How San Mateo County plans to transform rugged Tunitas Creek Beach into a beachfront park

By Kate Bradshaw

Tunitas Creek Beach, situated along the bluffs between Half Moon Bay and San Gregorito on San Mateo County’s coastline, will soon undergo a public-access makeover, if a county parks department-led initiative moves forward as planned.

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors in February approved plans to add a walking path to the beach, restrooms, a ranger residence, a parking lot, and, midway down the bluff, a flexible space with tiered seating that could be used for people to gather for picnics or educational events.

Now the project’s leaders are moving forward with securing environmental documents and permits with plans to begin construction as soon as summer 2022, said representatives from the San Mateo County Parks Department and the Peninsula Open Space Trust at a recent informational event. Those agencies have worked closely with each other and with the community to develop and move the plans forward.

The rugged property is about 58 acres and includes a 1-mile sandy beach along with a wide range of habitats, said Katherine Wright, San Mateo County parks ranger. The beach is also a popular nesting site for the snowy plover, a federally threatened bird species, she said.

A key part of the project is a pedestrian route from the parking area off of State Route 1 to the beach, which currently would also include a roughly 1,300-foot ADA-accessible pedestrian path to the middle portion of the bluff.

As planned, the pedestrian path will continue all the way to the beach, but it won’t be able to offer fully ADA-compliant wheelchair access, said Taylor Jang, stewardship project manager at the Peninsula Open Space Trust.

Construction is estimated to cost about $7 million and require $1 million in ongoing operations.

First COVID-19 cases reported at local high schools

By Angela Swartz

The first cases of COVID-19 have been reported at Menlo-Atherton and Woodside high schools and TIDE Academy.

The week of Aug. 9 to 13, the first week of school in the Sequoia Union High School District, seven cases were reported at M-A in Atherton, six at Woodside and three at TIDE in Menlo Park, according to a newly created district data dashboard. The district assembled an internal team to develop the dashboard, said district spokeswoman Ana Maria Pulido in an email. The week of Aug. 30, there were fewer cases at the three schools; four at M-A (two students and two staff members), one student at TIDE and none at Woodside.

The district counts a case during the week in which it is confirmed by school health staff, in collaboration with the San Mateo County health department, before listing it on the dashboard, even if it’s from an earlier date. This could result in a delay of cases appearing on the dashboard.

The district entered this school year with the goal of keeping numbers as low as possible, Pulido said. She said their ability to keep the numbers down is contingent on safety measures like mask wearing and health checks, and a series of external factors in the community, such as vaccination rates.

During the school year, the dashboard will be updated weekly every Friday, according to the district.

Reporting procedures

When a positive case is reported to the school’s health team, the school along with the district office initiate a case investigation with the county health
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Local News

Dassi Brook and husband Rabbi Mayer Brook have launched a Chabad center in their Ladera home that aims to serve the local Jewish community.

Seeing a void, new Chabad center brings Jewish services to PV, Woodside

By Angela Swartz

A drive to Los Altos Hills or Palo Alto used to be required to attend Jewish religious services before Chabad Portola Valley & Woodside (PVW), a new Jewish community center, opened in Portola Valley this spring. Mayer Brook, a rabbi and co-director of the nonprofit, moved from New York to Portola Valley in April with wife and co-director Dassi Brook and their two young sons. He said he’d always dreamed of bringing a Jewish center to a place that doesn’t have one.

“There’s not many Jewish activities in this area — you have to go past the highway to other cities,” he said. “There’s quite a few churches, but there are no other Jewish organizations that are in the hills.”

Mayer said he’s been in touch with 50 to 60 families from Los Altos Hills, Woodside, Portola Valley and Atherton.

Independent group to decide Menlo Park’s voting boundaries over next decade

By Kate Bradshaw

Menlo Park’s next voting boundaries, set to last until 2030, will be decided by an unelected commission with no City Council oversight or input, the council decided following a tense discussion.

The Menlo Park City Council split 3-2, with Mayor Drew Combs and Councilman Ray Mueller opposed, over the decision to create an independent redistricting commission to redraw the boundaries of the city’s five City Council districts based on the new 2020 U.S. Census data.

Menlo Park’s newly created Independent Redistricting Commission will be made up of seven commissioners and two alternates and will have to hold at least four public hearings throughout their process to draw updated voting boundaries. They alone will be responsible for developing the new voting boundaries, a majority of City Council members voted at the Aug. 31 meeting to have no authority or oversight of the commission.

Who should be responsible?

The council’s split decision, at its core, highlighted the council members’ differing opinions over who should ultimately be accountable for the weighty task of shaping residents’ voting opportunities.

Mueller and Combs, in the minority, favored keeping that responsibility in the hands of the council. They alone will be responsible for drawing updated voting boundaries, set to last until 2030, which will be presented to the council for approval.

Locals contribute over $3.4M to fight Newsom recall

George Marcus, Laurene Powell Jobs among top donors

By Gennady Sheyner

With the California recall election less than a week away, the campaign fighting the effort to oust Gov. Gavin Newsom has established a commanding lead in cash raised — with local donors playing a major role.

Even though none of the 46 candidates vying to replace Newsom is from the Midpeninsula, area residents are stepping up when it comes to raising money to fight the recall, campaign finance data from Secretary of State Shirley Weber shows.

Of the roughly $58 million that the main anti-recall campaign has raised to date, the vast majority has come from labor unions and statewide political action committees. At the same time, more than $3.4 million came from individuals in the Midpeninsula. And more than $3 million came from individuals in Los Altos Hills, Redwood City, Portola Valley and Woodside. This includes $1.43 million from Palo Alto donors, a field that includes — among others — prominent tech executives, philanthropists, developers and investors.

The biggest local donor, by a wide margin, was George Marcus, founder of the real estate firm Marcus & Millichap Company and longtime donor to Democratic causes. Marcus donated $1 million to the anti-recall campaign, Stop the Republican Recall. Among all of Newsom’s individual donors, only Reed Hastings, CEO of Netflix, contributed more to the cause: $3 million.

Hastings, Marcus and Connie Balmer, a Washington resident who contributed $1 million to oppose the recall, are the only individuals on the list of top 16 donors to the anti-recall campaign. Others on the list include the California Democratic Party, which gave $2.15 million to the recall; Dignity Service Employees International Union Local 2015, which contributed $1 million; the California Teachers Association Independent Expenditure Committee, which gave $1.8 million; and the California Correctional Peace Officers Association, Truth in American Government Fund, which contributed $1.75 million.

Marcus, well known for his Democratic activism, is hardly the only donor from this area to make a sizable contribution to the campaign fighting the recall. Atherton philanthropist Elizabeth D. Simonds, chair of the Heising-Simons Foundation board, made two contributions to the committee totaling $575,000. Her husband, Mark Heising, a founder of the investment firm Medley Partners, contributed another $425,000.

Other notable Palo Alto residents who contributed to the anti-recall campaign are Laurene Powell Jobs, president of Emerson Collective, who gave $400,000 to the committee known as Stop the Republican Recall. Marissa Mayer, former CEO of Yahoo, and former Google CEO Eric Schmidt, who now manages the investment firm Hillspire LLC, contributed $200,000 and $100,000, respectively.

The anti-recall committee also benefited from contributions from Redwood City investor Doris Fisher, who gave $250,000, and developer Richard Tod Spieker, an Atherton resident who contributed $100,000 to keep Newsom in office. Other local developers who have chipped in to support Newsom include John Sobrato, who gave $6,000 over two separate contributions, and Peter Pao, who contributed $500.

