmatively disclose that there was no tax deduction available to parents. "We dispute the allegations in the complaint and are disheartened to see this action," said Laurel PTO executive board members via email on Thursday, March 11. "We have tremendous gratitude for our past, present and future parent volunteers and as we move through an unprecedented school year, our focus will remain on continuing to nurture a respectful, supportive and beloved environment for all." The lawsuit details a 2019 meeting between Foroughi and former PTO co-president Kelly Parisi, in which Creighton allegedly said that "all the schools in the (Menlo Park City School) district used the term ‘donation,’ so using the term is okay.” Parisi told Creighton that accepting funds for
NOTICE INVITING BIDS
TOWN OF ATHERTON, CA

The Town of Atherton will accept bids for construction of the following public work:

EVENT MANAGEMENT SERVICES AT HOLBROOK-PALMER PARK

The Town of Atherton is seeking proposals from qualified companies or individuals to provide event management services at Holbrook-Palmer Park, 150 Watkins Avenue, Atherton, California 94027, until 2:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time on Wednesday, May 4, 2021.

Interested parties are advised that the Town of Atherton has also released a companion Request for Proposals seeking qualified Cafe operators for the Town of Atherton Library Cafe located at 2 Dinkelpel Station Lane. The companion Request for Proposals is available on the Town of Atherton website or by contacting the Town of Atherton Public Works Department.

PROPOSALS will be received at the office of the City Clerk, 150 Watkins Avenue, Atherton, California 94027, until 2:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time on Wednesday, May 4, 2021.

To bid, go to one.bidpal.net/maauction2021/welcome.

The Almanac is published every Friday at 3525 Alameda De Las Pulgas, Menlo Park, CA 94025

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NOTICE INVITING PROPOSALS
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The Town of Atherton will accept proposal for qualified vendors for the following:

ATHERTON LIBRARY CAFE VENDOR

The Town of Atherton is seeking proposals from qualified vendors to operate a cafe at its new Town Library, which is currently under construction. The successful vendor will provide for food and beverage items in a non-cooking environment throughout the day, as well as light fare, warming accessories, coffee makers, etc. Offsite food items are allowed provided they are prepared in a facility and manner approved by the San Mateo County Health Department. It is intended that the cafe be a community amenity for local residents and visitors to the Town Center and Library.

The Request for Proposals may be obtained at http://www.ci.atherton.ca.us/bids.aspx at no cost. The vendor shall be responsible for any addendums that may be posted on the Town's website.

PROPOSALS will be received at the office of the City Clerk, 150 Watkins Avenue, Atherton, California 94027, until 10:00 a.m. Pacific Standard Time on Wednesday, May 4, 2021.

Interested parties are advised that the Town of Atherton has also released a companion Request for Proposals seeking qualified vendors to provide Event Management Services at Holbrook-Palmer Park located at 150 Watkins Avenue. The companion Request for Proposals is available on the Town of Atherton website or by contacting the Town of Atherton Public Works Department.

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To advertise call 650.223.6597 or email digitaladsl@paweky.com.

CRIME BRIEFS

Shots fired

The Menlo Park Police Department is investigating reports of negligent gunfire shots that occurred around 2:40 a.m. on March 12. The department received a call regarding gunfire on the 600 block of Hamilton Avenue then, and when officers arrived, they found several spent shell casings on the street. No one was injured and no property was damaged.

The police department is investigating, and anyone who has information regarding the case or may have witnessed the incident is asked to call 650-330-6300 or the city’s anonymous tip hotline at 650-330-6395.

Man sentenced to four years in prison

A 25-year-old Menlo Park man has been sentenced to four years of state prison after an attack at a homeless shelter, according to the San Mateo County District Attorney’s Office. He will receive a little more than a year in credit for time already served, according to prosecutors.

Last July, Jervon Antoine Holland was staying at a homeless shelter on Maple Street when another man asked him to quiet down. Holland told the man that he did not need to talk to him like that and hit him over the head with a metal object, causing the man to begin bleeding profusely, according to prosecutors. Redwood City Police Department officers later determined that Holland had used a sock with a metal padlock and a bar of soap inside to hit the victim. In February, Holland pleaded no contest to felony assault with a deadly weapon on the condition he spend no more than four years in prison. He was in custody on $50,000 bail, according to prosecutors.

—Kate Bradshaw

M-A Foundation fundraiser

The Menlo-Atherton Foundation for the Future’s annual auction is running online through Sunday, March 21, at 9 p.m.

Auction items include a seven-night stay in a hotel in Palm Springs, a student parking spot for the 2021-22 school year and limited edition Menlo-Atherton High School pandemic loungewear.

Donations can also be made to provide technology and resources to support the return to in-person learning at M-A. To bid, go to one.bidpal.net/maauction2021/welcome.

Oak Knoll principal for new role

The Menlo Park City School District (MPCSD) governing board will vote during its March 25 meeting on whether to appoint Oak Knoll School Principal Kristen Gracia for the district’s new role of assistant superintendent for talent and technology, according to a March 12 press release.

The board approved the creation of the position earlier this year as part of its overall long-term financial stability strategy, according to the district, and will pay between $155,529 and $204,011, plus car allowance. The new job consolidates the roles of two directors that will be open at the end of the year.

“Ms. Gracia has been a transformational leader at Oak Knoll for over a decade, following 10 years of effective teaching at Laurel and coaching throughout the district,” according to the district’s statement. “After 20 years in our district, Ms. Gracia is excited to take a leap that will allow her to grow in her career and bring her enthusiasm and ideas to a bigger community.”

If the board approves the appointment, the district will go through a full and open process to find the next principal for Oak Knoll, involving the staff and families of the school, according to the district.

—Kristen Gracia

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Oak Knoll principal for new role

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—Kristen Gracia

PUBLIC NUISANCE

A story in our March 12 edition, “Menlo Park water rates proposed to rise over next five years” inaccurately described the volume units of water used in defining the water rates. They are CCFs, not cubic feet. One CCF is equal to 100 cubic feet of water.
Menlo Charity Horse Show canceled

By Angela Swartz
Almanac Staff Writer

The Menlo Charity Horse Show has been canceled for the off year in a row because of "continued uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic," organizers said earlier this month.

The event’s co-chairs said in a March 4 email that the horse show, which is held annually in August at the Menlo Circus Club in Atherton, will be postponed until 2022. The horse show typically includes riding events, an auction and a gala dinner.

"As with 2020, this decision was very difficult and disappointing, but unlike 2020 we are optimistic that we are collectively rounding the corner, and in that spirit, we are planning for a robust return of our historic and iconic horse show in 2022," they wrote. "This is where we will be focusing our efforts for the remainder of this year and into next year. We plan to surprise and delight our Menlo family with a series of events beginning later this year and culminating in a fabulous 2022 horse show celebrating our 50th anniversary."

Organizers are encouraging people to donate to the Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Palo Alto, which the event has benefited for over a decade. The Vista Center aims to help visually impaired people gain their independence through "evaluation, counseling, education and training."

Go to menlocharityhorse.com/donate to donate.

Email Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com

County sheriff expands new crisis training

First-of-its-kind program seeks to slow down police activity during mental health crises

By Sue Dremann

A first-of-its-kind, advanced crisis intervention training program in California is being introduced by the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office, opening a new chapter on reducing police use of force during mental health and violent interaction crises, the law enforcement agency told the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors last week.

Called Enhanced Crisis Intervention Training (ECIT), the program builds on the sheriff’s previous crisis intervention training by focusing on de-escalating, and in some cases disengaging its response to a person in crisis, Sheriff Carlos Bolanos said.

The goal is to reduce stressful mental health situations by putting time and space between the person and the deputies while a team gathers information about the situation and comes up with a plan. Engaging in specialized crisis-intervention communication, the deputies seek to gain voluntary compliance from the person rather than using force.

The ECIT program is the latest in a series of strategies the Sheriff’s Office has led countywide in behavioral health training and crisis response for the past 15 years. The office started in 2005 with the Crisis Intervention Training Academy for 17 county law enforcement agencies, in collaboration with the National Alliance on Mental Illness and the county’s Behavioral Health and Recovery Services.

The training helps officers be better equipped to compassionately and effectively respond to calls for service by guiding the officers through scenarios they might encounter and examining their responses, Bolanos said.

'We're focusing on the high-risk crisis calls.'
SHERIFF CARLOS BOLANOS

In 2015, the Sheriff’s Office took its behavioral health response one step further, adding behavioral health experts who assist patrol deputies through the Psychiatric Emergency Response Team. The Sheriff’s Office and staff at the county’s Behavioral Health and Recovery Services pair a clinician with a sheriff’s detective.

