COVID-19 levels are falling in local schools, but case rates are still far higher than in 2021

By Angela Swartz

The uptick in COVID-19 cases at local schools that began last month is subsiding, but case numbers have yet to drop down to the levels seen during the fall semester, according to school administrators.

The 2,700-student Menlo Park City School District (MPCSD) saw about 2.5 cases per week on average from its initial reopening in fall 2020 until just before this school year’s winter break, said Superintendent Erik Burmeister. Flash forward to the week of Jan. 10 and the district saw 88 cases in a week. The following week, it reported 88 cases again.

“As we move into February, internal MPCSD data indicate that the omicron surge is on its way down, at least among school staff and students,” he said in a statement, noting school attendance rates are back up to normal, about 95%, and reported COVID-19 cases are trending downward from the peak of mid-January. “However, we still are seeing an elevated case rate compared to the fall. ... At 66 cases last week, there is still a long way to go to return to those levels.”

The district board will consider loosening mask restrictions at a Feb. 10 meeting, according to Burmeister.

Cases are also in decline in the roughly 10,200-student Sequoia Union High School District, which was hit hard by the surge. There were just six cases the week in December that students headed off to winter break. A little over two weeks later, it started off the semester with a staggering 710 in January. There were 237 cases reported last week.

Menlo-Atherton High School reported 53 cases last week. TIDE Academy had 12. Woodside High School had 42 cases.

Woodside High School students work on their assignments in an audio production class on Feb. 1. The high school district saw record numbers of COVID-19 cases in early January, but case numbers are trending down.

Woodside freezes SB 9 housing projects, citing exemption for mountain lion habitats

By Angela Swartz

Mountain lions and housing policy aren’t often uttered in the same sentence, but that was the case last week in Woodside.

On Jan. 25, the town put an indefinite hold on all housing projects permitted under Senate Bill 9, California’s new split-lot law, according to Town Manager Kevin Bryant. The state legislation took effect last month and allows homeowners to split single-family lots and construct up to four residential units.

Town officials found a clause in the law that prohibits development in areas identified as habitats for protected species. Mountain lions are a protected species because they are a candidate for the California Endangered Species Act and Woodside, in “its entirety” is a mountain lion habitat, according to a Jan. 27 memo from Town Planning Director Jackie Young. The Fish and Game Commission planned to release a decision on the animals’ status in November, but the agency has yet to make that determination.

On Jan. 11, the Town Council passed an ordinance that limits units allowed under SB 9 unit to 800 square feet. It also prohibited basements under SB 9 and excluded development in areas at high risk of wildfires.

There were no applications submitted to the town under SB 9 before housing projects were halted, according to Bryant.

When asked if critics would besides SB 9.

Brown also noted that during last week’s meeting, the council created a committee to look into alternative housing approaches besides SB 9.

“We’re very interested in creating more housing alternatives; we’re not trying to shut anything down,” he said. “We just don’t want to have somebody in Sacramento saying we have to put a multistory high-rise in a rural community.”

Some Woodside officials have vocally opposed state housing mandates. In 2020, the Town Council voted 4-3 to adopt a resolution stating the town felt strongly that state housing legislation deprives towns of their abilities to meet the needs of their communities. Then-Mayor Brian Dombkowski, and then-Mayor Pro Tem Brown, John Carvell and Chris Shaw voted for the resolution.

Council members Ned Fluet, Jenn Wall and Sean Scott voted against it. Scott supported the resolution, but said he wanted
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Menlo Park seeks to end the blare of train horns

By Kate Bradshaw

Menlo Park is officially exploring what it would take to establish a ‘quiet zone’ along a section of the Caltrain corridor.

On Jan. 25, the City Council voted unanimously on plans to seek contractor bids to study the feasibility of creating a Caltrain horn-free zone along the rail line bisecting Menlo Park, within and even extending slightly beyond the city limits.

The idea behind a quiet zone along the Caltrain rail line is to install safety improvements enabling train operators to lay off the horns at each intersection where the rail line crosses city streets. Without extra safety measures, the trains are required to sound their horns.

In Menlo Park there are four such crossings: Ravenswood, Oak Grove, Glenwood and Encinal avenues. In addition, the Palo Alto Avenue crossing just south of the Menlo Park border is close enough to trigger Caltrain horn blasts in the city as it crosses into Palo Alto.

Menlo Park seeks to end the blare of train horns

Study of ‘quiet zone’ on Caltrain line moves forward

By Kate Bradshaw

Menlo Park is officially exploring what it would take to establish a ‘quiet zone’ along a section of the Caltrain corridor.

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The city wants a consultant to figure out how much more it would cost to evaluate the Palo Alto Avenue crossing in the feasibility study, although if it moved forward, it would likely be treated as its own quiet zone, according to a staff report.

Because all four of Menlo Park’s rail crossings are so close together, and Caltrain sounds its horn four times every time it is a quarter-mile from its next crossing, the horn can blast up to 16 times over a distance of only about 1.1 miles as each train passes through Menlo Park. And each blast can reach the maximum train horn volume of 110 decibels, according to staff.

Considering that, it’s no wonder that residents have complained about the volume, frequency, duration and time frame of the horns for years. There’s also been a notable uptick in complaints as residents who live near the train tracks have been increasingly trying to work and study at home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some residents have pointed to neighboring Atherton’s success in implementing the first quiet zone on the Caltrain corridor and called on city officials to establish a quiet zone in Menlo Park.

According to the Federal Rail Administration, there are a number of requirements that must be met to permit a quiet zone. Each crossing has to have gates, flashing lights and warning time devices; the zone must be at least a half-mile long; and it must not have a regular (non-quiet) crossing within a quarter of a mile of the first or last crossing of the zone.

According to a feasibility study, Menlo Park police recovered this homemade ghost gun after an alleged carjacker opened fire on police officers on Jan. 19.

Unregistered ghost guns are a growing concern

By Leah Worthington and Sue Dreamm

Exactly how many ghost guns are circulating in the Bay Area is unknown, but an informal survey of Peninsula law enforcement agencies reveals a noticeable rise: In South San Francisco, more than a fourth of the firearms police recovered in 2021 were ghost guns. And even in relatively quiet Palo Alto, police confiscated two ghost guns during vehicle stops for traffic violations last year.

Ghost guns, or privately made firearms, are hand built with DIY kits and lack a serial number, making them impossible to trace. Their proliferation in criminal activity has been a growing problem for local law enforcement agencies.