They are among the roughly 2,000 contributors from the Midpeninsula who donated to fight the recall effort, helping the anti-recall campaign establish a commanding fundraising lead over those of Newsom’s challengers for the governor’s job. The overwhelming majority are small donors. Of the contributions that had been reported as of Aug. 25, all but 32 were for
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that the Town Council of the Town of Portola Valley will hold a public hearing on the revised proposed Town Budget for Fiscal Year 2021/2022, Wednesday, September 22, 2021, at 7:00 p.m., via Zoom teleconference. To join the Zoom meeting, access the link provided on the September 22, 2021, Town Council agenda.

Comments may be submitted in writing prior to the Town Council meeting or presented at the meeting. All interested persons are invited to appear before the Town Council at the time and place herein above mentioned.

The Revised Town Budget for fiscal year 2021/2022 is available for viewing on the Town website at www.portolavalley.net and by emailing the Town Clerk at shanlon@portolavalley.net, starting 10 days prior to the meeting date above.

The agenda and staff report will be published on the Town website at www.portolavalley.net/town-government/town-council/minutes-and-agendas in advance of the meeting.

Dated: September 6, 2021
Sharon Hanlon, Town Clerk

CRIME BRIEFS

Juvenile suspects arrested in attempted murder
Officers with the Redwood City Police Department arrested two juvenile suspects on suspicion of attempted murder in connection with the shooting of a 19-year-old man less than two weeks ago, police said Sept. 7.

The August 26 shooting happened around 7:35 a.m. in the 1500 block of Hudson Street, according to police.

At the scene, officers found the victim suffering from a gunshot wound to his upper torso. The victim was rendered aid by the responding officers and then transported to the hospital.

Officers learned the victim was at the carport of an apartment complex when an assailant shot him. The suspect then fled in a black four-door sedan, later determined to be a Volkswagen Jetta, police said.

Later that evening, officers developed information that led them to execute a search warrant at a home in the 100 block of Hamilton Street in Menlo Park, where they seized electronics and firearms. The evidence led the officers to identify two underage suspects, who were arrested on Sept. 3. Because the suspects are juveniles, police have not released their identities.

See CRIME BRIEFS, page 19

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Hillview student Shawnak Shivakumar won second place at the North American Youth Chess Tournament in the under-14 age category and third place in the Blitz tournament in Chicago.

Hillview student wins chess honors
Shawnak Shivakumar, 13, an eighth grader at Hillview Middle School in Menlo Park, won second place at the North American Youth Chess Tournament in the under 14 age group and third place in the Blitz tournament in Chicago, Aug. 16-21. He was also awarded the FIDE Candidate Master title.

The tournament had several nail-biting moments, his mother, Devleena Shivakumar. Shawnak started at the 13th position in his category and fought his way up to second place, according to the tournament’s website.

“He had the opportunity to play with many top-ranking kids from across the continent,” she said. “This was the first major in-person tournament after 1.5 years of online tournaments, and a unique experience for all.”

In his spare time, Shawnak composes music, plays piano and is a part of Bay Area Debate team. He is interested in creating a chess program at the Little House Activity Center with senior citizens but because of the pandemic, the plan is on hold.

At the age of 8, Shawnak was already a state champion chess player.

For more on the event go to naycc2021.com.

Atherton disaster preparedness drill is Saturday
The Atherton Disaster Preparedness Team (A.D.A.P.T.) will host its annual emergency drill on Saturday, Sept. 11, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Holbrook-Palmer Park at 150 Watkins Ave. in Atherton.

Sign up at getreadyatherton.org/drill.

See COMMUNITY BRIEFS, page 10
Meet Darnise Williams, the new high school superintendent

By Angela Swartz

A fter a school year that saw the resignation of its top leader in the midst of a pandemic, the Sequoia Union High School District ushered in the academic year with more stability. The governing board hired Darnise Williams to head the district of about 9,000 students starting in July.

She replaces interim superintendent Crystal Leach who filled in after former superintendent Mary Streshly stepped down last fall amid calls for her resignation from teachers and administrators.

Williams previously led the Race and Equity Leadership Academy, a partnership between Los Angeles Unified School District and the University of Southern California that provides over 100 school principals and principal supervisors with leadership tools, according to a district press release.

Williams’ past roles include serving as a literacy coordinator, assistant principal, principal, principal supervisor, administrator of instruction and senior-level administrator.

Williams earned a doctorate in educational leadership from the University of California and a master’s degree in educational administration from California State University at Dominguez Hills.

She signed a three-year contract with an annual base salary of $265,000 and up to $17,500 in relocation expenses.

Williams sat down with The Almanac over Zoom to discuss her background, her goals and what she hopes to expect this school year, the first one to be fully in person in two years.

How did you come to work in education?

I grew up in south Los Angeles. … I was inspired by my grandmother. … She happened to be a custodian for one of the schools and she would just collect things; they became her treasures. She set up a library in the home and taught me the classics, (such as) Mark Twain and Langston Hughes. I expected a level of excellence. She initially wanted to be a teacher, but she didn’t become a teacher. … I became an English teacher at a school learning how to teach teaching literacy to high school-aged kids and adults. She would go back to the story of Frederick Douglass, that if you learn to read you become a danger in a way. Once you are literate you understand the conditions by which you live, and you will no longer be satisfied under those conditions.

What has been the pandemic’s impact on students?

For some of our students in distance learning, they were having to sit in front of a device for several hours and not being able to connect (to others). It brought to light that this is not normal (distance learning) and we may never return to what was normal was, but normal for everyone wasn’t great. … I think about students who struggled prior to the pandemic.

Not every student had support structures like I had with my grandmother. School is the safe haven; where they get their meals, social interactions, social-emotional support and feel protected. Some students did not get access to most rigorous platforms though (before the pandemic).

Students not only lost human connections but that connection of what was familiar: coming to school, graduation, prom. It was amplified when we (administrators) visited campuses; you can see 10th graders while being on distance learning for almost a year of their high school careers who didn’t know where their classes were. They had that excitement and tentative.

What motivated you to join the Sequoia district?

During the pandemic I realized you have to take certain risks and this is the time; I started the search. I looked for a place that could be close to familiar folks but in a different setting. I found that in this community.

I did a lot of research in terms of their academic performance; it was high achieving. The programs, the partnerships with Stanford (University) and Canaday (College), were the things that drew me. There was an opportunity to serve a population of students who were at a different level; I want to help connect those learners to resources that could drive them to advance in their academic careers.

You said during a board meeting that you lost six family members to COVID-19.

It’s a pain point for me. Like many families in our country, I was impacted on several levels during the pandemic. It brings me back to why I’m here (in the Sequoia district); I needed to disconnect from some of the loss. … I wanted a change in pace where my skill set would connect.

I looked at a nurse in tears who said, ‘You have only 15 minutes to be with your loved one.’ Prior to leaving, the nurse took my hand and said with tears in his eyes, ‘I will not let him die alone.’ It just amplified the trauma folks are experiencing and the pain attached to the pandemic. You want to connect with loved ones and you can’t.

Q: What are the greatest challenges facing the district this year and how will you tackle them?

Remaining open. We understand we’re going to have (COVID-19) cases and our contact tracing. I want to make sure we keep our community safe. We have to make sure we have systems in place to identify if we have a case.

Sutter Health settles Medicare false claims civil case for $90M

By Bay City News Service

S utter Health has agreed to pay $90 million to settle a civil lawsuit that alleged the company had overcharged a federal Medicare program.

The agreement was filed Aug. 30 in federal court in San Francisco by Sacramento-based Sutter Health and several of its affiliates, including Sutter Bay Medical Foundation (which conducts business as the Palo Alto Medical Foundation) and Sutter Valley Medical Foundation, to settle allegations that the medical care services provider violated the False Claims Act by knowingly submitting inaccurate information about the health status of beneficiaries enrolled in Medicare Advantage Plans.