The team works with residents in crisis and offers behavioral health services to those in need and their families. They also support patrol deputies as first responders when possible.

In 2019, the Sheriff’s Office added a second detective- clinician team. The two teams are equipped to respond to an average of 35 to 55 behavioral health-related cases each month, Bolanos said.

The Sheriff’s Office began laying the groundwork for the new Enhanced Crisis Intervention Training in 2019 after learning about the program’s implementation in the Portland Police Department. Portland developed its program as part of a 2013 settlement agreement. The U.S. Department of Justice found the Portland police had engaged in excessive force against people with serious mental health disorders, said Detective Erik Ruepplle, one of the deputies on the county’s psychiatric response sheriff/behavioral clinician team.

ECIT concept was developed after a court in San Diego found that police tactics leading up to an incident are relevant to the overall outcome, said Detective Cole Armando, a law enforcement partner on the second sheriff’s team.

Bolanos asked his staff to investigate the ECIT program in Portland and to develop one in San Mateo County. The sheriff’s program is emphasizing its communication skills development on addressing people with psychosis, Armando said.

“We're focusing on the high-risk crisis calls... This model is bringing modern best practices for our law enforcement crisis response. It's giving us better tools to respond to these situations and better tactics to promote positive outcomes to reduce the risk for everyone involved.”

“We're trying to reduce actions that we take that can put ourselves and the person in crisis in more risk, and bring... de-escalation tactics into our standard crisis response: We don't want to rush in and don't rush to make contact with the person in crisis unless there's an imminent threat to others.”

By slowing things down, a de-escalation tactic — they are using distance and time as a de-escalation tactic as well, Armando said. While we're doing that, they'll be gathering information about everyone involved in the situation and what's causing the person's crisis prior to attempting to make contact.

While we're doing that, we're going to begin to form a plan amongst the deputies involved

Disclosing Your Home’s Fire Risks

by Monica Corman

Dear Monica: I understand there is a new California law requiring sellers to disclose their home’s fire risks to buyers. What are the guidelines for this? Janet D.

Dear Janet: Since January 1 of this year, California home sellers have been required to disclose to homebuyers the fire risks on their property. Much has been learned from the major fires of the past years, and California Fire districts have issued simple, effective ways to add fire protections to your home. Referred to as “Home Hardening”, the guidelines list things you should do to make your home as safe from fire as possible. For more information, here is a link to Cal Fire’s detailed guide on this topic: https://www.readyforwildfire.org/prepare-for-wildfire/get-ready/hardening-your-home/

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

Mary Ann Dahlberg
August 31, 1930 – March 11, 2021

Mary Ann Dahlberg, a Menlo Park resident for 44 years passed away on March 11, 2021, at the age of 90. Mary, who was born in Berkeley, CA, graduated as an English major from the University of Washington in Seattle. She returned to California where she worked at the Standard Oil Company of California. Moving to the Peninsula, she was an Administrative Assistant at SRI International until her retirement. A lover of nature, Mary enjoyed walking trips. For many years she made an annual pilgrimage to Yosemite National Park. She was fortunate to have experienced two lengthy visits to Europe focused on art and architecture. She considered her greatest blessing to be close friends and her beloved family. Survivors are niece Catherine Curtis of Fairfax, VA; nephews Richard Cheney of New York City and James Cheney of Santa Rosa; a great niece and three great nephews.
Coronavirus central: Bay Area health officers tout vaccines’ safety

State relaxes rules, makes it OK for some drinking establishments to serve alcohol without a meal

By Embarcadero Media staff

San Mateo County as of Tuesday had 39,502 cumulative cases of COVID-19, with 536 deaths. There were 18 people hospitalized, Santa Clara County as of Tuesday had 112,909 cumulative COVID-19 cases and 1,876 deaths. There were 136 people hospitalized, 22 of which were new.

Officials emphasize safety of vaccines

Health officers in 10 counties in the greater Bay Area on Monday emphasized the safety of the three available COVID-19 vaccines in an effort to curb skepticism and encourage residents to get vaccinated.

The health officers in Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano and Sonoma counties as well as the city of Berkeley issued the joint statement as vaccine hesitancy has ticked up following the federal approval of the vaccine developed by Johnson & Johnson.

"What we can say with certainty is that all three vaccines provide levels of protection that are comparable to some of the best vaccines we have for other serious infectious diseases for which we routinely vaccinate people," the health officials said.

Concerns about the Johnson & Johnson vaccine stem from its perceived lack of effectiveness in clinical trials.

In phase three clinical trials, which included some 40,000 participants, the J&J vaccine was roughly 66.1% effective at preventing symptoms after four weeks, 85.4% effective at blocking severe cases and 100% effective at preventing deaths and hospitalizations, according to the company.

The two-dose vaccines developed by Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech showed slightly higher effectiveness at 95%, leading to some concern that the J&J vaccine is less desirable.

The health officers argued, however, that the clinical trial results are not perfect comparisons due to their different trial populations and the different phases of the pandemic in which trials were completed.

The three vaccines have also not been studied head-to-head, the health officials said.

"If this had occurred in the absence of a prior announcement and implementation of 94% and 95% efficacy (vaccines), one would have said this was an absolutely spectacular result," National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Dr. Anthony Fauci said about the J&J vaccine during a media briefing in January.

In addition, the J&J vaccine has several benefits that those from Pfizer and Moderna do not, including much less cumbersome storage requirements and the need for only one dose, eliminating the need to return for a second dose weeks after the first.

With COVID-19 continuing to circulate as we work toward community immunity, our collective medical advice is this: the best vaccine is the one you can get the soonest,” the health officers said.

Residents in each of the 10 counties are encouraged to contact their medical provider or public health department if they have questions about the vaccines.

Residents can visit myturn.ca.gov or call 833-422-4255 to find out if they are eligible for a vaccine or sign up to be notified once it is their turn.

State allows alcohol served without a meal regardless of tier

State public health officials released updated reopening guidelines March 11, allowing breweries, wineries and distilleries to operate without serving meals, regardless of their county’s tier.

Breweries, wineries and distilleries had been allowed to operate under restaurant guidance since last year, provided that they served meals with alcoholic beverages. Alcohol vendors that did not provide meals, either from their own kitchens or a partnered vendor such as a food truck, had to remain closed in the purple and red tiers.

That changed effective March 13, according to the California Department of Public Health.

Breweries, wineries and distilleries in red and purple tier counties are now allowed to serve alcohol to customers outdoors, provided that those customers have reservations and do not stay for more than 90 minutes. On-site consumption without a meal must also end by 8 p.m.

In the orange tier, the affected businesses may also resume indoor operations at 25% capacity or 100 people, whichever is fewer.

Yellow tier restrictions increase those caps to 50% and 200 people, according to the CDPH.

Bars that do not serve meals in purple and red tier counties must remain closed, while bars in orange tier counties are allowed to operate outdoors with modifications and those in yellow tier counties are allowed to operate indoors at 25% capacity or 100 people, whichever is fewer.

State officials also announced that, beginning June 1, overnight sleepaway camps can resume with restrictions in red, orange and yellow tier counties.

Up-to-date information on tiers and which businesses can operate in each county can be found at covid19.ca.gov/safer-economy.

Comprehensive COVID-19 coverage


CallMatters and Bay City News Service contributed to this report.
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Bay Area leaders call on state health officials to prioritize vaccines for hard-hit communities

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

Elected and nonprofit leaders throughout the Bay Area sent a letter to state health leaders March 12, urging them to change their vaccine distribution formula to better include local communities most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Local state representatives Assemblyman Marc Berman and Sen. Josh Becker said in interviews that they signed the letter because the state’s current formula for allocating vaccines does not take into account the needs of Bay Area neighborhoods where the pandemic has had a serious impact.

“The formula they were using didn’t reflect parts of the Bay Area that had been really hard-hit,” said Becker (D-Menlo Park).

Earlier this month, the state announced a new formula aimed at providing equitable vaccine access to communities that have suffered disproportionately from the COVID-19 pandemic. The formula allocates 40% of available doses to the lowest 25% of ZIP codes as measured by the California Healthy Places Index, or about 446 ZIP codes within the state. The California Healthy Places Index combines 25 big-picture public health indicators like housing, economic and social factors to assess each neighborhood’s general health and well-being.