How to access Meta Park, Menlo Park’s newest public open space

The park is accessible by foot or bike, but limited parking poses a challenge for drivers

By Lloyd Lee

Meta, formerly known as Facebook, opened a new public park available to the public daily from sunrise to 8 p.m. on February 4, 2022.
Las Lomitas Elementary School District is soliciting bids for the provision of vended meals for the School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs. Bids will be accepted until Friday, March 18, 2022, at 1:00 PM at the District Office, located at 1011 Altschul Avenue, Menlo Park, California, 94025. Visit the district website at https://llesd.ca.schoolloop.com/CBO to view the full bid document. Clarifying questions may be directed to Mei Chan by emailing mchan@llesd.org or calling 650-854-6311 x14.

Deadline for Submission: March 18, 2022 by 1PM

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**Editorial assistant & internship coordinator**

Embacerado Media is looking for a detail-oriented, organized self-starter who enjoys working as a key member of a news team. The ideal candidate for the full-time job of Editorial Assistant & Internship Coordinator is able to accomplish a wide variety of daily and weekly responsibilities with a high degree of quality. You enjoy working on publications and have a knack for copy editing, are fluent in such programs as G Suite (Google Apps), Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat; are flexible and able to take direction; and have knowledge of the Palo Alto area. A background in journalism is strongly preferred.

The Embacerado Media editorial assistant wears three main hats: co-editor of special publications, internship-program coordinator and departmental “glue.” The position supports the editorial staff in general and directly reports to the associate editor.

This is a great opportunity to contribute to an award-winning, 42-year-old online and print publication that plays a critical role in the community.

For more details, go to tinyurl.com/EMEditorCoord22.

To apply, please email your resume, cover letter and three news clips to Editorial Director Jocelyn Dong at jdong@paloaloelek.com, with “Editorial Assistant” in the subject line. No phone calls, please.

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**Antiques Roadshow coming to Filoli**

The 2022 Antiques Roadshow will make a stop in Filoli, the historic Woodside estate, on Wednesday, June 22, and you can enter to win two free tickets to the event.

The popular TV show kicks off its 27th season on May 10 and will also make stops in Nashville, Tennessee; Santa Fe, New Mexico; Boise, Idaho; and Shelburne, Vermont. The U.S.’s version of the Antiques Roadshow is put on by PBS. In each hour-long episode, auction house specialists and independent dealers offer free appraisals of antiques and collectibles — including family heirlooms, flea market finds and items kept in attics and basements, according to the show’s website.

The ticket drawing will be conducted in April. After the drawing, on or about April 11, ticket winners will be notified if they were chosen. Enter the drawing at pbs.org/wgbh/roadshow/tickets by March 21.
Newsom seeks ‘fast forward’ path to zero-emission vehicles

Governor proposes $6.1B in budget to address infrastructure, support for more affordable, clean vehicles

By Sue Dremann

Standing outside the Ford Greenfield Labs in Palo Alto on Jan. 26, Gov. Gavin Newsom spoke about his vision for fast forwarding the state’s zero-emissions economy and climate goals.

Newsom’s budget proposal, dubbed the California Blueprint, is proposing an additional $6.1 billion to build electric-vehicle infrastructure and offer rebates for purchasing alternative vehicles to residents in the next few years. The proposal includes tax incentives for manufacturers.

The $6.1 billion would increase the total in the climate budget to $10 billion, which would specifically support electric-vehicle transformation, he said. Of that total, $665 million would be set aside for direct rebates to low-income residents to replace gas-guzzling cars with alternative vehicles, he said.

The $10 billion is part of a broader $37.6 billion plan that Newsom’s announced to address climate change in the coming years.

“Electric vehicles are one of the state’s biggest exports,” he said, standing amid the Stanford Research Park, where not only Ford but Tesla have set up business. Palo Alto and Silicon Valley are playing a direct role in developing electric vehicles and will be “a big part of the future.”

Making such an investment is “imperative for the state in particular” to meet its climate goals. California is the first state to require all new vehicles to be alternatives to gasoline engines by 2035, he said.

More than 50% of the state’s carbon dioxide emission comes from oil extraction and/or tailpipes, according to Newsom. The state can’t be serious about addressing climate change without thinking about reducing vehicle emissions, he said.

The $6.1 billion would help support more affordable, clean cars, trucks and buses and expand access to zero-emission vehicles and zero-emission vehicle infrastructure in low-income communities.

State Assembly member Marc Berman, whose district includes Menlo Park, said Silicon Valley is inextricably linked to these innovations and would lead the way.

Palo Alto Mayor Pat Burt noted that the city has been a leader in working to meet the governor’s climate goals. The city has the highest electric-vehicle sales, with one-third of new car sales being electric. He noted that the 2020 catastrophic CZU August Lightning Complex fires, which were linked to climate change, came close to jumping the mountain ridges into Palo Alto, making climate protection a dedicated goal of the city.

Ford has started making high-volume, all-electric vehicles, including the E-Transit van and the F-150 Lightning Pro pickup truck, the latter of which will be available by the middle of this year, according to its website. Its Mustang Mach-E SUV is the first all-electric vehicle to pass the Michigan State Police vehicle tests, including for acceleration, braking and high-speed vehicle pursuits.

Ford Greenfield Labs in Palo Alto, located at 3251 Hillview Ave., is one of the largest automotive manufacturing research centers in the region, according to its website. It employs nearly 300 researchers, engineers, designers and scientists in 182,000 square feet of work and lab space.

Ford Pro, the automaker’s global vehicle services and distribution business, is dedicated to serving commercial and business customers.

The new business — the first of its kind among automakers — focuses on end-to-end services for cars, software, charging stations, financing and repair to help companies convert their vehicle fleets to electric. It currently has 70,000 Blue Oval chargeports throughout the country, said Wendy Zhao, head of growth for Ford Motors’ Pro Charging, a section of Ford Pro.

“Fleets are a vital part of helping California and the world meet its ambitious climate goals,” she said, adding that a robust charging network would be essential to making the transition.

Why Is Inventory So Low?

Dear Monica:

In many years there has often been low inventory in January and February, with marked improvement in March and April. It is too soon to tell if that will be the case this year but it doesn’t look promising as yet. It is very tough for buyers now with such a low property supply and also with cash-buying hedge funds edging them out of the market.

We don’t know how long this imbalance between supply and demand will continue but most agents too would like to see it end. My advice is to keep at it and not to get discouraged.