The government alleged in 2015 that Sutter Health knowingly submitted unsupported diagnosis codes for certain patient encounters for beneficiaries under its care, inflating payments to be made to the plans and to Sutter Health. The lawsuit further alleged that, once Sutter Health became aware of the situation, it failed to correct it.

The suit includes resolution of a whistleblower action in 2013 by a former employee of Palo Alto Medical Foundation.

“Today’s settlement exemplifies our commitment to fighting fraud in the Medicare program,” said Stephanie Hinds, acting U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of California. “Health care providers who flout the law need to know that my office will hold accountable those who pad their bottom line at taxpayer expense.”

The government relies on health care providers to submit accurate information, said Deputy Assistant Attorney General Sarah E. Harrington of the Justice Department’s Civil Division.

“Today’s result sends a clear message that we will hold health care providers responsible if they knowingly provide or fail to correct information that is untruthful,” she said.

In connection with the settlement, Sutter Health entered into an agreement with the federal agencies that requires it to hire an independent external reviewer to review a sample of the company’s medical billing records.

Sutter Health officials said in a statement that the settlement and agreement, in which the company admitted no liability, “bring closure to a long-running dispute, allowing Sutter to avoid the uncertainty and further expense of protracted litigation, and enabling a constructive relationship with the government.”

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On 9/11’s 20th anniversary, local groups offer service projects, peace picnic

By Sue Dremann

Two Palo Alto organizations are marking the 20th anniversary of Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on Saturday with events meant to bring people together and to serve their communities in meaningful ways. The Multifaith Peace Picnic on Saturday includes a free meal and interfaith prayer service and is sponsored by American Muslim Voice and Multifaith Voices for Peace & Justice. The 2021 Mid-Peninsula National Day of Service and Remembrance, also on Saturday, brings volunteers together to perform service projects together in memory of those who died and volunteered to save lives.

Samina Sundas, founder of American Muslim Voice, started the Multifaith Peace Picnic on the first anniversary of 9/11 after experiencing a confrontation with ashopper who blamed her for the terrorist event because she is a Muslim.

"Some days, it seems like we are making progress, then all of a sudden something happens and the Muslim community feels like it could be a backlash again," she said, noting the recent return to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Peace Picnic honors all who were sacrificed during the 2001 attacks and the 9/11 Families for Peaceful Tomorrows — families whose loved ones died in the attack but who have dedicated themselves to creating a more peaceful world.

"We wanted to honor the victims, families and first responders that have lost loved ones," she said. "We're here," he said. "I'm very happy to have a warm Jewish home."

"People are really happy to have a warm Jewish home," he said. "People are really happy to have a warm Jewish home." Portola Valley residents have come to their adult-education classes, and attend Shabbat dinners. There are about 7.5 million Americans who identify as Jewish and about 16% of those participate in activities and services through Chabad, according to a 2020 Pew Research Center survey.

Politics are one topic that’s not on the table at Chabad PVW. "People are tired of hearing politics preached during services," Mayer said. "We don't get into any politics. We stick to our mission and our goal and community as it embarks on the creation of its new "Interpreative Strategic Plan." The plan, which is expected to be completed in 2022, will outline the department’s agenda for the next five to 10 years and is aimed at enhancing visitors’ experiences, getting visitors valuable information and figuring out which activities and programs resonate with all visitors so as to engage them better. The department is also interested in identifying the barriers to accessing parks.

Go to is.gd/yacapp1 and is due Friday, Sept. 17.

Provide feedback on county parks programs

San Mateo County’s Parks Department is looking for people to complete a survey to weigh in on its programs and offerings to the community as it embarks on the creation of its new "Interpreative Strategic Plan." The plan, expected to be completed in 2022, will outline the department’s agenda for the next five to 10 years and is aimed at enhancing visitors' experiences, getting visitors valuable information and figuring out which activities and programs resonate with all visitors so as to engage them better. The department is also interested in identifying the barriers to accessing parks.}

"We're getting messages from people who are really excited we're here," he said. "I'm very confident about the future of Jewish life in Portola Valley and Woodside."

Before launching Chabad PVW, Brook organized Jewish outreach programs and holiday events across five continents. He received his rabbinical ordination from Sydney Beth Din in Australia.

Upcoming events include "Sushi in the Sukkah" on Sept. 26. For more information, go to chabadpvw.com or email info@chabadpvw.com.

Email Staff Writer Sue Dremann at sdremann@paweekly.com.

Woodside Friends of the Library book sale

Woodside Friends of the Library will host a used book sale on from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 11. Books for all ages will be available, organizers said. The library is located at 3140 Woodside Road in Woodside.

Atherton officers donate backpacks to students

The nonprofit Atherton Police Activities League and Atherton Police Officers Association teamed up to buy 40 backpacks filled with school supplies to give to students at Atherton schools.

On Aug. 31, School Resource Officer Dimitri Andruha delivered the backpacks to Laurel, Encinal and Las Lomitas schools.

—Angela Swartz

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

continued from page 6

CHABAD CENTER

started nearly 250 years ago, which has about 5,000 branches worldwide and is known for its outreach to unaffiliated Jewish groups and its humanitarian aid. Portola Valley resident Len Lehmann said the Brookses reached out to them when they were considering settling in Portola Valley.

"Chabad is a great addition to civic life in Portola Valley and Woodside," he said in an email. "They are engaging and giving, focused on serving their community, and add to our many currently available resources for spiritual growth and practice. During these times, when many are seeking meaning, that can only be a good thing."

Jeffrey Carmel, a Portola Valley resident who casually attended Chabad in Palo Alto for many years, said that now that there is a Chabad house right in his neighborhood, his family has been able to take advantage of the organization.

"Rabbi Brook and his amazing wife Dassi are young, enthusiastic, hospitable, warm and welcoming, and they bring a wealth of knowledge to our Jewish community and neighbors," Carmel said in an email. "What marks Chabad as a unique movement in Judaism is its non-judgmental approach to welcoming Jews of all religious levels and to enhance their cultural, religious, and educational experiences."

Chabad synagogues don’t have membership dues. Instead, they seek donations from those who go to their adult-education classes, attend their services and holiday celebrations, and attend Shabbat dinners. There are about 7.5 million Americans who identify as Jewish and about 16% of those participate in activities and services through Chabad, according to a 2020 Pew Research Center survey.

Politics are one topic that’s not on the table at Chabad PVW. "People are tired of hearing politics preached during services," Mayer said. "We don't get into any politics. We stick to our mission and our goal and community as a whole."

So far locals have been kind and welcoming to the group, Mayer said.

Email Staff Writer Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com.
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The 37th Annual Palo Alto Weekly Moonlight Run & Walk
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Mervyn Morris, founder of Mervyn’s stores, Atherton resident dies at 101

By Angela Swartz

Mervyn “M” G. Morris, the founder of Mervyn’s department stores, a philanthropist and longtime Atherton resident, died on Aug. 24. He was 101.

Born to Fannie and Harry Morris in San Francisco on July 4, 1920, in the Central Valley town of Delano, alongside his sisters Bertille and Jacqueline.

A third-generation Californian, his great-grandparents ran a store during the Gold Rush. His grandfather ran a local retail store called Morris’ where he worked as a sales clerk. He attended one semester at the University of California at Berkeley in 1938, before being called home to help run the family business.

He enlisted in the military during World War II, running an Army post exchange based in Arkansas.

Morris returned home after the war and rejoined the family business before deciding to start his own store. On July 29, 1949, at the age of 29, Merv opened the first Mervyns department store in San Lorenzo, Calif.