Throughout the pandemic, its data at the census tract level has been used to identify communities that may be vulnerable to COVID-19 and signal to state and local health departments where they should invest resources aimed at promoting health equity.

The new formula, however, uses ZIP codes instead of census tracts to determine the geographic boundaries of need, determined that no additional vaccines should go to Santa Clara or San Mateo counties.

It also overlooked much of the rest of the Bay Area. One San Francisco Chronicle analysis found that only 2% of Bay Area residents live in zip codes that will benefit from the new vaccine allocations, even though Bay Area residents make up 20% of the state’s total population. And only 10 of the 446 ZIP codes selected for the additional vaccines are in the Bay Area, the San Jose Mercury News reported.

“The Bay Area is really getting the short end of the stick in regards to the equity metric,” said Berman (D-Menlo Park).

Using ZIP codes as the basis for vaccine distribution may work in many areas of the state where there is a big geographic divide between poor communities and wealthier ones, he said, but it doesn’t work as well in some parts of the Bay Area, where low-income neighborhoods that have been hit hard by the pandemic share ZIP codes with less impacted, wealthier neighborhoods.

One clear example is in the city of Menlo Park. According to county health data, a total of 1,529 people have been infected throughout the city boundaries that correspond closely to the 94025 ZIP code. The city-wide infection rate translates to about 448 cases per 10,000 residents, lower than the overall infection rate in San Mateo County.

When the cases are broken down by census tract, about half of all of Menlo Park’s cases are in just one area, the census tract corresponding to the Belle Haven neighborhood. In Belle Have alone, there have been 772 cases, or a rate of 1,331 cases per 10,000 residents — higher than the overall infection rate in hard-hit Los Angeles County.

Meanwhile, those served by the Ravenswood Family Health Network, which includes residents of Belle Haven and East Palo Alto, as well as Sunnyvale and Mountain View, were not receiving any additional vaccines under the new system, according to Luisa Buada, CEO of the health network.

“You can’t look at the numbers and tell me that East Palo Alto, North Fair Oaks and Belle Haven haven’t been significantly impacted by this pandemic,” Berman said.

“A solution that leaves out 98% of the Bay Area, and leaves out east San Jose, East Palo Alto, Belle Haven and North Fair Oaks, not to mention other underprivileged communities in the Bay Area — that’s obviously not the right solution,” he said.

He added that he felt the state should adopt a more flexible model, where census tract-level data could be used in some parts of the Bay Area to more precisely identify the deeply affected areas.

“Let’s come up with a flexible model that acknowledges that the underprivileged are in a very different circumstance than the rest of the state,” he said.

An additional measure Beck- er said he’d like to see is that people in areas hardest hit by the pandemic be vaccinated as family groups.

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

CRISIS TRAINING
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on when and how to attempt to engage with the individual, and what type of techniques we want to use to give ourselves the best opportunity to gain voluntary compliance, and get that positive outcome,” he said.

Sometimes, a successful outcome means “disengaging.” When a San Mateo County man with a gun experiencing suicidal thoughts had barricaded himself in his home in January, deputies decided to back off since he wasn’t committing a crime and hadn't endangered anyone else.

They referred the case to the psychiatric emergency response team, which developed a plan and contacted the man’s family.

The team was later able to “reen- gage” with the man and he was eventually taken to a hospital for help, Armando said.

“ECIT builds partnerships between law enforcement and the community by offering a more empathetic response by way of listening, offering appropriate resources before and at the time of a crisis, and offering to follow up by person, when it’s appropriate, for resource link- age,” Rueppel said.

Armando said the goal is to get the person help and possibly get them to psychiatric emergency services for treatment. “But we’re critically looking at it because we don’t want to force them against their willing and start taking steps that might escalate this issue,” he said.

If communication initially fails to gain voluntary com- pliance and law enforcement chooses to disengage, they aren’t “doing nothing,” he said. Dis- engagement is chosen in part “because we feel that’s the best option to offer that person a chance to de-escalate them- selves or we’re creating more of a distance so they can de-escalate.”

“We will reach out to a fam- ily, if they’re involved, as we’ve done in the past, and try to enlist their assistance with that reen- gagement plan. So the family’s aware what steps we’re taking and when and how we’re going to contact, and in some cases we might not need to reengage because the family is in com- munication with us and they might tell us that the person is no longer in crisis,” he said.

The COVID-19 pandemic slowed down introducing the program to deputies in 2020, as had been planned, but during a two-day training session in late January, the department trained 25 deputies in ECIT, Assistant Sheriff Mark Duri said.

While the program isn’t the only type of crisis interven- tion being practiced, it is the one that Bolanos thinks is most suitable for the county. Supervisor Don Horsley asked if the Sheriff’s Office had con- sidered the Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) program devel- oped in Eugene, Oregon. The program sends outreach work- ers and medics from a community health clinic who are trained in crisis intervention and de-escalation techniques to respond to certain mental health crisis calls rather than police as first responders.

Bolanos said deputies respond to about two to five calls per day for mental health crises, and budgeting for an on-call, separate set of clinicians such as in the CAHOOTS program isn’t cost-effective, he said.

He is also concerned about safety. Some of these cases can turn violent in a matter of sec- onds, he said.

“I become very concerned about unarmed civilians being first responders to those types of incidents,” he said.

Email Sue Dremann at sdremann@pawweekly.com
Could new rail project ease traffic gridlock on Dumbarton Bridge?

Preliminary forecasts reveal system could serve tens of thousands daily but comes with a $3B price tag

By Jocelyn Dong

Among residents and transportation professionals on both sides of the San Francisco Bay, interest is picking up in the Dumbarton Rail Corridor project, a potential 18-mile public transit route that would connect Union City to Redwood City, with stops along the way in cities including East Palo Alto and Menlo Park.

Viewed as a “game changer” by some, the new transit system could ease the maddening daily traffic gridlock on the Dumbarton Bridge and roads connecting to it — as well as provide residents easier access to Caltrain on the Peninsula and BART in the East Bay.

At a virtual meeting on March 15, project staff and consultants presented the progress made on the project, which would use the defunct, century-old Dumbarton rail bridge south of the Dumbarton Road bridge as the basis for the cross-bay route. So far, the project team has documented the current infrastructure conditions along the route, forecasted ridership numbers for proposed stations and developed a range of transit alternatives. It’s also estimated project costs, which would require a complete rebuild of the Dumbarton rail bridge.

The San Mateo County Transit District — along with partners Facebook and the Plenary Group, a public infrastructure investor and developer — are exploring four possible modes of transportation: commuter rail, light rail, bus rapid transit and autonomous vehicle transit. All four transportation modes would operate on electricity, not diesel, the consultants said.

Traveling the whole route would take about 30 minutes, they said.

Commuter rail is similar to Caltrain and would cost the most to build. It could carry the most passengers at once — nearly 600. But trains would come about every 20 minutes, the lowest frequency of the four transportation alternatives. It also would handle the fewest passengers per day, between 14,600 and 17,800, according to consulting firm HDR Engineering.

Light rail generally requires its own track system with overhead electricity lines. It could cost $3.22 billion, and one train could transport 428 passengers, according to ridership forecasts from HDR Engineering. Light rail trains would arrive every 10 minutes and could transport 16,900 to 19,800 passengers a day, with similar frequency.

The final transit option, autonomous vehicle transit, is an emerging technology that uses independently operating pods to transport 22 riders at a time. It has never been scaled up for mass transit use, according to HDR Engineering, but potentially could carry the most passengers of all four options: 20,600 to 24,300 a day. Pods would arrive in intervals of between one and a half and five minutes, the consultant stated. The cost to build an autonomous vehicle system could be similar to that of bus rapid transit, or $2.49 billion.

Regardless of which alternative is ultimately chosen, the project also includes a regional network of bike and pedestrian paths.

The proposed transit system would ease traffic on the Dumbarton but address only a portion of the congestion: It could serve between 14,600 and 24,300 passengers a day, compared to an estimated 70,000 vehicles that used the Dumbarton Bridge daily before the pandemic.

Nonetheless, for local residents like Mark Dinan, the project can’t come soon enough. The East Palo Alto resident and civic volunteer has been tracking the project, which got a jump-start in 2018 when Facebook stepped forward to form the Cross Bay Transit Partners and fund necessary state and federal environmental impact analyses, as well as a fiscal impact analysis. Early discussions of the project at first didn’t include a stop at Redwood City.

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MENLO-ATHERTON

contd from page 5

twice a week starting April 5 for students who’ve opted in.