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

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From: Your Secret Admirer

Woodside Elementary School District
Invitation for Bid
Vended Meals for Child Nutrition Programs

Woodside Elementary School District is soliciting bids for the provision of vended meals for the School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs. Bids will be accepted until Friday, March 18, 2022 at 1:00 P.M. at the District Office, located at 3195 Woodside Road, Woodside, California, 94062 Tel: 650-851-1571. Visit the district website at http://woodsideschool.us/rfp to view the full Bid document.

AlmanacNews.com 7
Menlo Park biotech company opens COVID-19 testing site

The drive-thru site will be open daily from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

By Lloyd Lee

Menlo Park biotech company is offering COVID-19 tests and will be open to the public daily. Avellino Lab, which specializes in gene therapy and molecular diagnostics, is conducting PCR swab tests seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., the company announced on Jan. 28. The site is located by the office’s west parking lot at 4300 Bohanpon Drive.

An appointment won’t be required, according to Angela Lapre, global head of corporate communications. Patients will register on site and will be asked for health insurance.

Lapre said the company will follow the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control Prevention and aim to provide test results within 48 hours. “But that could quickly change if there’s another spike,” she said.

Avellino uses its own COV-ID-19 tests that were given Emergency Use Authorization from the Food and Drug Administration in 2020. The company processes the samples at its laboratory 4.5 miles away from its headquarters. The lab is certified by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services’ Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments program, which allows a lab to accept human samples for diagnostic testing.

At its peak, the lab can process up to 30,000 tests, according to Lapre.

Lapre said the company decided to open the testing site as a way to support the community amid the surge of coronavirus cases due to the Omicron variant. “We just wanted another lever to be able to support the community at an even more direct capacity, right in our backyard in our headquarter parking lot,” she said.

Avellino operates additional testing sites in San Jose and Cupertino. To date, Avellino has conducted more than 2.5 million COVID-19 tests, according to a press release.

The Menlo Park site will be open “as long as demand warrants,” Lapre said.

To find more testing sites within San Mateo County, visit smcgov.org.

Email Lloyd Lee at lleee@almanacnews.com

County’s new partner to provide up to 2K COVID-19 tests daily at event center

By Bay City News Service

San Mateo County is partnering with health care provider Carbon Health to provide up to 2,000 COVID-19 tests daily at the San Mateo County Event Center.

Carbon Health began providing PCR tests at the Event Center on Feb. 1. Walk-up are allowed or people can register online at bit.ly/3INcoxc.

Testing through Carbon Health will be available Tuesdays through Sundays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Event Center. The entrance to the testing site is located at 2701 South Delaware St., San Mateo.

The testing is free. Patients are asked to walk in with an ID if possible. County Manager Mike Callagy said in a statement that the county already has a relationship with Carbon Health, as they helped open a mass vaccination site at the San Francisco International Airport and other county clinics.

Carbon Health’s Chief Growth Officer Nita Sommers said in a statement that the site can accommodate between 1,500 to 2,000 tests per day and they expect to provide results in 48 hours.

The county will work with Carbon Health for one month with the possibility of extensions as needed.

The county has ended its partnership with bio-health technology company Virus Geeks following testing delays earlier in January.

More information and a map showing the testing site entrance are available online at smcgov.org.

PCR and rapid tests continue to be available at county sites, health providers and pharmacies.

A full list of testing can be viewed online by visiting smcgov.org, then clicking COVID-19 Resources.

Your COVID-19 vaccine questions — answered

We’ve compiled a list of who can currently get vaccinated in San Mateo and San 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.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Atherton City Council will hold a public hearing to consider adoption of an Ordinance governing the development of qualified Senate Bill 9 subdivisions and development projects on single-family properties within the Town of Atherton.

This meeting will be held via teleconference only pursuant to Government Code section 54955(j) to provide the safest environment for staff and the public while allowing for public participation. The public may participate in the Planning Commission Meeting via Zoom Meeting.

Dial In: 1-669-900-6833, 506897786

Remote Public Comments:
Meeting participants are encouraged to submit public comments in writing in advance of the meeting. The following email will be monitored and public comments received will be read into the record.

Email: asuber@ci.atherton.ca.us
Text: 650-687-7084

Description: The City Council is considering adoption of an Ordinance governing the development of qualified Senate Bill 9 subdivisions and development projects on single-family properties within the Town of Atherton.

The establishment of these regulations will result in the orderly subdivision and development of qualified Senate Bill No. 9 (2021) (“SB 9”) projects while ensuring that the new units are consistent with the existing development patterns of the Town and do not create any significant impacts with regards to public infrastructure or public safety. A copy of the meeting agenda, staff report and draft Ordinance can be found online by Thursday, February 3, 2022 here: https://www.ci.atherton.ca.us/Archive.aspx?AID=41&Type=Recent

The proposal has been determined to be exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to CEQA Section 15378(a), which defines projects subject to these provisions. The proposal does not meet the definition of a project.

NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN that said Ordinance is set for hearing by the City Council at its meeting on February 16, 2022 at 6:00 PM via teleconference accessible through the above-described information, at which time and place all persons interested may participate and show cause, if they have any, why the Ordinance should or should not be recommended for approval.

IF YOU CHALLENGE any actions taken to adopt the SB 9 Ordinance in court, you may be limited to raising only 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.

PVSD
Portola Valley School District
Invitation for Bid
Vended Meals for Child Nutrition Programs

Portola Valley School District is soliciting bids for the provision of vended meals for the School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs. Bids will be accepted until Friday, March 18, 2022 at 1:00 P.M at the District Office, located at 4575 Alpine Road, Portola Valley, California, 94028. Visit the district website at http://PVSD.net/rfp to view the full Bid document.

Clarifying questions may be directed to the District Office by emailing rfp@pvpsd.net or calling (650) 851-1777.

Deadline for Submission: March 18, 2022 by 1:00 PM

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
BEFORE THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE WEST BAY SANITARY DISTRICT

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a public hearing will be held before the Board of Directors of the West Bay Sanitary District at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, February 9, 2022, at the District Offices, located at 500 Laurel Street, Menlo Park, California to consider the adoption of an ordinance amending Section 209 “Board Member Compensation” of the District’s Code of General Regulations to increase the amount Board Members shall be compensated for attendance at meetings of the Board or for each day’s service rendered as a Director by request of the Board from $240.00 per day up to $250.00 per day, not to exceed six days in any calendar month.