Morris married Roslyn Grossman, of Napa, on a blind date in the spring of 1950. They married in San Francisco in September 1950 and had four children. They moved to Atherton in the mid-1950s, according to Palo Alto Weekly archives.

Mervyns went public in the spring of 1971, and Morris sold it to Dayton Hudson (now Target) in January 1978. When he retired in 1979 there were about 75 Mervyns stores.

During his 50 years with Mervyns, Morris built a reputation of having both a keen business mind and a deep sense of loyalty, his family said. The stores were known from the time they were founded for their charitable giving benefiting children and families in communities where they were located, according to a 2008 Palo Alto Weekly story on the anticipated closure of Mervyns stores.

“She was an innovative leader, smartly choosing his store sites and understanding the consumers of the post-War boom years,” according to the family. In 1977, the National Retail Merchants Association, an organization of about 3,500 retail stores worldwide, elected Morris chairman of the board of directors.

After he retired from Mervyn’s, he became chairman of Morris Management Company, a family investment firm.

He became involved in philanthropy and served as a trustee on numerous boards, including the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, the California Academy of Sciences, the Palo Alto Medical Foundation, Stanford Hospital, the Jewish Home for the Aged, Mt. Zion Hospital of San Francisco and the University of Southern California. He was appointed to serve as a trustee of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum by President George W. Bush in 2002.

He and his wife Roslyn, known as Roz, invested in building the Mervin G. Morris Clubhouse for the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula. They also supported the San Francisco Symphony, the San Francisco Opera and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The Peninsula Volunteers’ Little House Activity Center was named after Roz following a $1 million donation to a remodeling project at the center in 1995, according to The Almanac’s archives.

Granddaughter Kimberley Morris Rosen, a Portola Valley School District trustee, said she’ll miss meals with him the most.

“We would sit down for a proper meal, the rush of the world would stop, and we’d have some time to talk and connect,” she said. “Grandpa was charming, interesting, wise and thoughtful. I’ll miss talking about history (both our family’s and the world’s), politics, and how everyone in our very large family is doing. I’ll also miss further opportunities for my children to get to spend time with him. We were just so lucky to have had him with us — and in such extraordinary mental capacity — for so long.”

One of her favorite memories from recent years is when her daughter, Charlotta, then a great-grandfather’s house to sell him Girl Scout cookies.

“Always the retailer, Grandpa asked Charlotte to give him a full detailing of the entire product line,” Morris Rosen said. “He then asked specific questions about various cookies and encouraged her to practice her addition skills when he bought multiple boxes and asked for the total price. It was so sweet to see him pass on his profession to his great-granddaughter.”

Morris was preceded in death by wife Roz in 2016 and by his sister, Bertille. He is survived by four children and their spouses, Diane, Jeff (Missy), John, and Jim (Susan); and by his sister, Jacqueline; 14 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren; and devoted friend Cynthia Hockey.

An interview with Morris at the Computer History Museum in November 2019 is posted on YouTube at tinyurl.com/mervmorris.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be sent to the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula at 401 Pierce Road in Menlo Park, Peninsula Volunteers, Inc. at 800 Middle Ave. in Menlo Park, or the donor’s favorite charity.

A celebration of life will be held at a later date.

Email Staff Writer Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com.

Kathleen Gaffney Braunstein died on September 11, 2021, in Woodside, California, with her children and husband at her side.

Kathleen Margaret Gaffney was born in Los Angeles, California, the eldest of five children born to Thomas and Margaret (Donovan) Gaffney. The family moved to San Francisco, where Kathleen grew up in the Sacred Heart Parish, just west of Hayes Valley. She graduated from Lowell High School, City College of San Francisco, and UC-Berkeley, where she majored in Accounting. Kathleen later earned an M.B.A. from Golden Gate University while working full-time.

In 1976, she met Terry Braunstein on a cross-country flight from BWI to SFO, as both returned from business trips to Washington, DC. The two married in January 1978 and settled in the Skywood neighborhood of Woodside later that year. Apart from 4 years when the family lived in London and Palo Alto, Kathleen resided there until her passing.

Kathleen’s career with the federal government spanned decades, starting in the 1960s as a management trainee with the Social Security Administration. She was subsequently an executive with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (now known as the Department of Health and Human Services, or HHS), and later, with the US Geological Survey. Kathleen enjoyed being active in the community and dedicated time to volunteering, first for the Town of Woodside, for which she served on the Architecture and Site Review Board and the Planning Commission. Her volunteer work also included providing issues education at retirement communities for the League of Women Voters, more than 25 years as a docent at the Filoli Historic House in Woodside, and more than a decade as a docent at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco.

Kathleen had a lifelong love of the arts and music. For more than 40 years, she was a subscriber and regular attendee of the San Francisco Opera and the San Francisco Symphony. Her annual birthday celebration featured the San Francisco Ballet’s production of Tchaikovsky’s Nutcracker Ballet – as she could bring her children and later her grandchildren – and this became a cherished family tradition.

Terry and Kathleen traveled extensively together, visiting cultural sites from St. Petersburg to Damascus to the Peloponnese by car, visiting the sites of ancient Sparta and the Battle of Pylus, among others.

Kathleen’s dry wit was enjoyed by friends and family alike. When feeling underappreciated by her teenage children, Kathleen would occasionally don an ornate silver pin from her travels in Eastern Europe, marking her as a member of the USSR’s “Order of Maternal Glory.”

Kathleen was a loving mother to three children – daughter Roberta Peterson, of Palo Alto, and sons Ryan Braunstein, of San Carlos, and Shane Braunstein, of San Francisco. Later in life, she relished her role as ‘Nana’ to her grandchildren, Izaak, Levi, Rose and Katherine Braunstein.

Kathleen was predeceased by her parents. She is mourned by her husband, Terry, her daughter Roberta, her sons Ryan and Shane, her siblings Jeanne Penrose, Thomas Gaffney, James Gaffney and Grace Gaffney, her four grandchildren, extended family, and many friends.

“In lieu of flowers, a donation to the SF Symphony’s Education & Community Programs would be appreciated.”

https://www.sfysymphony.org/Donate-Volunteer/Donate Visit and a celebration of Kathleen’s life will be held on Saturday, September 11, at Duggan’s Serra Mortuary, starting at 10am. Kathleen was an inspiration to many, and she will be missed.
Victim's brother testifies alleged serial killer raped, murdered teen in 1963

By Sue Dremann

 Alleged serial killer John Arthur Getreu was convicted of killing and raping a 15-year-old girl in Germany in 1964, a decade before the strangled bodies of two young women he is now accused of killing were found on Stanford University land, the brother of the murdered teenager testified on Tuesday.

Evan David Williams, a pastor, said that Getreu killed his sister on June 9, 1963, when his family and Getreu's parents were stationed at the U.S. Army base in Bad Kreuznach, Germany. His sister, Margaret Williams, was found on a field beaten, strangled and raped.

Williams said his father, who was an army chaplain at the time, told him that Getreu had been arrested for the crime.

Getreu, 76, of Hayward, is now being tried in San Mateo County Superior Court for allegedly killing Janet Ann Taylor, 21, whose beaten and strangled body was found in a ditch near the intersection of Sand Hill Road and Manzanita Way in 1974. Taylor was the second woman found on Stanford land with similar injuries. Leslie Marie Perlov, 21, was found near what is now the Stanford Dish hiking area in a remote area in 1973. Getreu is facing a first-degree murder charge in her death in Santa Clara County.