“We’re looking forward to students returning,” she said. “It gives us an opportunity to be ready for the fall. There’s just a lot of logistics and work to be done; at some point we’re going to get there.”

M-A plans to host five to 10 freshman cohorts (who will each meet twice) during three cycles. Rowan Pecson, an M-A freshman, couldn’t take part in the cohorts since he is already part of a cross country team cohort.

“I kind of am feeling like I’m not living the whole freshmen experience,” he said. “I haven’t been able to meet a bunch of new people.”

He doesn’t plan to join classmates for the reopening this spring.

“The long school year — I’ve gotten into a really nice routine over distance learning,” he said. “I don’t see so many pros in going back to school for now.”

Classrooms reopening

District students have the option to return to classrooms in the spring. The opt-in form was due March 11 and about a third, 3,000 of M-A’s roughly 9,300 students, signed up to return, said district spokeswoman Ana Maria Pulido.

The students on campus will be divided into four groups (A, B, C and D), according to the district’s reopening plan, which was submitted to San Mateo County on March 1. For example, on April 5 and 6, Group A may attend class on campus. On April 8 and 9, it’s Group B’s turn.

After the first two weeks of testing the system on 25% of the student body, the school will combine the four groups into two new groups, bringing the campus up to 50% capacity.

Starting on April 19, as long as the county stays in the orange tier, up to half of the student body will be invited to be on campus at any time. The number of students invited to campus is based on the capacity of the classroom and social distancing requirement of 6 feet.

Email Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com

OBITUARIES

Local residents who died recently include Mary Ann Dahlberg, 90, a former administrative assistant at SRI International and a Menlo Park resident of 44 years, on March 11.

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

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lockdown, my mother could no longer handle his needs and transferred him to a higher acuity facility where he didn’t know anyone. Before the pandemic, I’d had dinner with them every weekend, and in between, my husband and I would help with shopping and errands and grocery visits. Now we couldn’t see them, and they couldn’t see each other, so my dad’s mental status deteriorated quickly. English is his second language, but at the new place no one speaks Chinese, so he was confused and frightened.

Working on the front lines and trying desperately to keep from getting COVID-19 or giving it to my family, I was managing as best as possible in the pandemic until August. Then the rain and lightning storm that sparked those awful wildfires caused a dog-walking accident in which I fell down slippery stairs and broke three vertebrae in five places (and a rib). I was still recovering when, in December, my father developed COVID-19. His doctor at Stanford got him on the list for the monoclonal antibodies that had just been granted an emergency use authorization. His nursing home wouldn’t transport him to the hospital for treatment, however, so my husband and I donned yellow gloves, gowns, masks and face shields and transported him ourselves.

He was coughing in our faces with every breath and fighting us because he thought he was dying. (He had a surprisingly strong grip for a 90-year-old, as a nurse and I pried his hands off my husband’s neck.) For a few days he was barely responsive and we thought he might die, but on Christmas Day the nursing home FaceTimed us and he was awake, eating and drinking and recognized us and the Christmas carols we sang to him. It was the best Christmas gift ever.

I could talk about being underappreciated as a health care worker and about being furious when people won’t wear masks or socially distance. I could talk about 12- to 16-hour days in the hospital, and then hearing people doubt the reality of the illness. I could talk about being mistaken for a patient when I’m not in my white coat, and I could talk for a long time about people fearing me because I’m Asian.

And sometimes I do talk about it, and sometimes I can’t. Sometimes the only thing that gets me through tough times is realizing it will make a good story later. So thank you for the opportunity to share our stories.

Rona J. Hu, MD, Palo Alto

‘We are building a bridge to the other side of this.’

which subject do you think is the hardest to teach online? All of them? That is correct, but in my opinion it is music, specifically choir.

Last March, just a week before schools in Mountain View shut down, I jumped on a Zoom call with choral colleagues from across California. We were all experiencing extreme anxiety because we knew that if school went online, our classes would be impossible to teach. So, we began sharing ideas. This is one thing I love about the choral community: They give freely! We tried out singing on Zoom (it didn’t work due to latency). We tested out online platforms like FlipGrid and SoundTrap and Noteflight, and generally plan-icked (Plan-icked = planning while panicking. It’s a real thing. Every teacher has done it!).

So, when we started teaching on Zoom the following week, we were ... not ready, but we at least had some idea of what to do. And we helped our colleagues in other subject areas catch up by sharing our resources. I am now known at my school for being “good at tech,” which is not a title I ever expected to earn.

Choir on Zoom is like this: I am singing. I hope my students are singing with me. They can hear me, but I cannot hear them. I have them frequently record themselves singing in a program called SoundTrap so that I can give them feedback. It takes approximately 30s as long as it is used to for me to give them feedback on their singing, but it’s OK because it is something. Most of my students are now comfortable with recording themselves. Some still are not. It’s an imperfect process, but we make it work!

In order to boost morale and to make it seem like we are singing “together,” I take these recordings and edit them together in Logic Pro. I also sometimes edit videos of them singing in Final Cut Pro. These are two programs I never wanted to learn how to use, but here we are. The process of creating a virtual choir takes hours and hours. And hours. But it is worth every hour to hear the sound of the choir singing together in harmony.

Here is what I tell the choir: I miss you, I miss singing with you. I can’t wait to hear your recording! Your voice matters and I hope you will add your recording to the virtual choir! Thank you for participating and creating something that we can be proud of. Keep singing, if it makes you happy!

Here is what I tell my colleagues: This is not forever. It is not the new normal. We are building a bridge to the other side of this. Yes, distance teaching is hard and we sucked at it at first, but we got better! Hybrid teaching is even harder, and we will suck at it, at first, but we will get better, just like we did before.

Here is what I will say to you, my community: Keep wearing your masks. Keep doing your part to bring the COVID-19 numbers down. When this is all over, sign your kids up for a choir (or any music class) because we will all need the incredible healing that music provides.

I can’t wait till we can sing together, again.

Dr. Rona Hu, an associate dean at Stanford University School of Medicine, holds a photo of her father who survived COVID-19.

‘People are starved for human interaction of any kind, no matter how limited.’

had thought about trying videoconferencing for most of the three years that Curious Minds, an adult discussion group, had met weekly at the Woodside Village Hub. Meeting in person provided a rich, three-dimensional experience, particularly valuable when topics ranged all over the map, both literally and figuratively; among over 100 others, they have included Russia, Great Britain, Africa, Kashmir, the Middle East, health policy, the solar system, homelessness, intellectual property, happiness, the film industry, humor, geopolitical forecasting, the media, food and, unsurprisingly, elections.

Then the pandemic hit, forcing the experiment. I figured I was singing with me. They can hear me, but I cannot hear them.

Creating space outside of work

I am exhausted. I work all of the time. There is no meaningful division between my work life and my home life, and I haven’t had a vacation day in over a year.

I am eager to get back into my office — my real workplace — and to be able to travel again so that I can more easily create non-work times and spaces in my life.

Bob Sawyer is part of a discussion group that met at the Woodside Village Hub but had to move its meetings online.

If it didn’t work out, we could suspend meetings until the pandemic was over, likely in just a few weeks. Ha!

I assumed the number of participants would decline from the 10-15 we typically had, and the meetings would be shorter. While Zoom provides video of participants who choose to share it (most do), the small video tiles on a flat screen was a big step backward, making it harder to figure out who wanted to speak and when to move the conversation to a higher level or drill down to a lower one. But we adapted to the new medium. On the positive side, it allowed people from multiple time zones to be able to participate. That has also allowed us to more frequently invite people with particular knowledge of a topic, since travel was no longer a factor. It is not uncommon now for discussions to span 10 time zones.

The meetings aren’t shorter and typical participation has grown to 15-20, perhaps in part because people are starved for human interaction of any kind, no matter how limited. It’s gone well enough we will likely continue videoconferencing for at least some meetings after the pandemic is over.

Eric Goldman says his life has been consumed by work in the past year.
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Hugs are everything. We hug our family, friends and co-workers. Did we ever think of a time when we could or would not hug? Not only was it unimaginable, we never thought of the hug and all its significance. A hug shows love, it shows sympathy, it shows respect and most of all it feels good.

Hugs are one of the things that can feel good for all parties. We have hugs for two or hugs for a group. We have big bear hugs, strong breath-take-away hugs and gentle, kind hugs. Would we have ever imagined not having any kind of hug or not giving any hugs?

A year into the COVID-19 pandemic and our shelter-in-place requirements for lots of things are not fun. We have lost jobs and sources of income. We are in jeopardy of losing our homes, too.