WEST BAY SANITARY DISTRICT
By: /s/ Sergio Ramirez
Sergio Ramirez
District Manager
A lawsuit was filed on behalf of plaintiffs Anthony McCree and the Debt Collective, a national organization that challenges consumer debt. McCree, who was homeless at the time, missed his fare payment. The court, according to the complaint, “maximizes revenue collection” by using the legal procedures of “wage garnishment, property liens, and bank liens” to collect the debt. Frequently the court refers charges to private collection agencies. A significant portion of the lawsuit is devoted to allegations that the San Mateo court has a vested interest in imposing the assessments, because a portion of the funds collected go into the court’s budget. According to plaintiffs, the court is permitted to retain all assessments collected in excess of $2.1 million plus the costs of collection.

In response to public records requests by plaintiffs, the court stated that it had been able to retain more than $3 million over the most recent three fiscal years. Given the court’s annual budget of approximately $30 million in fiscal 2020-21, plaintiffs contend that the amounts are such a significant source of revenue for the court as to create a conflict of interest. The lawsuit also alleges that the court allegedly imposed assessments because of California’s “Three Strikes” legislation dramatically overfilled prison facilities throughout the state and lead to a financial crisis for the court system’s budget.

Plaintiffs say the California Legislature solved the financial problem, not by increasing the court’s funding from the state treasury, but by allowing the courts to impose the assessments and retain the funds recovered.

The complaint also argues that the practice violates the defendants’ due process rights by failing to timely and adequately inform them of their right to challenge the assessment or avoid it altogether simply by requesting that the citation be resolved without a hearing, a practice allowed in traffic violation matters.

According to Shroff, the suit is the first in California to challenge the assessment practice. While the new suit is not a class action, Shroff says that if relief is granted it will help many people affected by the assessment practice. San Mateo allegedly referred more than 100,000 cases to collection in the last three years. Plaintiffs want to enjoin all collection of those assessments and stop any further improper assessments in the future. Requests for comment on the suit by the San Mateo court and its counsel were not promptly returned.
Coronavirus central: FDA issues full approval of Moderna vaccine

By Embarcadero Media staff

Federal regulators issued their full approval Monday of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, the second approval of a COVID-19 vaccine outside of its emergency use authorization.

The Food and Drug Administration issued its full approval of the vaccine after considering data from roughly 14,000 vaccine recipients and 14,000 placebo recipients.

In the more than 28,000 adults sampled, the two-dose vaccine was 93% effective at preventing COVID-19 infection and 98% effective at preventing serious illness.

The FDA also determined that the vaccine is safe to receive after analyzing data from a pool of more than 30,000 vaccine recipients and placebo recipients, with the most common reported side effects including fatigue, headache, redness and swelling at the injection site and fever.

“While hundreds of millions of doses of Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine have been administered to individuals under emergency use authorization, we understand that for some individuals, FDA approval of this vaccine may instill additional confidence in making the decision to get vaccinated,” acting FDA Commissioner Dr. Janet Woodcock said in a statement.

The vaccine has been available to adults under emergency use approval since December 2020, along with the similar mRNA vaccine developed by Pfizer-BioNTech.

Since then, the FDA has expanded its emergency use authorization for the Moderna vaccine to include its use as a booster dose for people who completed their initial vaccine series at least five months prior.

With Monday’s announcement, Moderna’s vaccine will now be marketed as Spikevax.

“Safe and effective vaccines are our best defense against the COVID-19 pandemic, including currently circulating variants,” said Dr. Peter Marks, the director of the FDA’s Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research. “The public can be assured that this vaccine was approved in keeping with the FDA’s rigorous scientific standards.”

VTA to require employees prove their vaccination status

The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) will require its employees and contractors to prove that they have completed their initial vaccine series, the agency said Jan. 27.

The policy requires VTA’s more than 2,000 employees and contractors to prove by April 29 have at least received their first two mRNA vaccine doses or single Janssen/Johnson & Johnson vaccine dose.

According to the VTA, workers will not be required to prove that they have received a booster dose, which health officials have argued is necessary to bolster immune response against COVID-19.

“We have a responsibility to protect our employees and the public and help bring an end to this devastating pandemic,” VTA General Manager and CEO Carolyn Gonot said in a statement.

Roughly 60% of VTA’s workforce has already voluntarily confirmed their full vaccination status, according to the agency. That figure does not include employees hired after Aug. 1, 2021, who are required to be vaccinated.

Unvaccinated employees will be allowed to request a medical or religious exemption to the vaccination requirement.

Those with approved exemptions will be required to test weekly for COVID-19. All others whose exemptions are not approved must complete their first vaccine series by the April 29 deadline.

Comprehensive COVID-19 coverage


Bay City News Service contributed to this report.

Woodside is tasked with zoning for 328 units between 2023 and 2031 under the state’s Regional Housing Needs Allocation, up from 62 during the previous cycle.

Council members asked staff last week to look into hiring a consultant to study mountain lion habitats in town, while the town’s Planning Commission raised similar concerns in January prior to the council’s discussion last week.

Updates will be posted to the town website as the review of the petition to put mountain lions on the endangered species list progresses, according to the memo.

Email Staff Writer Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com.
A n alleged fraud scheme that put African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church properties, including in Palo Alto, into millions of dollars of debt has led to the arrests of a former bishop and lay leader, the U.S. Department of Justice said on Jan. 25.

The Rev. Quintana and others used the real estate as collateral to obtain the high interest loans, exceeding $14 million in net proceeds. The Palo Alto church alone was indebted for more than $3.9 million, according to its lawsuit.

Powell and Quintana allegedly diverted funds from the loans for their benefit, including the acquisition of properties, according to the lawsuit, which seeks to stop Powell and Quintana from succeeding in bankruptcy proceedings that would include the church properties.

According to the indictment, after taking control of the church properties, Powell, Quintana and others used the real estate as collateral to obtain the high interest loans, exceeding $14 million in net proceeds. The Palo Alto church alone was indebted for more than $3.9 million, according to its lawsuit.

We are grateful to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for bringing this case forward.