San Mateo County Sheriff Det. Gordon Currie testified that he obtained 10 volumes of court documents related to Getreu's 1964 conviction in Margaret Williams' murder and rape. Deputy District Attorney Josh Stauffer read excerpts from the more than 1,000 pages of court documents. Getreu, who was 18 years old at the time of the killing, was convicted on July 13, 1964, to 10 years in prison for rape with fatal consequences. He served a partial sentence of five years and nine months. German officials believed he was likely to lead a "righteous life" after he was sent to live with his parents in the U.S., where he returned in 1969 under probation supervision, according to the German court documents.

Getreu, in his own statement to German investigators, said he and Williams met at a dance. He hadn't seen the girl before but noticed her when she exited a car. They went for a walk and talked.

Williams told him she had to be home at a specific time, but rather than walk toward the school and her home, they headed in the opposite direction. They sat on a bench in a park and later walked to a playground. He said he wanted to be alone with her; they walked away from people nearby.

Getreu claimed he didn't intend to have intercourse with her; he was looking for a good place where he had taken other girls before for "smooching." Getreu and Williams began kissing while sitting on his jacket and soon they were lying down. He engaged in light petting and soon began to advance to wanton intercourse. He told her that he had consumed "a lot of drinks." She was nervous and distressed and wanted to go home. It began to rain, and she said that was why she wanted to leave. "She did not react positively" to his advances, according to the police investigation. He said as his excitement had increased, he wanted to rape her.

Williams began talking loudly to try to attract attention. Getreu gave her a judo chop in the neck so she couldn't talk anymore, he said. Williams started to weep, and he "gave her a blow in the face" with his fist because he thought when she regained her voice, she would only cry louder. The only reason he struck her was to prevent her from talking, he said.

'I feel glad that there's the potential to convict someone who needs to be convicted.'

EVAN WILLIAMS, MURDERED TEEN'S BROTHER

Williams, who had been standing up to leave, fell to the ground after Getreu struck her. She was about to cry out, so he covered her face with his jacket and held it over her mouth with both hands. As Williams began to kick and try to scream, he held her mouth shut with one hand and grabbed her by the throat with the other, he told police.

Williams lost consciousness, but Getreu had the impression she was still breathing. She didn't move at all and he raped her. He kept his hand over her mouth to keep her from crying out if she regained consciousness, he said.

As car headlights passed nearby, he grabbed his jacket and ran away. After returning home, he took his dog for a walk and returned to the area to see if she was still alive. Margaret Williams never regained consciousness. She died on the playing field, police said.

Outside the courtroom, Evan Williams said there were new aspects to the crime he hadn't heard before.

"I feel glad that there's the potential to convict someone who needs to be convicted," he said, adding he felt a connection to others who have lost loved ones to murder.

Getreu's first wife, Susan Cammarota, testified that he told her before they were married that he had killed a girl in Germany. She also said he was convicted of statutory rape after initially being charged with raping a teenage girl who was a member of his Explorer Scout troop in 1975. (The victim testified in court last week.) He served his jail sentence on weekends, she said.

Getreu also regularly traveled along the route where Taylor was found, according to testimony from his stepdaughter.

Kathi Stone, Cammarota's daughter, testified that she first met Getreu when she was 6 years old. The family lived in various locations along the Midpeninsula. They lived about two years on Montrose Avenue in Palo Alto, then moved to Redwood City for another two years before moving back to an apartment in Palo Alto. They also lived in Woodside.

While living at an aunt's house on Roberta Drive in Woodside, a quiet area of trees and grasslands, Getreu would drive her to school daily. To get to Roberta Drive, one travels on Mountain Home Road, which connects up with Sand Hill Road, west of Searsville Lake.

During his testimony, Currie, the detective, pointed to a map with a green square depicting where Taylor's body was found on Sand Hill Road near Manzanita Way, the route Getreu would have taken daily to go home.

How far is the location from Sand Hill and Manzanita from Roberta Drive? Stauffer asked.

"About 2 miles," Currie said. The time to travel from the scene of Taylor's murder to Roberta Drive takes about six minutes, he said.

Email Staff Writer Sue Dremann at sdremann@paweekly.com.
RECALL
continued from page 5

amounts of $1,000 or lower.

Several of Newsom’s 46 oppo-

nents in the recall effort have

also benefited from local largesse. Talk show host Larry Elder, who has amassed a war chest of $6.8 million, is among them. Though his list of top donors is
dominated by contributors from Southern California, Elder has also received $32,400 contributions from Woodside resident Saul Fox, CEO of Fox Paine; $5,000 from Palo Alto investor William Jarvis; and $2,000 contribu-

tion from local developer Boyd Smith.

Woodside resident Stacey Siebel, a philanthropist whose husband, Thomas Siebel, founded the software company Siebel Systems, gave $5,000 to Elder’s campaign. She also contributed $25,000 to the campaign of Kevin Faulconer, the former San Diego mayor who is also hoping to replace Newsom.

Despite these efforts, the total amount raised by Elder’s campaign from the Midpeninsula is just a fraction of that received by the anti-recall faction. Donors from the cities Palo Alto, East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Mountain View, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Woodside, and Portola Valley accounted for $79,575 in contributions received by Elder.

Businessman John Cox has reported $77 million in contribu-

tions, though $6.9 million consist of money he contributed to his own campaign. His biggest contributor from the Midpeninsula area was the Sunnyvale-based construction company De Anza Building and Maintenance, which gave $32,400 to Cox (while state law caps contributions to gubernatorial candidates at $32,400), that rule does not apply to contributions made by political parties or by political action committees that are not tied to a particular candidate). No one else from the Midpenin-

sula gave more than $100 to the Cox campaign, finance records show.

Faulconer’s biggest supporter from the area is Palo Alto resident John Chambers, who contributed $32,400 to Faulconer. Los Altos Hills resident Douglas Scrivener contributed $17,500, while Woodside resident Michael Marks gave $15,000, records show.

San Mateo County voters can find information for the Sept. 14 recall election at smcacre.org/ elections, including hours and locations for in-person voting centers.

Email Staff Writer
Gennady Sheyner at gsheyner@paweekly.com.
Council denies gas station permit to sell beer and wine

By Kate Bradshaw

The Menlo Park City Council last week denied the owners of the A&S Union 76 gas station on Willow Road a permit to sell beer and wine and operate longer hours. The station’s owners wanted to be able to sell beer and wine between 6 a.m. and 2 a.m. and operate 24 hours a day, but neither request would offer convenience and has to determine if the request would offer convenience or meet community needs. Since the request was approved. California’s Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control governs which establishments are permitted to sell beer and wine, and has to determine if the request would offer convenience or meet community needs. Since there are already other three locations in the neighborhood that sell alcoholic beverages, the department would consider adding a fourth license within the same census tract to be “over-concentrated,” according to staff.

Generally, the Department looks to the Planning Commission to avoid creating an “undue concentration” of alcohol vendors if the ratio of alcohol retail licenses to population exceeds that of the average census tract within the county, or it’s in an area where there is a 20% greater number of reported crimes than the county average, according to a staff report.

Other locations selling beer and wine near the Union 76 station at 710 Willow Road are at El Rancho Market at 812 Willow Road and Hacienda Super Mercado at 1933 Menalto Ave. The Willows Market at 60 Middlefield Road sells beer, wine and spirits.

The Planning Commission previously denied the permit request in March 2020. City staff members recommended that the City Council deny the appeal of the permit request; and the council voted 4-0 vote, with Councilman Ray Mueller absent, to uphold the commission’s decision.

A number of residents spoke in opposition to the permit at the appeal hearing on Aug. 31. Resident Jeffrey Chen suggested that gas station patrons would not buy alcohol for a planned meal or event but instead to consume immediately, which could increase the risk of DUI-related accidents nearby. Resident Brian Gilmer said that the gas station “tends to attract problems” and that he’s found trash in his yard including receipts from the gas station.