Nothing could compare to losing a family member or friend to this horrid disease. It’s a miracle that in one year a vaccine can mitigate this virus and help us all look forward to a more normal lifestyle. I feel so grateful that my family is safe and so far I have survived all of this. My grand-children and I have invented pretend hugs when we see each other outside, masked up and socially distanced. It is something but really not enough.

I know I, for one, will never take a hug for granted again.

Geraldine MacDonald, Los Altos

 unlawful mandate to enter the home. The events have negatively impacted our family. Losing all in-person support during the pandemic has negatively impacted our family. Losing all in-person support during the pandemic was the most painful time in our lives, a lose-lose situation, and each person shares the burden, but how can ing time. Unfortunately the help us through such a try- ing time. Unfortunately the pandemic caused everyone to reconnect with our neighbors and get to know them better.

We even started sharing grocery runs and other things as a result of the relationships we have developed. This has been an emotional blessing since we don’t have any family members who live close by. And it has helped us remember to have a moment of gratitude each day, even on the days that we don’t feel very positive. I have also made new friends from the original Quarantine Singalong, and we keep in touch over Facebook.

We often have neighbors drive or walk by while we are doing our singalongs, and they have also commented that seeing our family singing or dancing in the street has brightened their day. It has really helped us to try and spread positivity during this difficult year.

Hera Hong Lee, Mountain View

When the going gets tough, create ‘Happiness Bubbles’

Here’s the story about how we started a neighbor- hood singalong that we affectionately call “Sun Mor Singers” and a public Facebook page called “Happiness Bubbles” where we share videos of our singalongs, our gratitude for health care and essential workers, and just positivity with others.

Our family of five (plus two dogs) lives on Sun Mor Avenue in Mountain View. A few days after the official shelter-in-place order on March 16, 2020, we discovered a Facebook group called “Quarantine Singalong” that was started by Ilana Minkoff in San Francisco. We joined that group on March 21, and every night at 7 p.m. we would stand outside to applaud the health care workers and sing a song. We invited our neighbors to join, and the three neighbors adjacent to us would come outside almost daily to join us. We continued to do that every night, posted a video of our song, and started to spend a few minutes talking with our neighbors (standing across the street from each other) after each singalong, which turned into the best part of our day. We did this for 70 nights straight until May 29. (The last official night of Quarantine Singalong ended with an epic version of Bohemian Rhapsody)

But after that larger group stopped, we didn’t want to stop connecting with our neighbors, so we decided to continue on ourselves and meet outside three nights a week. And that led to starting our own Face- book group called “Happiness Bubbles” so we could post those videos of our neighborhood singalongs. (My kids came up with the idea for the name because happiness can bubble up to the top and make you feel better, and bubbles can also make you happy — see our page at facebook.com/groups/happinessbubbles.)

We have been singing with our neighbors since then and haven’t stopped yet! We are now on our 180th neighborhood singalong this week. It has definitely been a silver lining for us during this past year of the pandemic. It has helped to have something fun and positive to look forward to (sometimes we have costumes or themes), and it has helped us reconnect with our neighbors and friends.

Hera Hong Lee and her family started neighborhood singalongs during the pandemic and dubbed them “happiness bubbles.”

Diagnosed with leukemia four months before the pandemic

At the age of 5, my daughter Hadley, now 7, was diagnosed with leukemia, four months before the pandemic closed everything down. We went through the gut-wrenching experience of learning how to navigate childhood cancer while feeling wrapped in love with an amazing amount of support, to feeling shunned by our community when the shelter-in-place order started. Suddenly nobody wanted to be near us, when we need most is our connections with our friends.

This past year has been the most painful time in our lives, not because of fearing the virus but because of how all the restrictions have negatively impacted our family. Losing all in-person support during a time when we are still reeling with a traumatic diagnosis has only made a terrible situation even worse. Hadley only got to attend a few months of kindergarten before being hospitalized, and she was just starting to get ready to return to the classroom when school went virtual. Distance learning doesn’t work for her, so we’ve struggled this past year and will be pulling her out of the district to officially home-school, instead where she’ll have more flexibility.

I worry that by next fall schools won’t be back to normal, and I’m not comfortable sending her anywhere that I’m not allowed to be on campus, which is what I fear will be the case. She has to wear a mask more than most people and has been doing so since she was diagnosed in November 2019, and we have no desire to put her in school where she’d need to wear a mask all day.

Navigating the world of childhood cancer and how it affects our whole family while also dealing with a pandemic is truly a horrible experience. Still, despite the hardships of this year, there have been some wonderful moments thanks to those who continue to try supporting us in whatever way is possible. Friends have bought us groceries, lent us a car to take Hadley to her chemo appointments, sent thoughtful gifts to both of our children, and when her hair started growing back and she asked to trim the sides, someone donated a professional haircut to her! I also encourage our friends to donate blood in Hadley’s honor, since she’s needed many blood

transfusions. You can see more of her story at tinyurl.com/hadleysstory.

I was warned that friendships have a tendency to fade away when your child is diagnosed with cancer, and I doubted that would happen since we had so much support and everyone seemed like they wanted to help us through such a trying time. Unfortunately the pandemic caused everyone to experience their own trying times, and it’s harder to find the helpers when everybody is struggling.

The collective grief we are all feeling after a year of hardship is magnified for me, and carrying that weight feels impossible at times without being able to share the burden, but how can I ask those I love for help when they need help as well? It’s just a lose-lose situation, and each day I hope we are one day closer to a return to normal.

Geraldine MacDonald says pandemic forced her to reconsider the importance of hugs.

Katy Crain and daughters Hadley (center) and Makena. Hadley was diagnosed with leukemia just a few months before the pandemic.
With vaccination, The Sequoias resident looks forward to freedom

Sue Crane, 88, says she’s been proud, and surprised, by her own resilience

By Angela Swartz
Almanac Staff Writer

Jan. 15 marked a day of joy and relief for Portola Valley resident Sue Crane. It was the day she finally received her first of two Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine doses.

Crane, 88, has been mostly confined to her apartment in The Sequoias retirement community in Portola Valley since the pandemic sparked San Mateo County to institute its shelter-in-place order.

Before she moved into The Sequoias, Crane, a former Portola Valley mayor who’s lived in town for 57 years, had heard stories about the difficulties of norovirus outbreaks in 2006 and 2011.

“I thought, ‘Oh, thank goodness I never came when something like that happened,’” she said. “So when something like this happens — that, oh, ‘Tommorow, you will not go to the dining room,’ that’s the first way you hear about it — you think, ‘It’s going to be a day or so.’ You have no expectations. And it goes on and it goes on and things get canceled.”

Since the pandemic began, six of The Sequoias’ 315 residents and 34 staff members have tested positive for COVID-19, said Rob Hays, executive director of The Sequoias, in a March 1 email. One person was hospitalized and there have been no deaths.

The pandemic was a particular shock given that the year had started off completely normally. In March 2020, Crane organized a group of Sequoias residents to visit Ridge Winery in Cupertino, which she co-founded — before selling — with her late husband, Hew, in the 1950s. The group planned to taste wines, including her favorites: cabernet. But the excursion never happened.

Instead, residents of The Sequoias faced restrictions. They were not able to gather, although they were allowed to walk together outside, 6 feet apart, outside. Residents received COVID-19 tests at their front doors. Mail and meals were also delivered to their doors.

Crane, who moved into the community six years ago for social interaction, considers taking meals by herself to be the most difficult part of the restrictions at The Sequoias.

“Every day I hate eating alone,” she said. “I just don’t like it.”

Weekends feels particularly lonely for Crane, a time when she has few meetings scheduled.

“If I’m lonesome, I usually don’t call somebody and say ‘I’m lonesome,’” she said. “I stay away from people. Now, I might, a few days later... I can talk about it — but I did not help myself. I did not help myself when I was lonely. And I find a lot of people do this.”

Still, Crane is happy to be at The Sequoias during the pandemic. She fears she would feel lonelier living in her own home.

“I walk outside my apartment and I bump into people,” she said. “You’re never alone.”

As separated as she’s been from family this past year, she’s also come to rely on them in new ways.

Her son Daniel, who lives in the Portola Valley house she called home with her sons and Hew for many years, drops off groceries from Trader Joe’s. Daniel said his parents were very self-sufficient, so it’s actually been nice to be able to take care of his mother recently.

Daniel’s partner, Harriett Bell, said that after almost a year they really know what Sue likes. Graham crackers or dark chocolate? Favorites are on Sue’s list of favorites.