REV. KALOMA SMITH, PASTOR AT UNIVERSITY AME ZION CHURCH
RESORT-LIKE PROPERTY OF OVER 3.5 ACRES

The quintessential beauty of Portola Valley provides the perfect backdrop for this spectacular estate of over 7,400 square feet, including a beautiful guest home of more than 700 square feet, resting on over 3.5 verdant acres of resort-like grounds. A gated paver motor court introduces the property, and inside, this home presents a luxurious ambiance with soaring ceilings, fine millwork, floors of marble and hardwood, and stunning walls of glass that bring the outside in. The floorplan is scaled for entertaining yet comfortable enough for everyday living, and features the living room with a fireplace, the chef’s kitchen with high-end appliances, and the expansive family/game room, plus a theater, wine cellar, yoga/fitness room, and so much more. Accommodations include 4 bedroom suites, highlighted by the incredible primary suite with a sitting room and fireplace, while the detached guest home offers an additional bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen. Experience true indoor/outdoor living as multiple points throughout the home open to a multi-level deck with a built-in grill and peaceful views of the home’s magnificent grounds, featuring meandering walking trails, a gazebo, and a side area with an enticing blend of both natural and synthetic grass. Moments from beautiful nature preserves and trails, this home is just minutes to the iconic Roberts Market, and offers access to acclaimed Portola Valley schools (buyer to verify eligibility).

OPEN HOUSE: SATURDAY & SUNDAY 1:30 PM - 4:30 PM
www.835Westridge.com
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Michael Repka, DRE #01854880 | 650.900.7000 | michael@deleonrealty.com | Equal Housing Opportunity
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Built in 2015 and boasting outstanding build quality throughout, this spacious 5-bedroom, 3.5-bathroom home offers outstanding Mediterranean-style architecture along with nearly 2,600 square feet of living space designed for a modern lifestyle. Chic appointments including hardwood floors, stonework, crown molding, and arched entryways create a stylish ambiance from the moment you step inside. A fireplace centers the living room, the kitchen features quartz countertops and Thermador appliances, and the family room provides great space to relax and unwind. Upstairs, the luxurious primary suite features a balcony overlooking the yard plus a marble-appointed bathroom, while the home’s additional bedrooms offer comfortable space for family and guests. Outside, a large paver patio in the backyard provides the perfect venue for alfresco dining and entertaining. Just moments to the shops and restaurants along Palo Alto’s University Avenue, this home is also convenient to downtown Menlo Park and offers easy access to US 101 for Bay Area commuting.

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**NEWS**

**Bikes, a laptop, 500-gallon water jugs among items taken during burglaries**

By Angela Swartz

Someone stole $23,800 worth of items from a home in Atherton on Jan. 26, according to a police bulletin.

Between 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., a burglar apparently slid a window open to get inside the home on the first block of Cebalo Lane, off of Baywood Lane. The items taken included two bicycles, bike lights and a laptop.

Atherton has a lot of high density entry points from neighboring communities, via El Camino Real and Highway 101, according to a newsletter last week from City Manager George Rodericks.

“The town cannot prevent criminals from making burglary attempts, but you can help the town with deterrence by hardening your home against such intrusions,” the newsletter states.

Of the eight burglaries in January, police suspect six were committed by organized Chilean gang members operating out of the Los Angeles area, according to a Jan. 28 message to residents from police Chief Steve McCulley.

In 2021, officers investigated 28 residential burglaries and made two arrests of burglary suspects, he said, six of which have been linked to Chilean gang members. Chilean gang activity has been a problem throughout San Mateo County and nationwide, he said.

From 2016 to 2021, town police investigated an average of about two burglaries per month and made two burglary suspect arrests a year, according to police.

Police plan to host a community meeting with residents about the burglaries on Thurs., Feb. 17, from 6 to 8 p.m.

The town is also asking residents to host department Neighborhood Watch/Crime Prevention meetings. Anyone interested in hosting a meeting may email McCulley at SMcCulley@ci.atherton.ca.us.

The best way to prevent being burglarized is to lock windows and doors; leave lights on; install exterior lighting; don’t keep valuables in the master bedroom; and install an alarm system and security camera, according to a town news bulletin.

**Woodside and Portola Valley burglaries**

Someone reportedly broke into a home on the 100 block of Chapman Road in Woodside on Dec. 8, taking two large, 555-gallon water tanks worth about $1,800, said Javier Acosta, San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office public information officer, in an email.

The burglary was reported to police on Jan. 18, according to the Sheriff’s Office police blotter.

The Sheriff’s Office also reported a residential burglary on the 300 block of Portola Road in Portola Valley on Jan. 27 between 4 and 6 a.m.

The burglars broke into a basement storage area but did not gain access to the living area of the residence and fled before deputies arrived, according to a town press release.

**Trains**

A number of residents spoke in favor of the council’s step toward a quiet zone Tuesday. “The long-term solution to alleviating more of the train noise is grade separations,” said Complete Streets Commissioner and Caltrain advocate Adina Levin.

“There’s no telling how long that will take. If we have a decade of people being able to sleep at night, it is worth pursuing this.”

The city has for decades been trying to move forward with separating the Caltrain rail line from the places it intersects with city roads. After years of debate, the city is exploring the possibility of a fully elevated grade separation alongside other approaches at three of the city’s four rail crossings, at Ravenswood, Oak Grove and Glenwood avenues.

Speaking on behalf of several neighbors, her interview with the Caltrain tracks, Felton Gables resident Marcy Abramowitz emphasized the willingness of residents to support the project and urged the city to select a consultant with experience that is relevant to the city of Menlo Park. “We are thrilled to be embarking on this step,” she said.

Funding for the study includes $75,000 from city coffers and $300,000 allocated from the Springline development under construction at 1300 El Camino Real. More funding would be needed to construct the improvements for the quiet zone, according to staff. Under the proposed timeline, the consultant would be expected to develop the draft implementation plan for the quiet zone by Sept. 26.

**Frances Kent Dickman**

Frances Kent Dickman 1941 – 2022

Frances Kent Dickman passed away on January 14, 2022, with her beloved daughters at her side. Debbie Thomas (Tadd), Jennifer Tighe, and Kimberly Fleming (Jon), seven grandchildren, Piper and Drew Thomas, Blair and Allix Bunge and Jack, Beau and Kate Fleming, three sisters, Barbra Wood (Bill), Claudia Dickman, and Sandra Dickman, and her many nieces and nephews.

Fran was born in Oakland to W. Bernard and Edith Dickman on April 30, 1941. Her family lived in Oakland, where Fran attended Crocker Highlands Elementary School, until 1951 when they moved to Atherton, where Fran lived, attending Encinal Elementary School and Menlo-Atherton High School, until she went to University of Oregon in the fall of 1959. She joined the Alpha Delta Pi sorority, and studied to become an elementary school teacher. At Oregon she met her future husband, David Yee, the father of her three children, and they were married in 1960. They divorced in 1977.