Gas station owner Aparna Saha and her son pushed back against the neighbors’ concerns. They said that several other nearby businesses around the neighborhood have permits to sell alcohol, so it hardly seems fair to deny their request out of some concern that it would somehow be more dangerous or disruptive than selling it in other nearby locations.

“I don’t think it’s fair to say that (in) granting us a beer and wine license we’re going to significantly cause the neighborhood to deteriorate,” Saha’s son said.

He added that the pandemic has roughly halved sales for the family’s business at the gas station, and being permitted to sell beer and wine on the premises could help them increase their income.

“I’m not in support of giving a permit for increased hours or for alcohol sales,” said Councilwoman Cecilia Taylor.

Email Staff Writer Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com.

High schools continued from page 1

COVID-19 cases fall 2021

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HIGH SCHOOLS continued from page 1

department, according to the district’s fall reopening plan.

The school’s health team works with the district office to start contact tracing, and the school informs close contacts — interactions within 6 feet for more than 15 minutes with someone who is positive for COVID-19 — about their possible exposure, the plan states. The contacts are referred to testing, told to monitor for virus systems and connected to resources to support self-quarantining.

A general exposure notice is sent to classmates, guardians, teachers and others potentially exposed during the case’s infectious period on campus. Notice will be sent to all staff members who were on campus at the same time as the positive case’s infectious period, according to the plan.

Not all students or staff who tested positive were on a district site during the infectious period, which creates a discrepancy between case counts and notifications, according to the district.

Staff vaccination rates

District staff vaccination percentages are currently based on self-reported responses. The vaccinated percentage rate is equal to the total number of vaccinated staff members divided by the total responses received.

As of Aug. 27, 74% of all district staff members have responded. At M-A, 96.02% of staff members who responded are fully vaccinated. Some 96.1% of Woodside High staff members are vaccinated and at TIDE, 93.3% of staff reported being vaccinated.

The district promised to collect data on student vaccination rates at an Aug. 5 Parent Community Night. District officials expect to collect those numbers, which will be voluntarily reported, by September.

Superintendent Darnise Williams said at the meeting. View the data dashboard on the district’s website, seq.org. Email Staff Writer Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com.

Woodside High School seniors wait in line to have their picture taken for their student ID cards during orientation on Aug. 10.

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BEACH continued from page 1

Europeans arrived in 1769 with the Portola Expedition, she said.

In the latter half of the 1800s, the property became the home of what would be known as “Gordon’s Chute” — a 45-degree ramp built into the cliffs just north of the creek that was used to load freight ships directly from the cliffs, Wright said. The chute was “not very practical,” she said, describing how some burlap sacks that were sent sliding down the chute would catch fire because of the friction, which would endanger the ship below.

You can still see the bolts in the rock walls at the beach, she added.

In the early 1900s, the creek became the southern terminus of the Ocean Shore Railroad, which operated between 1905 and 1920 before going bankrupt, partly due to rockslides at Devil’s Slide, farther north, she said. From the Tunitas Creek train stop people used to get off of the train and onto shuttle buses to continue south, she said.

In 2017, the Peninsula Open Space Trust bought the beach’s mid-bluff area to continue south, she said. From the Tunitas Creek train stop, we’re going to add tiered seating, picnic tables, a restroom and a pedestrian path down to the beach.

Go to parks.smcgov.org/tunitas-creek-beach to learn more.

Email Staff Writer Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com.

The plan for the mid-bluff area at Tunitas Creek Beach is to add tiered seating, picnic tables, a restroom and a pedestrian path down to the beach.

by park staff.

Go to parks.smcgov.org/tunitas-creek-beach to learn more.

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Go to parks.smcgov.org/tunitas-creek-beach to learn more.
privilege with elected officials. Mueller said that he felt it to be the role of elected officials to be accountable for protecting residents’ voting rights, and that the City Council is up to the task.

“I really believe the residents of Menlo Park expect that of the elected officials who they put faith and confidence in, that the council would retain some ... minimum level of oversight in case something were to go awry. I think this council would hold that to a very high bar and wouldn’t act unless absolutely necessary,” he said.

With the independent system, there’s a theoretical worst case scenario in which, for instance, a majority of members had a grudge against one council member, and could go out of their way to “draw a weird map,” Mueller said. “That shouldn’t be shaping people’s voting rights.”

“I see this as empowering a randomly selected body to disenfranchise members of our community,” Combs said.

Combs added that he objected to the notion that having elected officials retain some authority in the redistricting process would impact the impartiality of the outcome.

“All of the major decisions are made by elected officials; their ability to make those decisions comes from them being elected,” Combs said, adding that having elected officials involved would legitimize the process, in his perspective.

Councilwoman Jen Wolosin, who voted for the independent commission, said, “This isn’t about the elected officials, this is about the voters.” She also favored shortening a residency requirement to one year instead of the recommended three, but didn’t get support from other council members.

Menlo Park switched from at-large to district-based representation in 2018 after a threatened lawsuit alleged that the city’s election system violated state law because Latino and Black residents in the Belle Haven neighborhood didn’t have fair representation on the City Council.

During the initial process to draw election boundaries in 2018, an advisory commission over eight weeks developed a series of maps dividing the city into its current five districts which the City Council adopted.

At the time, council members expressed interest in assigning redistricting to an independent commission in the future. Council members are impacted by redistricting outcomes since those boundaries may shape their reelection chances, supporters of the independent commission approach said at the time. They argued that taking away the council’s authority to alter the commission’s map would prevent council members from interfering with the redistricting process to benefit themselves.

There are other legal checks and balances against gerrymandering, according to Jesus Garcia, demographer with GEO Inova Solutions Inc, the consulting firm the city hired to provide demographic analysis and census mapping services to help with its redistricting process.

The new district map that the independent commission develops will still need to comply with fair voting laws, and anyone may challenge the fairness and validity of the map, he said.

“If it’s a bad map, it’s a bad map. It can and probably will be challenged going forward,” Garcia said.

The commission

Commission applicants must be at least 18 years old and have lived in Menlo Park for at least three years. They’ll have to agree to comply with the Brown Act, Public Records Act and Political Reform Act, and not serve on the City Council for at least five years after participating on the commission. For at least four years, they’ll also have to agree not to participate in or contribute to any City Council campaign and not enter a contract with the city unless it was part of a competitive bidding process, according to Assistant City Attorney Denise Bazzano.

The City Clerk will randomly pick the first three commissioners from among the applicants. Those three commissioners will, with a majority vote, pick the other four commissioners and two council members from among the remaining applicants, Bazzano said. Both of those selection processes would be held in public meetings, she added.

A downside of districts

One outcome of redistricting that seems to be unavoidable is that, for any households that suddenly find themselves in a new district, it’s likely that the next election they will be allowed to vote in will be in either two or six years, rather than the traditional four years.

That’s because of the staggered election system, which mandates three City Council members and two City Council members be eligible for election in alternate even years. Districts 1 and 4 will be up for election in 2022 while districts 3 and 5 won’t be up for election until 2024.

For instance, if a boundary were to shift from District 3 toward District 2, some former District 2 residents, suddenly part of District 3, wouldn’t be able to vote until 2024 even though the last election they would have participated in would have been in 2018.

The potential delaying effect from the boundary shift would also apply to elected officials. If an elected official lives in an area where the district boundaries have changed, he or she would be permitted to serve the remainder of the term, but then would have to wait until the next time the new district seat is up for election, Bazzano said.