“I know she likes this cheese more than that cheese,” Bell said. “The relationship is different than it was. There’s a different level of intimacy. Other than not being able to actually see her, it feels like we talk quite often.”

On Thanksgiving Crane made the brutal decision to not spend the holiday with Daniel, her daughter (who took a COVID-19 test before attending the gathering) and Bell.

“The minute I walked in the door, I forgot about the pandemic,” Crane said. “I must have kept my mask on for a while. I didn’t hug anyone at first. I think when I left, I did hug somebody, my mom. Of course, we were in a familiar place. I felt wonderful.”

Bell said Sue took note of some new photos on the wall.

“It makes you realize how long it’s been since she had been in the house,” Bell noted.

Keeping busy and silver linings

The pandemic has not come without its share of silver linings. It’s helped Crane to grow personally. Looking back, she is proud of the resilience she’s displayed.

“Going with the flow was difficult,” she said. “But I can look at it now and I think I was up to the job. That surprises me. I did my share of complaining. But you know, I’m not the worst for it. I know a lot of people here who are much for the worse of it.”

Crane has been able to offer support and comfort for others who are not feeling as resilient.

“I don’t know I’m doing it when I’m talking, but then they’ll come back and say, ‘Thank you. I really appreciated you saying that,’” she said.

Crane’s confidence has also increased during the pandemic, the continuation of an evolution that she’s been on since her husband, who was a key figure in the design and construction of banking automation, died in 2008.

“I had a good marriage. (But) I was not as independent,” she said. “I took a backseat. He was at SRI and he was called a brilliant man. When people talked about us owning the vineyard, they talked about the men owning it. I mean, I always had to fight to be noticed.”

Through the pandemic, her council work and pottery, Crane has gained a certain confidence.

“I have become a much stronger person,” she said.

In recent weeks, many restrictions at The Sequoias have been lifted because of the vaccinations. Residents are now allowed to go shopping, go to the bank, get their car washed, attend a church service, eat outside at a restaurant with family or friends, play tennis, golf, swim, visit family and friends’ homes and visit with up to five other residents in their apartments. Masks are still required and frequent hand-washing is encouraged.

“ Spirits have visibly lifted,” she said.

She planned to eat corned beef and cabbage with Daniel on St. Patrick’s Day and said she enjoyed seeing a different set of faces at the Alpine Tennis and Swim Club earlier this week.

“There’s a lightness I just felt to drive and look at the trees,” she said.

A trip to Trader Joe’s with her family made her realize how much she’d missed the last year. The COVID shopping restrictions felt foreign to her.

“I realized how caged up I’ve been in not being able to have a normal life,” she said. “We don’t allow ourselves to know when something is being taken away from us.”

Email Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com
Nova Jimenez, professional singer, delivers the healing gift of music through sidewalk serenades

By Linda Taaffe

As Nova Jimenez takes center stage behind a mic and portable amp set up in a parking stall behind Stanford Health Care on a recent Wednesday afternoon, her voice tenderly cuts through the backup bells of nearby construction trucks and the steady hum of traffic along El Camino Real.

"E schiudi l’uscio al tuo cantor! [Open the door to your cantor!]," the trained soprano sings in Italian as she serenades a dozen or so masked health care workers who are spread out across the back of the Menlo Park office about 20 feet away. For the next 30 minutes, the daily realities of working on the front line seem to fade away with every note she delivers. There’s no discussion of vaccines, sickness or death — just singing, swaying, clapping and unbridled joy.

Impromptu concerts at unlikely venues have become routine for Jimenez, a private voice teacher and lecturer at Stanford University who has been performing what she calls "sidewalk serenades" for front-line and essential workers and isolated seniors around the Bay Area nearly every weekend since March. She’s performed in front-yard lawns, asphalt parking lots and on a sidewalk 11 stories below her audience.

"I think the work I’m doing right now, it’s my most important purpose in life," said Jimenez, who has been singing professionally since she was a child. "We’re living in all these restrictions and to be able to do one little thing without endangering people, it is freeing.

"I feel like (these serenades) were just absolutely meant to be ... My years of training, my experience, everything sort of pointed in this direction. This is why I’m singing."

Jimenez said she’s always turned to singing during difficult times.

"When I’m challenged, my first response and my reaction is to sing," she said. "When I was a child, I would go in my room and sing for hours. It’s how I healed myself. I got to be creative, and I got an opportunity to really sort of scream away my troubles.

And that’s what happened last spring, when the pandemic hit. She went into her studio and started singing for hours — something she hadn’t done in recent years while busy raising her two school-aged sons.

"I came out, and I said, ‘You know, maybe someone needs a lift. Maybe I can share some of the healing that I feel with others.’ And so it kind of went from there," she said.

Jimenez bought a portable amp and a microphone and went outside to sing for her Stanford neighbors.

"It was so fun," she said. "You know, it was like, just this way to kind of get people out of their houses. It was the greatest feeling."

Jimenez wanted to share that experience beyond her immediate neighbors, so she placed an ad on the Nextdoor website offering free sidewalk serenades to essential workers or anyone isolated due to the pandemic who needed a lift.

"It had been incredible," said Jimenez, who has performed close to 70 serenades since March. She’s been invited to perform outside the homes of teachers, doctors, her mail carrier, seniors at Channing House in Palo Alto and even a blind musician in her 90s whose daughter reached out after hearing Jimenez perform on the radio.

The response has been absolutely liberating for me."

Jimenez said performing outdoors during the pandemic has given her life purpose and clarity about the importance of music.

"This is my skill. I’ve been working at it my whole life. It’s something I love to do ... and it’s gotten me out of my house, and I’ve gotten to meet so many incredible people," she said. "It’s like, there are these memories that would have never happened if this didn’t happen the way it did.

"So I really believe that in all of this darkness, there is some light. And all I want to do is just kind of share some of that joy and light and be a reminder that our lives will one day return back to normal, and no one’s alone."
Menlo Park: City and fire board leaders talk properties, emergency plans

By Kate Bradshaw
Almanac Staff Writer

The Menlo Park City Council held a joint meeting with the Menlo Park Fire Protection District board Tuesday to talk through problems where their interests intersect: emergency plans and the city-owned property that the fire district leases in Belle Haven.

The district has long been interested in purchasing the city land that it leases for its fire station in Belle Haven. The question came up in 2016 when the city and fire district negotiated to continue the district’s lease over the property at a rate of $1 per year for the next 55 years.

The district first approached the city about purchasing the property in 2013, but the city is wary of selling because, as Mayor Drew Combs put it Tuesday, “property values only go up.”

The fire protection district board made its case again Tuesday, arguing that the district would prefer to own the property before it embarks on plans to expand its fire station, Station 77, at 1467 Chilco St. in Belle Haven.

In addition to the city bought a property at 1283 Willow Road in 2019 that the fire district at the time expressed interest in purchasing, where it would potentially develop a new fire station and relocate some operations there. The property is a former gas station and had some zoning and technical restrictions, City Manager Starla Jerome-Robinson said. Since then, it seems that the fire district is more interested in staying at its current location.

“We are rather focus on the 77 site,” fire Chief Harold Schapelhouman said Tuesday. “We have a long history of being there. We don’t plan on going anywhere.”

As development continues north of U.S. 101 in Menlo Park, Schapelhouman argued, the resources the fire district needs nearby also need to expand. “It’s too small to meet those growing needs, he said.

The district is rebuilding its station at the corner of Valmiera and Alameda de las Pulgas in West Menlo Park, then plans to rebuild its Middlefield Road headquarters before tackling a project to rebuild the station in Belle Haven.

He noted that Menlo Park’s boundaries continue into the Bay, so the fire district is often the first responder to incidents on the Dumbarton Bridge and to water emergencies in the Bay near Menlo Park.

Emergency plans

The fire district also urged the city to develop an emergency plan for a disaster. “We don’t have a plan, and we need one,” said fire board member Chuck Bernstein. Even though the fire district has the expertise to respond to disasters, the city Council is tasked with managing them under state law, he said. Since fire department set up to respond to incidents on a 24/7 basis, the district board said that it could develop plans to help lead during the first 12 hours of a disaster.

Discussions to develop such a plan would likely take place in the summer or fall with a workshop or planning discussion, board President Jim McLaughlin said.

City is on Chilco Street. The Menlo fire district is interested in buying the land where the station is located, but it’s currently owned by the city of Menlo Park.