In her twenties Fran discovered the game of bridge, and with her natural ability for numbers and strategy, and her love of competition, became an excellent and much-respected player. She enjoyed many bridge friends in bridge clubs and on trips to play in tournaments. She reached the pinnacle of bridge success when she became celebrated as a Grand Life Master in 2008. Over the years, Fran’s extended family has maintained a special closeness, sharing in holiday celebrations, vacations to Hawaii, and trips to fish on the Rogue River. In more recent years Fran and her three sisters have enjoyed a companionable friendship.

Fran was the proud matriarch of her own family. She enjoyed an unbreakable bond with her daughters and an admiring affection for her grandchildren. The center of family gatherings, she was a sympathetic ear with a sage perspective and was the foundation of her progeny.

Fran will always be remembered for her generosity; her loving, feminine presence, her impeccable style and flare for fashion, her warm and welcoming smile, her love of dancing, her baking prowess, and her wonderful sense of humor.

While there is a hole in all of our hearts, we are comforted by our sweet memories of Fran. In lieu of flowers, please submit photos and written memories to: rememberingfran2022@gmail.com

**Mark Steven Moriconi**

Mark Steven Moriconi May 7, 1948 – January 25, 2022

Mark Steven Moriconi passed away on January 25, 2022 at the age of 73 in Redwood City, California after a decade long battle with Early Onset Alzheimers.

He was born to Bill and Ardevina Moriconi on May 7, 1948. Mark will be lovingly remembered by his wife of 33 years, Susan Moriconi; his son, Alex Moriconi; brothers, Bill Moriconi (Susan) of St. Louis, Missouri and John Moriconi (Erica) of Wolfeboro, NH; grand children Jeff Bergman (Alexis) and Lisa Bergman (who preceded him in death), grandsons Christopher and Nicholas Bergman and his nephews and nieces.

After graduating from Kauapa High School and Wichita State University, Mark enjoyed ten years of teaching English and Mathematics in Wichita, Kansas. Mark received a Ph.D. in Computer Sciences from The University of Texas at Austin and later completed the High-Tech Executive Program at Stanford University’s Graduate School of Business. He published over 20 technical papers and held many patents. Mark was also an invited speaker, panelist, technical reviewer, program chair and general chair at dozens of international ACM/IEEE conferences and workshops, winning several awards for his contributions.

Mark’s professional career included nearly 20 years as Director of Computer Science Lab at Stanford Research Institute and he eventually founded his own company, SecureSoft/ CrossLogic. Following its sale, the technology CrossLogic was based on became a core component of Oracle Entitlements Server.

Mark and Susan moved to Atherton 35 years ago, where Mark was able to engage in his passions for gardening, sports and wine. He enjoyed fine dining, cooking and travel and, more than anything, loved sharing those experiences with the people he held dear. He also enjoyed walking to Peet’s every day with his black labrador, Tori, and even started to look like her later in life when they were both grey around the muzzle and wearing all black.

A celebration of Mark’s life was held on Thursday, February 3, 2022 at the Church of the Nativity. A memorial donations may be made in his honor to the Peninsula Humane Society & SPA. https://phs-sPCA.org/

**OBITUARIES**

Local residents who died recently include Edgar (Bud) Galt McLellan, 86, an Atherton resident, on Jan. 11; Rowland Whitney Tabor, 89, a Portola Valley resident and volunteer for the city’s conservation committee and geologic safety committee, on Jan. 13; Betty Porter Sox, 98, an Atherton resident and Hewlett-Packard employee for 47 years, on Jan. 22; Else Muller Towle, 88, a former Portola Valley resident and volunteer for the Portola Valley School District, on Jan. 23; and Mark Steven Moriconi, 73, an Atherton resident, on Jan. 25.

To read the full obituary service, remembrances and post photos, go to Lasting Memories at almanacnews.com/obituaries.
“All of the sidewalk and curb cuts are ADA accessible,” he said. In addition, the park itself is “completely level” and has ADA-accessible walkways. The bridge also has a very “gentle slope” and there are no steps, Reinhart said.

Unlike the park, the 1,026-foot-long bridge is accessible around the clock. Park rules prohibit dogs and other animals, commercial photography and filming, drones and amplified sound. •

Email Lloyd Lee at llee@almanacnews.com

Go to: AlmanacNews.com/obituaries

Edgar (Bud) Galt McLellan Jr.
March 5, 1935 – January 11, 2022

Edgar Galt McLellan, Jr. (Bud) died peacefully in his sleep on January 11, 2022 at the age of 86, at his home in Atherton, California.

Bud was born in San Mateo, California in 1935 to Edgar Galt McLellan and Oneita Jantzten McLellan. He spent his childhood in Hillsborough, California and Portland, Oregon. His maternal family had founded and run Jantzen swimwear, and his paternal family had been early and successful real estate investors in Belmont and San Mateo, on the San Francisco Peninsula. Bud was a 1953 graduate of Menlo School in Atherton and graduated with a degree in Social Sciences in 1957 from Stanford University. He was a member of the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity at Stanford, where he played junior varsity football.

Bud was a gregarious man, who made friends easily. After graduation from Stanford, he entered the Loop executive training program for Bethlehem Steel in Portland, Oregon where he became a successful salesman. In 1958, he married Jacqueline Plank, and together they raised two children, Reed and Jana. In the 1970’s, Bud and Jacqueline moved to Cleveland, Ohio to represent the company throughout the Midwest, where the family settled until his retirement in 1984. He succeeded his father on the Board of Directors of the McLellan Estate Company and continued as a member of the board until this year.

After retiring, Bud and Jacqui returned to Portland, Oregon. Sadly, Jacqui died in 2001 from cancer. In 2002, he reconnected with Sonia Shepard, a classmate from Stanford whose husband had also died of cancer. Bud had been a groomsman in their wedding. They were married in 2002 and spent the next two decades traveling the world, hosting students in their home, attending Stanford sporting events, and hosting a myriad of gatherings for their family. Bud enjoyed a fine scotch, a nice meal, good conversation and a repertoire of folk- and climbing songs. He was also a familiar presence in the Portola Valley Community, and his Geologic Safety Committee. He was instrumental in volunteering on Portola Valley’s Conservation Committee and in field camps he entertained his field assistants and fellow geologists with his guitar and an endless supply of folk- and climbing songs. As an accomplished mountaineer, he was a long-time member of the American Alpine Club. Notable climbs included Lost Arrow Spire (CA), Shiprock (NM), Hoover Tower (CA), and first ascents of Mt La Perouse (AK) and the North Ridge of Mt Johannesburg (WA). While on a Fulbright in Austria he also enjoyed climbs in the French Alps, and an ascent of the Matterhorn.