Combs expressed interest in synchronizing the election cycles so that all five City Council members are up for election at one time, but the rule of splitting the number of council members up for reelection in alternate two-year cycles is a law codified within the city’s charter, according to Bazzano.

Combs called the fact that someone might have to wait six years between able to vote in local elections “a defect in the process.”

“I’d say that’s disenfranchisement,” he said.

The city is required to complete the redistricting process by April 17, 2022, according to a staff report.

Email Staff Writer Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

Your COVID-19 vaccine questions — answered

We’ve compiled a list of who can currently get vaccinated in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, plus answers to common questions and links to resources. Access the page at tinyurl.com/COVIDvaccinequestions. Have a question? Send it to editor@paweekly.com and we’ll do our best to answer it.
On 20th anniversary, 9/11 volunteer revisits the tragedy — and humanity

By Francine Toder

I left Palo Alto for New York City, my birthplace, as soon as I could get my Red Cross Disaster Mental Health volunteer documents in order, in just two weeks after the attack in lower Manhattan.

As a psychologist, I already had the training and just needed the hard hat, badge, walkie-talkie and a flight to get there. My role was to support the efforts of first responders — police, firefighters, handlers of survivors and cadaver-sniffing dogs as well as volunteer medical personnel as they struggled to manage the horrors.

Wearing a helmet, goggles and face mask, I left my emergency response vehicle and entered a surreal space, once the World Trade Center, noting a smell permeating the air that defied description. Some said it smelled like death or maybe the electrical smell of a melted toaster cord. Hot smoldering hills of rubble rose from the ground and manholes.

The smoke was so heavy at the makeshift police station at Ground Zero that walking the flight of stairs took enormous effort. The whole scene was eerie and seemed like a black-and-white movie in slow motion. Delivering food and drink to disaster workers there, I noticed how little they talked, communincating through eyes that were sad and intense. The mood was somber, resolved and very subdued. New York was humbled by Sept. 11 and you could see it reflected in locals’ behavior — less horn honking, more courteous encounters and recognition of sorrow in each other’s faces. It was business as usual but with a tenderness I’d never before witnessed in New York City.

Winding my way up to the top of the landfill at the Staten Island facility designated to sort body parts, I could see at a glance that this was no ordinary place. Enormous hills of mangled metal dotted the landscape. I knew what was in the piles and why there were people raking the ground and why others were watching debris pass over a conveyor belt. The mission of this place was awesome: trying to separate building materials from human remains.

Even though I was acquainted with the facts, I wasn’t prepared for the mood of this place — melancholy, quiet for a New York setting and uncharacteristically gentle. A walk through the mess hall where hundreds of exhausted disaster workers ate around the clock, I observed a sense of seriousness and camaraderie. Outside it was very cold, the early November wind howling and it was hard to keep the swirling dust and debris out of my eyes. I used my gut to pick out workers who I thought might benefit from some conversation or support and took my lunch with them.

The slow, painstaking work was critical because the facility served both as a crime scene and a personal memorial. The losses were very real to the individuals, many of whom lost someone or had a friend who did. This was a sacred space, made clear by the clergy of different religions who blessed the ground where bodies had been brought but of course couldn’t be definitively identified. I thought that the whole landfill ought to be regarded as a sacred burial ground or identified as a memorial site — the final resting place for so many people. I hoped that this would mark the end of a tragedy and a step toward recovery.

As if the mood in New York weren’t somber enough, the crash of a commercial plane in Rockaway Beach on Nov. 12 ratcheted up the general nervousness several notches. The site was less than a quarter mile from where I was stationed, and I saw the plumes of black smoke as I was riding in a Red Cross Emergency Response vehicle on my trek to provide food and water to disaster workers at Ground Zero.

My new orders rerouted me to Rockaway Beach to talk with local residents who I thought might be traumatized by the crash from seeing either the crash itself or the destruction of homes, their own or their neighbors’. I saw disbelief, anger and fear on their faces as they assembled at the barriers constructed at the crash site. A temporary morgue was set up within their view. They came alone or in families. Kids in twos and threes wandered by to gawk, cry and inquire about the safety of their neighbors. A woman rocked as she sat on her porch steps facing the burned out remains of houses across the street. Another woman sat in shock. Her house was demolished with a piece of the plane sitting in what had been her front yard. Even though all of the tangible reminders of her former life were taken by the fire, she was focused on a mother and child, neighbors across the street, who had died in the fire. Over and over I saw people being re-traumatized, this crash being just the latest assault on their lives. Rockaway lost 84 people at the World Trade Center. Now this. It was almost unbearable.

After daily shifts that woke me at 4:30 a.m. and didn’t end until nightfall, sleep didn’t come easily. But writing did. As a writer, this immersion proved invaluable. Keeping my sanity meant chronicling what I witnessed and observed on a daily basis because some of it was so unspeakable that talking to loved ones at home wasn’t an option.

In looking back, I was amazed at the resilience of Americans to deal with disaster and come together with heroism and compassion even in the darkest of times. Three weeks later I returned to California. Ten years later I was diagnosed with lung cancer, like so many disaster responders.

At the time it seemed impossible to imagine that an attack on American soil would ever be repeated. Yet here we are, two decades later following a domestic attack and ongoing threats from foreign adversaries. Domestic terrorism is something new, but our ability to come together as a nation of patriots is not. Francine Toder, Ph.D., is a local psychologist, writer, author of four books and emeritus faculty at CSU Sacramento. She can be emailed at Francine@docToder.com.

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Call Alicia Santillan at 650-223-6578 or email asantillan@pawweekly.com for assistance with your legal advertising needs. The deadline is Monday at noon.
Fuse Theatre’s ‘Special Delivery’ uses letters to explore connection, relationships — and it’s coming to a mailbox near you

The correspondence that’s central to Fuse Theatre’s “Special Delivery” includes photos of places that are relevant to the story.

Fuse Theatre’s ‘Special Delivery’

By Heather Zimmerman

Fuse Theatre has been among the many performing arts groups that looked to online platforms to reach audiences while theaters have mostly been off-limits for the past year and a half. And the Redwood City-based company’s latest production is still made for a remote audience, but rather than using Zoom, the show relies on a much older form of communication: the mail.

Starting in mid-September, Fuse’s show “Special Delivery: Theatre by Mail” will unfold via a series of letters sent to audience members who “subscribe” to the show by buying a ticket.

The company was inspired to create a theater-by-mail production in part because so many projects had migrated online, said Fuse Theatre’s Artistic Director Stacey Ardelean.

“We kept coming back to this idea of ‘not using technology, the isolation.’ And asks what has been lost amid the pandemic per se, which is Ardelean said.

Although “Special Delivery” unfolds via regular mail, the members of Fuse’s artist collective developed the show through online discussions.

“This story is about our friends, our chosen family, reconnecting and (it’s about) celebration, love and friendship. It’s kind of a surprise,” she said.

The unconventional format of “Special Delivery” makes the most of a reorganization at Fuse Theatre over the past year, a shift that’s still underway as the group moves from a more traditional hierarchical model, with a board and executive positions, to an artists’ collective — a group of artists that Fuse calls “SPARKS.”

“We have a collective of 12 artists now. We’ve been working a lot on the company and the structure and dealing a lot with (the idea of) how do we run this company, being very mindful of dismantling systemic racism within those structures,” Ardelean said.

The SPARKS artists’ collective created “Special Delivery” together, each contributing to the show.

Ironically, the online realm of video conferencing, chats and emails that the show is deliberately avoiding in its presentation actually aided in its development. The era of Zoom has allowed Fuse Theatre to broaden its reach and the SPARKS collective features actors from beyond the Bay Area, including Southern California and Boston.