Door-to-door vaccinations

Another idea proposed was for the city and fire district to partner to use federal COVID-19 stimulus funds to provide COVID-19 vaccines door to door to homebound people in Menlo Park.

“If we build that logistical framework together, it seems to me we can make a strong case to get the vaccines in order to deliver them,” Councilman Ray Mueller said.

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

Fire Station 77 is on Chilco Street. The Menlo fire district is interested in buying the land where the station is located, but it’s currently owned by the city of Menlo Park.

‘Our traffic is incredibly bad, and without a project like the Dumbarton Rail Corridor, it’ll only get worse.’

MARK DINAN, EAST PALO ALTO RESIDENT

If you look at the development planned, there’s got to be a public transit solution here,” he said, while also noting the lack of regional transit service to the city of roughly 30,000 residents. “East Palo Alto is a city on the move. If half of it gets built, you’ll see a lot of office workers.”

Dinan said that before the pandemic, rush-hour traffic was already so bad that he wouldn’t dare drive his son home from downtown Menlo Park after a late afternoon activity. Instead, they’d stay in the city for dinner, just to wait out the drive home that, under normal conditions, should only take 10 minutes.

“Our traffic is incredibly bad, and that’s without the Dumbarton Rail Corridor, it’ll only get worse,” Dinan said.

Advocating for a Marsh Road station

Skip Hilton, a Menlo Park resident, is also bullish on the Dumbarton Rail Corridor, but he’s also got a concern: Initially, Hilton himself has been following the project for years, even before Facebook initiated the partnership.

He noted that the ridership projection for the University Avenue stop is actually lower than that of Marsh Road — 300 to 400 riders per day — but consultants said the East Palo Alto station is included because the city is underserved by transit.

“Marsh Road is also underserved by transportation. We should have all the stops,” Hilton said. “More stations and access is better.”

Consultants at the meeting stated that every additional stop would add five minutes to the route’s travel time, but Hilton noted that taking a stop out would also reduce the number of people using the system.

“It doesn’t make sense to reduce passenger volume. That’s the linchpin to effective transit, said Hilton, who himself has commuted by Caltrain.

Hilton has requested the ridership studies to analyze. He said SamTrans would find there were tremendous ridership gains in a Marsh Road station if the agency were to reach out to those four neighborhoods.

With Hilton would like to see a Marsh Road station, Dinan has a preferred mode. He hopes to see the commuter rail option chosen — the extension of either Caltrain or BART from the East Bay. It makes the most sense, he said, to extend an existing network rather than create a new short-haul system from which riders then would need to transfer to Caltrain or BART.

“What I would say is that it’s got to be seamless,” Dinan said. With a Caltrain extension, Hilton envisions biking from his home to the new University Avenue transit station, hopping on Caltrain and whizzing up to San Francisco or heading down to San Jose — without changing to another transit system.

“Coordination” has also been the mantra lately among leaders of local transportation agencies. With 27 separate entities, the Bay Area has been called the “most fragmented public transit network in the country” by advocacy group Seamless Bay Area. Regional planning efforts are underway to try to lower hurdles to taking public transportation, including the study of coordinating schedules among agencies and unifying fare systems so passengers can easily hop from one transit service to another.

The Dumbarton Rail Corridor project has miles to go before it could become a reality, however. While it is included in the Metropolitan Transportation Commission’s Plan Bay Area 2050 with a completion date in 2036, for now, the project needs the SamTrans board of directors’ approval of preferred alternatives to submit for environmental review.

The staff’s analysis of the alternatives is scheduled to be presented in May or June, according to Carter Mau, deputy CEO and general manager of SamTrans.

“The board will decide how to proceed forward,” Mau said March 15. He added that while the Dumbarton rail bridge is “quite a unique regional asset … there has never been enough support to fund any proposals to reactivate the railway.”

The project team states on its website that it is eligible for public funding under the recently passed Regional Measure 3 (bridge toll tax) and San Mateo County’s Measure W, as well as Federal Transportation Administration Capital Investment Grants and other U.S. Department of Transportation programs.

Dinan said he’d love to see the Dumbarton Rail project receive significant federal aid from the new presidential administration.

“I’m all for it. I’m a huge fan,” Dinan said. “For all the taxes we’ve paid in Silicon Valley, someone has got to pay?”

Email Jocelyn Dong at jdong@paweekly.com

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COMMUNITY BRIEFS
continued from page 6

Office of Education talks

The San Mateo County Office of Education is hosting a series of upcoming virtual events.

On Saturday, March 20, middle and high school students can meet in-person with students from across the county, hear from guest speakers, attend breakout sessions to learn about climate justice and sustainability topics, and mobilize collective action for Earth Week.

On March 23, the county will host a session with teachers to address the California Department of Education’s 2021 revision process for the mathematics framework for public schools.

On March 25, there will be an event on pressing issues and major topics in environmental literacy and sustainability. A panel will discuss how to prepare students for careers in a green economy. Attendees will network with others to explore these topics, share resources and best practices, and reflect on local issues and projects.

During the April 15 webinar “The Arts, Anti-Racism and Climate Change,” leaders will offer creative and critical strategies using the arts to support teaching and learning.

More information is at tnyurl.com/smccevents.

—Angela Swartz

COMMUNITIES TO RECEIVE SIGNIFICANT FEDERAL STIMULUS FUNDS

As part of the American Rescue Plan Act, the federal stimulus bill aimed at addressing the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the city of Menlo Park is estimating it will be allocated $6 million in federal funds.

Atherton is expected to receive $1 million, Woodside $1 million, and Portola Valley $500,000, according to a press release from Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, whose district includes areas of San Mateo, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties.

San Mateo County is expected to receive about $148.7 million, Santa Clara County $373.9 million and Santa Cruz County $34 million.

“Our Congressional District will receive $883 million for local governments to protect the jobs of first responders, from public health workers, teachers, transit workers and other essential workers. It includes $102 million to help reopen schools safely in Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Santa Cruz Counties. This transformative bill brings us closer to the day when we will be able to hug our families, have coffee with friends and celebrate birthdays in person again, and I’m eager to see its benefits reach people as soon as possible,” Eshoo said in the statement.

Hand sanitizer dispensers installed at playgrounds

The city of Menlo Park has recently installed touchless hand sanitizer stations at its 14 playgrounds, according to a city announcement. The dispensers are near playground entrances and are aimed at encouraging visitors to clean their hands before and after play.

New hydration stations have also been added at city parks and facilities to encourage people to use refillable water bottles.

Candidates sought for city advisory bodies

The city of Menlo Park is seeking candidates to apply for a number of openings on city commissions. There are four four-year term vacancies on the Housing Commission, three on the Finance and Audit Committee, and two each on the Parks and Recreation Commission and Complete Streets Commission. There are also single seats open for four-year terms on the Planning Commission, Library Commission and Environmental Quality Commission. Four-year terms are set to expire April 30, 2025. In addition, there are two single seats open for terms ending April 30, 2022, on the Complete Streets and Library commissions. Go to: AlmanacNews.com/committees for more information on how to apply.

Candidates should be at least 18 years old, live in Menlo Park and submit applications no later than April 16.

—Kate Bradshaw
n formation that is supposed to, interested volunteer parent orga-

ations "one of the driving forces of the increase in pension contribu-
tions. "The School Board is calling for the district's independent PTOs."

How PTO funding works

Foroughi's lawsuit claims that, desperate to meet increasing budget shortfalls caused by the district's pension liability, district officials colluded with the Menlo Park-Atherton Education Foundation (MPAEF) to fund-

menteally reorganize school fundraising to the detriment of the district's independent PTOs. Specifically, the district sought to turn the Laurel School PTO into a fundraising entity for the benefit of the district — not the PTO, according to the suit. To accomplish this change, the foundation and the district created the "One Community Campaign" (OCC), a fundraising effort designed specifically to generate funds for the foundation, which then funnels money directly to the district in the form of unrestricted grants.

The lawsuit also claims that the district did not divulge that a portion of the funds raised would go toward paying increased pension costs. The district's employer contribution to the state's teacher pension fund was raised from 8.25% of certificated staff's salaries to 19.1% over the course of seven years. In 2014, the state legis-

ated State Teachers' Retirement System (STRS) pension reform, which increased employer contribu-
tions for the first time in over 40 years. In the district's 2020-21 interim budget, officials called the increase in pension contribu-
tions "one of the driving forces of the district's budget."