While his summers were devoted to field work, during the rest of the year at home in Portola Valley, he enjoyed working in his darkroom, remodeling his 1920’s-built home, and volunteering on Portola Valley’s Conservation Committee and its Geologic Safety Committee. He was instrumental in persuading the town to move the Town Center to the west, away from the San Andreas Fault. He was also a familiar figure on his bicycle on his daily commute, rain or shine, to work in Menlo Park.

For years, he sang bass in the Stanford Symphonic Chorus, and in field camps he entertained his field assistants and fellow geologists with his guitar and an endless repertoire of folk- and climbing songs.

Rowland believed geology should be accessible to the wider public, and enjoyed writing for the curious layman. With his good friend and colleague, Dwight Crowder, he co-authored Routes and rocks: hiker’s guide to the North Cascades from Glacier Peak to Lake Chelan (The Mountaineers, 1975), and, co-authored with colleague and friend, Ralph Haugerud, Geology of the North Cascades: a mountain mosaic (The Mountaineers, 1999). His last book, Rock pick and ice axe: recollections of a mountaineering geologist (2022) is published by his family.

Rowland was survived by his devoted wife of 52 years, Karin (Kaja) Eckelmeyer, his sons Whitney and Michael, their mother Lesley Stark Tabor, and grandsons Merce Tabor and Kaiuto Tabor. His sister, Anne Tabor Winston, predeceased him. Contributions in his memory may be made to any organization devoted to the preservation of our beautiful, natural world.
**COMMUNITY BRIEFS continued from page 6**

**2022 May Day logo art contest**

Apply to create the logo for Woodside’s 100th annual May Day celebration. This year’s theme is “homecoming.” The competition is open to preschoolers through eighth graders. The logo will appear on Woodside banners around town, the May Day web page, and communications for May Day 2022. Submit an entry by Friday, Feb. 18. Winners will be announced on Monday, Feb. 28. Find out more at tinyurl.com/maydayartcontest2022.

**Town of Portola Valley updates**

Due to supply chain issues, conversion of Portola Valley’s Historic Schoolhouse for hybrid government meetings has been delayed.

Town hall has been closed since Dec. 24 and the closure was extended until Feb. 14 while staff works remotely.

Anyone with questions or concerns about the policy can contact Town Manager Jeremy Dennis at jdennis@portolavalley.net.

Go to portolavalley.net for more information and to access online services.

**PV-based Lyme disease foundation raises $8 million**

The Bay Area Lyme Foundation announced last week that it’s raised $8 million since the start of the pandemic for research and education programs aimed at making Lyme disease easy to diagnose and simple to cure.

“Although the pandemic presented us with many extraordinary hurdles, it also helped people understand the complicated aspects of infectious diseases — including the importance of accurate diagnostics, the role of antibodies, and the power of effective treatments — all of which are — and continue to be — huge factors in our fight against Lyme and tick-borne diseases,” said Linda Giampa, executive director of the Portola Valley-based nonprofit, in a press release.

“The similarities between Lyme and COVID-19 clearly show the critical nature of scientific pursuit, progress, and education,” Giampa said. “The foundation demonstrates consistent, measurable progress unlocking the mysteries of tick-borne diseases, which remain one of the most important health crises of our time.”

**Sacred Heart recognized for increased diversity in computer science**

The College Board awarded the AP Computer Science Female Diversity Award to Sacred Heart Preparatory in Atherton for its work to expand young women’s enrollment in AP Computer Science Principles during the 2020-21 school year, according to a school press release. Sacred Heart is one of 760 schools nationwide that’s being recognized for the honor.

“Their neuropathy is finding the relationship between, ‘I want to do this, and I’ve never done this before, so it’s not for me.”

He said that all of the computer science courses at the school are designed for total novices. “I’ll teach you what you need to know.”

Morris said in the release. “There are more than a half-dozen girls enrolled in AP computer science this semester and several are considering majoring in computer science in college, he said.

— Angela Swartz

**Purchase tennis court keys**

Keys to access to the Arrilaga Family Gymnasium tennis courts on 600 Alma St. are now available for purchase that will be valid through Feb. 1 to Jan. 1, 2023. Keys purchased between Jan. 1 and June 30 are $63 for residents and $127 for nonresidents, which includes those living in unincorporated Menlo Park. Between July 1 and Dec. 31, the prices drop to $42 for residents and $84 for nonresidents. Tennis court reservations are $17 for residents and $22 for nonresidents per hour.

Courts are open Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. For more information call 650-330-2220.

**County clerk’s office extend hours for February marriages**

The San Mateo County Clerk’s Office is extending office hours on a few days in February for those who want to seal the deal on Valentine’s Day or on dates full of twos.

The clerk’s office will perform wedding ceremonies from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Feb. 14 and Feb. 22. The office also held extended hours on Feb. 22.

**New toll lanes open on Highway 101 this month**

New express lanes on U.S. Highway 101 from the Santa Clara County line to Whipple Avenue in Redwood City officially open on Friday, Feb. 11, officials with the San Mateo Transit District announced. The express lanes will operate from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays.

Express lanes are available for drivers enrolled in the FastTrak system. All customers must have a FastTrak Flex to qualify for free or reduced tolls in the express lanes, as it allows them to disclose how many passengers they are carrying, officials said. Those without valid FastTrak accounts will be in violation and are subject to fines and penalties.

People driving in carpools with three or more people, as well as buses, will be able to travel free of charge in the express lanes. Customers driving clean air vehicles such as cars that run on fuel cells, battery, or plug-in hybrids that have a valid clean-air vehicle decal from the Department of Motor Vehicles will qualify for a 50% toll discount when the lanes first open, officials said.

The express-lane project will continue, with lanes being extended to the northern end, up from Whipple Avenue to Interstate Highway 380. The lanes lead directly into express lanes in Santa Clara County.

More information about the project can be found at 101express.com

— Lloyd Lee
“The month of January has been eventful!” Woodside Principal Karen van Putten said in a note to families on Monday. “I applaud all of our students, staff and families for working through the health and safety protocols and doing your best to return to teaching and learning with consistency and demonstrating grace and understanding as we learn to live and thrive in the midst of the uptick in COVID cases. Daily attendance has steadily increased and I appreciate everyone’s efforts in following health and safety protocols.”