Theater-by-mail may be low-tech compared to performing via video conference, but the concept came with its own array of unusual logistics.

With the U.S. Postal Service’s well-publicized delivery troubles over the past year or so, the company made sure to put a system in place to deal with any letters that go astray. Each missive is numbered so that audience members don’t accidentally open anything in the wrong order that would spoil the show for them (the correct order is also shared on the show’s website).

As they created “Special Delivery,” the collective had to approach creating a theatrical experience in a new way, such as having to take into account a sensory element, which doesn’t come into play much with traditional in-person productions or those presented online. Company members had to consider not only how the letters would be designed, including instructions on how to read them, but also what paper each letter might use, not to mention how to incorporate props in this production.

The unique challenge was, Ardelean said, “How do we create not only the storytelling aspect of it, but also that theatrical aspect of it?”

And then of course making sure every piece of mail actually reaches its destination has involved a multitude of mailing labels.

“We have to have mailing labels for every single thing. With just the labels alone, it was like, ‘My God, how do we do this?’” Ardelean said with a laugh. “It’s just been a new way of thinking.”

If “Special Delivery” does well in its first outing, the company will look at potentially offering it again this fall, she said, and could even add a theater-by-mail production as a regular feature of coming seasons.

Subscriptions for “Special Delivery” are $20 and offered on a limited basis; as of press time, subscriptions were still available. For more information, visit fusetheatre.org.

Email Arts & Entertainment Editor Heather Zimmerman at hzimmerman@almanacnews.com.
Cruising the Coastside for the perfect produce

By Sara Hayden

Cruising the San Mateo County coast down Highway 1, it’s never long before you find a farm stand that showcases just what’s in season. The phenomenal bounty of the local farms paints the landscape in a palette of beautiful earthy tones — emerald fields of Brussels sprouts, pops of orange pumpkins, dusky green artichokes and gold- en sunflower petals dancing around rich brown centers. At a stand, customers can purchase these directly at the property where they’re produced.

Soon, you might also find a broader assortment of items that aren’t produced on site. Since March, the San Mateo County Agricultural Advisory Committee has been considering updating farm stand guidelines to satisfy customer cravings for ready-to-eat items by sourcing more from partner farms. “Artichokes are a popular seller. Peas are still good. But when families stop at the stand, they want something to snack on, such as fruits. If you don’t have it, they don’t return,” farmer Bob Marsh of Bob’s Vegetable Stand and Pumpkin Farm said at a recent committee meeting. “If you just have a couple items, your farm stand isn’t going to stay open very long.”

A farm stand is one thread in a lifeline for preserving the agricultural industry as local farms face tough circumstances: The total estimated gross value of San Mateo County agricultural production dropped by more than 27% between 1999 and 2019, while operating costs have continued to rise. The COVID-19 pandemic and CZU Lightning Complex fires made last year even more challenging. “We’re kind of a dying breed. I hate to see us dying off altogether,” Marsh said.

Expanding the types of items that can be sold at farm stands could help. If the proposed guidelines are approved, offerings could supplement the local vegetables with more snack-friendly produce like stone fruits, and lightly processed foods such as jams, nut butters, preserves, juice and pickles. Committee members plan to finalize their comments on the county’s latest draft of the proposed guidelines at their September 13 meeting.

In the meantime, there’s plenty to feast on. Farm stands provide an opportunity to see where food comes from and meet the people cultivating it. “You’re getting fresher, healthier food,” says Dawn Dillman of Andreotti Family Farms. “That is the crème de la crème.”

We’ve created a guide featuring a few to whet your appetite.

**Andreotti Family Farms**

The Andreotti family has been farming since 1926. Their roots are in growing artichokes, beans and broccoli, but they have a plethora of other winter vegetables too including kale and garlic — “food staples people want on their plate every day,” says Dillman, who works with husband Frank Andreotti and family. They also offer fruits, jams, jelly, nuts and other treats from sister farms in the area. Their historic century-old barn where they previously sold their produce was destroyed in a fire in February. They’re currently raising money to rebuild, and usually sell produce on site Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 6 p.m.

Andreotti Family Farms, 329 Kelly Avenue, Half Moon Bay; 650-922-0141.

**Bob’s Vegetable Stand and Pumpkin Farm**

Heading a few miles south from Half Moon Bay, this stand sits just on the east side of Highway 1, across from cows peering over the coastal bluffs. It’s a sight that’s as dramatic as it sounds. Apples, plums, peaches and cherries might catch your eye up front (and we’ve been equally tempted by the strawberries), but look in the barrel bins behind and you just might find the largest potatoes you’ve ever seen. We grabbed a giant russet spud that weighed in at a whopping 1.7 pounds. Try cooking them up as twice-baked potatoes: Slice a spud in half lengthwise, bake it, scoop out the pith and mash it, put it back and pop the potato back in the oven for one more go. Dress it up with toppings of your choice, and you’ve got yourself a hearty meal.

Bob’s Vegetable Stand and Pumpkin Farm, 650-726-4567.

**Cozzolino’s**

The Cozzolino family provides something fresh all year round, including Christmas trees during the winter holiday season. During other months, stop by for staples from their farm like beans and peas, lettuce and chard, onions, potatoes and eggs. They also have seasonal stone fruits and strawberries from partner farms.

Cozzolino’s, 12599 San Mateo Road, Half Moon Bay; 650-504-8296.

**Ouroboros Farms**

You can enjoy Ouroboros’s fresh produce grown in water at a variety of restaurants on the Coastside, throughout the Peninsula and in San Francisco, but to prepare your own, you can Cruisin’ the Coastside for the perfect produce visit one of the nation’s largest commercial aquaponic farms right in Half Moon Bay. They have a collection of leafy greens and herbs. Ouroboros is usually open Thursday through Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Monday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Ouroboros Farms, 12511 San Mateo Road, Half Moon Bay; 650-522-0542.

**Pie Ranch**

Pie Ranch was founded in 2002 with a focus on regenerative farming and food system education, and the surrounding lands are cared for in partnership with the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and Land Trust. At the farm stand, the aptly named Pie Ranch does indeed have literal pies, but they’re symbolic of something more — idealistic “pie in the sky thinking” in line with their vision for social change. The farm stand also has fresh produce from neighboring farms, herbs, fresh cut flowers, preserves, hot sauce from local peppers and more. Stop by any day except Tuesday, when they’re closed. Weekday hours are noon to 5 p.m, and weekend hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Pie Ranch, 2080 Highway 1, Pescadero; 650-879-0996.

**R&R Fresh Farms**

Owner and operator Jose Ramirez’s bread and butter is actually an herb — rosemary. The farm sells it wholesale, and also directly to consumers at its Pescadero farm stand. Also available at the stand are fresh duck eggs, chayote, tamarind and plump, green tomatillos. There are dried goods too, offering a selection of rich, red chiles, fruits preserved in syrup and a multitude of beans that look like perfectly polished pebbles.

A sweet bonus: you can pick your own berries — blackberries, raspberries and olallieberries among them — or pick up a pint (or several) at the stand. Just as sweet are the baked goods like pan dulce or a slice of tres leches cake.

R&R Fresh Farms, 2310 Pescadero Creek Road, Pescadero; 650-954-0055.

**Email Associate Digital Editor Sara Hayden at shayden@peninsulafoodist.com.**

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Top: Artichokes are plentiful coastside, but San Mateo County Agricultural Advisory Committee is considering guideline changes to allow farm stands to sell more items that aren’t produced on-site. **Left:** Candied fruits from R&R Fresh Farms in Pescadero. **Right:** Some local farmers supplement income from the produce they sell with flowers, fruit-picking and other ventures.
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