"The PTO is supposed to be a grassroots mom-and-pop interested volunteer parent orga-
nization that is supposed to, according to the corporate char-

ter of the PTO, engage in activi-
ties for the benefit of the PTO, it doesn't say for the benefit of the community or the district," said Foroughi's attorney Peter McMahon, founding partner of McMahon Serepca. He added that engaging in mismanagement of the field trip fees is potentially very serious for the PTO. "An artificial hierarchy has been created that somehow the foundation is sort of the boss of the PTOs and that's not the way it's supposed to be," McMahon said.

"It seems that the PTO and remains an honorary member, and can't "unobserve" the alleged wrongdoing."

"As a financial professional and certified financial analyst (CFA) charter-holder, Foroughi has a duty of loyalty to her clients, which in the context of the PTO refers to the beneficiaries of the organization — the students, community, and teachers — and not the conflicting interests of the PTO board," the suit states.

She feels committed to school district parents to correct these wrongs, make the community and future PTO board members aware of the transactions to prevent future missteps, and to encourage the adoption of more robust policies to strengthen the integrity of nonprofit governance, she said.

As a result, she is not simply going to 'go away,' as she is sure the PTO leadership wants her to do," according to the lawsuit. "Indeed, instead of sanction-

niously paying lip service to the fact that the PTO is a 'volunteer organization that is trying to navigate unprecedented times in society and education,' the current PTO board stated that the district wants.

In her claim, Foroughi is ask-
ing that Creighton and the PTO members named in the lawsuit cover the legal fees the PTO incurred from the misconduct, as well as her own and for the Laurel School PTO to reform its governance, policies and culture to obey the law.

A case management conference is scheduled for July 7 at 9 a.m.

Email Angela Swartz at awartz@almanacnews.com

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The opinion of The Almanac

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How the pandemic made me realize
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**GUEST OPINION**

The things we’ve carried
Lessons learned from one year 6 feet apart

By Brianna Aguayo

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From surviving to thriving: How an adapted mindset has helped me during the pandemic

By Christian Sbragia

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A local treasure
San Mateo County History Museum reopens March 24

By Maggie Mah

The San Mateo County History Museum, located on Redwood City’s Courthouse Square, has a planned reopening date of March 24.

Tad Taube, a longtime resident of the area and key donor for the future Taube Family Carriage House, said he never knew the museum existed until a friend introduced him to the place several years ago.

“The first time I went inside, I was flabbergasted. I saw all these treasures — stunning, remarkable,” he said. “I think that happens to everyone who sets foot in there. It is such a treasure.”

That this treasure has been somewhat under the radar might be due to the fact that it was actually hidden for many years. Although it has been the home of the San Mateo County Historical Association since 1998, it wasn’t until 2006 that the structure was revealed, when several boxy office buildings that had surrounded the former San Mateo County Courthouse since the 1950s were demolished.

Completed in 1910, the courthouse was designed in the Italian Renaissance Revival architectural style and, despite being obscured for so many years, was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. The stunning leaded glass dome is the largest of its kind on the West Coast. After the county center was moved to the current location on Marshall Street, the courthouse became the new home of the San Mateo County History Museum.

An array of permanent and changing displays with interactive features invite visitors to explore the rich history of the area and follow the waves of development from the earliest human inhabitants to the rise of Silicon Valley. (Speaking of waves, the WaveRider feature at the Mavericks exhibit provides a virtual surfing experience for those who want to know what it’s like to ride — or wipe out on — a 40-foot wave.)

Until the physical museum is open again later this month, or for those not quite ready to venture out just yet, there are virtual tours, webinars and events online. More information is available at historysmc.org/history-at-home.

The glass dome of the old courthouse building is said to be the largest one of its kind on the West Coast.

Pamela Gauthier

Continued from previous page

much with other kids.

I hope once we all get back to our school campuses, we can combat some of these social challenges so many are talking about. My focus has been on life over education, people over grades, and masks over ventilators.

I think about how what I do affects my family, friends, and community. Before I take off my mask, I ask myself, “Do I want to be responsible for this person’s death? Or the death of their elderly parent?” I’m a community person; I just hope we, as a community, can get through this time.

Christian Stragia is a junior at East Palo Alto Academy and an East Palo Alto resident.

He serves on the San Mateo County Youth Commission, an advisory committee the county Board of Supervisors established to address the needs of youth and give them voice in local government.

Our readers write

Underrepresented in government

San Mateo County leaders say the right things when it comes to promoting diversity, equity and inclusion. But what are we actually doing to make sure that people of diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and life experiences are involved in the policymaking process? Some recently released statistics shine a harsh light on our reality.

According to the Bay Area Equity Atlas, San Mateo County ranks worst in the Bay Area in the ethnicity gap of elected officials vs. ethnic population (40% white, but holding 66% of elected positions).

The three largest ethnic groups in our county are white (non-Hispanic) 40.4%, Asian 27.0%, and Hispanic or Latino 24.6%. Together, Asian and Hispanic residents are 51.6% of our population. So, where are we with regard to representation of these majority minority groups?

API (Asian Pacific Islander) and Latino populations, more than half the region’s population, are underrepresented at all levels of government at just 13% of top county-level elected officials.

Women are underrepresented by 20%, given that they are near 53% of the population, but hold only 44% of elected roles. And it is extremely rare that women hold positions countywide or higher. In fact, only two women of color have ever served in a countywide office in San Mateo.

Elections will take place in San Mateo County for supervisors in districts 2 and 3 in 2022. Our local Democratic club is committed to diversity, but endorsements from our governor and other men on the public servant ladder go largely to other white males. Advocacy for women of color is typically for staff positions or lower levels of government.

Female candidates of color cannot, and will not, soon reach equitable representation unless we all work together to support and elect them. Our county’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion should include leadership support, and 2022 is not too early to help experienced women of color win countywide and higher office. Let’s all make a difference in the election ahead by encouraging and supporting women and people of color.

Nancy Reyering
Portola Road, Woodside

What’s on your mind?

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Questions? Email editor@AlmanacNews.com, or call 650-223-6537.

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Summary of the home:

- 4 bedrooms, plus a den
- 4.5 baths
- Main home approx. 3,765 SF
- Basement approx. 1,800 SF
- Lot 10,500 SF

Beautifully designed, meticulously maintained and boasting significant bonus basement living space, this exceptional home offers flexible living opportunities on three grand levels.

Highlights include vaulted ceilings, circular accent windows, stylish kitchen with Viking range and breakfast bar, formal dining, two half-bath.

Upstairs, a gorgeous suite is enhanced by vaulted ceilings, two-sided fireplace, tub and dual vanities. A secondary suite and two additional bedrooms and bath.

The finished basement* is the ultimate draw with a home video room, exercise room, wine room, full bath and tremendous storage space for almost all your entertaining, sporting and traveling needs!

Additional features: security system, central vacuum system and oversized 2-car garage.

Backyard oasis for entertaining with a vast lawn, mature trees offering privacy, a stone patio with built-in BBQ island.

* Basement square feet calculated by a third party vendor. Finished, unpermitted lower level completed by local licensed contractor.

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PALO ALTO | $1,898,000
4062ElCaminoWay.com | Chic townhouse-style condo, free-standing, custom built in 2014. Near zero-energy unit has over 1,900 sq ft of interior living space + over 400 sq ft of exclusive private terraces and another over 800 sq ft rooftop lounge shared with just 1 neighbor. Sustainable, stylish property with smart home technology is for a buyer that is looking for something extraordinarily special.
Julie Lau
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Palo Alto | Price Upon Request
3br/2ba Palo Alto home. Great opportunity to add your personal touch and vision to this large lot (9,375 square feet, per assessor). There are plans/blue prints available to build 2 structures on this corner lot. Excellent location in College Terrace next to Stanford University offering convenient access to commute routes and local tech companies. Acclaimed Palo Alto schools!

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Sunnyvale | $2,098,888
1141 Lafayette | Stunning rancher on a non-through traffic street in coveted Cherry Chase neighborhood with Cherry Chase elementary. True California classic with extensive & recent designer-touch remodel. Almost 1,700 sq ft of living space w/4 generous-sized bedrooms & 2 tres chic remodeled baths. Gourmet kitchen has breakfast nook. Master suite w/dual closets & a spa-like bath. You will love this home.

Julie Lau
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Mountain View | $1,998,000
This is a charming home in an excellent location, on a corner lot, just about three blocks from Castro St., Downtown Mountain View's restaurants, shopping and parks and about ten minutes to the Google campus. The home boasts an extensively remodeled kitchen, living room w/fireplace, basement. Excellent locale.

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