In the Ravenswood City School District, there were 63 cases reported last week. These numbers are comparable to the week before (65 cases), but down from the district’s peak of 120 cases the week prior.

“We want to hope that we have reached the peak, but the most my mystery, but we do seem to be coming to a much better place, and it will be here sooner than we realize.”

He said he’s hopeful that annual events like May Day, the Operetta and the eighth grade graduation ceremony will go on as planned, and that parent volunteers will be back on campus soon.

Last week, there were 19 cases in the 1,100-student Las Lomitas Elementary School District, which has a middle school in Menlo Park and elementary school in Atherton. It reported 37 cases the week prior.

“*The two last years have taught us much,*” he said. “…What lies ahead as far as mandates and guidelines from the state regarding COVID-19 is a mystery, but we do seem to be coming to a much better place, and it will be here sooner than we realize.*

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Last week, there were 19 cases in the 1,100-student Las Lomitas Elementary School District, which has a middle school in Menlo Park and elementary school in Atherton. It reported 37 cases the week prior.
The Redwood City Police Department reported that two ghost guns were recovered in 2019 and 2020, of 75 and 57 total guns, respectively. By comparison, seven guns were out in 2021 of 56 total guns recovered by December 2021.

In South San Francisco, nine ghost guns were recovered in 2019; in 2020, over a fourth of the 46 firearms recovered were homemade firearms, according to Sgt. Sean Carmi. Carmi said the majority of ghost guns seized in South San Francisco have been handguns, while an estimated four to five have been AR-15 type rifles. The firearms were recovered during a variety of incidents, including traffic stops, shootings, robberies, and auto burglaries.

Only one gun was recovered in Daly City in 2019, but 10 each were seized in 2020 and 2021, according to Daly City Police Department Sgt. Brandon Scholes — most seized in conjunction with drug possession or drug sales.

The city of San Mateo reported 16 ghost guns recovered in 2021, an increase of 166% since 2019. The East Palo Alto Police Department reported six ghost guns recovered in 2021. One ghost gun was recovered in Menlo Park in 2020.

In Santa Clara County, the Mountain View Police Department recovered four ghost guns and 20 traditional firearms in 2021, spokesperson Katie Nelson said.

One of the ghost guns was found during a disturbance call; two were found during separate traffic stops; and one was recently found during the execution of a search warrant. The department doesn’t disclose the types of ghost firearms, she said.

Homemade guns have even begun appearing in cities such as Palo Alto. Palo Alto police confiscated two ghost guns in 2021, one each in May and June, Lt. Brian Philip said. Police captured one ghost gun in 2020 but none in 2019.

Each of the three ghost guns was discovered by patrol officers during vehicle stops for traffic violations.

It is unknown what sort of crimes or incidents in which those firearms may have been involved prior to us seizing them. The guns were submitted to the crime lab for tracing; as of now, they have not yet been connected to any known crimes, Philip said.

Given the low number, Palo Alto police wouldn’t characterize the ghost guns as a trend in civilian and private use of the arms.

“If we are looking at the number overall, it’s probably at about 200,” a roughly 48% increase over 2020, she said. Although the overall rise in privately made firearms has been noticeable, some jurisdictions have contradictory data that their officials are struggling to explain.

The San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office has seen a sharp decline in confiscation of homemade firearms: There were 33 ghost guns/parts seized in 2019, five in 2020 and six in 2021, according to a list the office compiled.

The reason for this significant drop-off isn’t clear, although San Mateo County District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe speculated that it may have something to do with the pandemic.

“Law enforcement was very cautious in their contact with the public during the last two years and perhaps contacts or detections of citizens, where guns are sometimes found, that might have occurred in other years were not occurring during the pandemic,” he said in an email.

Undersherriff Mark Robbins shared similar thoughts. “Especially in 2020, with lockdowns, there were far less people out. While I can’t say for certain, this certainly is something to consider,” he wrote in an email.

According to David Silberman, San Mateo County’s chief deputy counsel, all items on the Sheriff’s Office list are guns or parts that are defined as being a firearm (such as frames/receivers). The list is limited to those recovered from contract jurisdictions, such as Half Moon Bay, Millbrae, San Carlos, Portola Valley and Woodside, as well as unincorporated areas.

But even small numbers can be a cause for worry, given what they represent, said Redwood City’s Captain Ashley Osborne.

“You look at the numbers, and it’s not an overwhelming concern, although the increase is significant,” said Osborne, noting that the numbers in Redwood.

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City tripled in 2021, from two to seven. "If we saw that triple again, that would certainly start to get into a territory where we’re much more concerned about it."

**Efforts to combat the proliferation**

Law enforcement agencies throughout the Bay Area are trying to figure out how to track down and stop the proliferation of these elusive weapons.

San Mateo County Sgt. Michael Leishman operates a task force that collaborates with all local police departments, as well as the ATF, the High Intensity Drug Trafficing Areas program and Northern California Regional Intelligence Center. He said that social media has helped facilitate the ghost gun industry by creating a sort of online marketplace for people to network and share ideas, adding that these platforms also provide a new source of investigative material.

"A lot of these individuals will use open source media or social media to communicate — and in some cases, we’ll use that as investigative leads," he said.

"We’ll see certain patterns or images that catch our attention, and we’ll start digging further." 

At a local level, South San Francisco’s Curmi said there’s little that can be done to directly combat the ghost gun industry, other than locating the illegal firearms and assisting with investigations led by other local and state agencies.

Redwood City’s Osborne agreed, saying that, while the department works diligently to enforce the existing laws, a municipal police department doesn’t play a big role in the regulation of firearm sales.

"We have no clue how many of these firearms are actually still on the street."

**Mike Sena, Western Region Crime Gun Intelligence Working Group**

In an effort to unite local and statewide efforts against crime guns, including privately made firearms, Mike Sena, executive director for the Northern California High Intensity Drug Trafficing Areas program and the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center, helped establish the Western Region Crime Gun Intelligence Working Group, a collection of law enforcement staff, prosecutors, crime analysts and forensic lab professionals from California, Nevada and Arizona.

"There was a huge disconnect between prosecutors, the forensics labs, officers on the street, the investigators and the analysts who were looking at various aspects of the manufacture and distribution and use of these types of weapons and criminal activity," he said.

Sena started hearing reports about unserialized weapons and 3D printers in early 2020, and at first, he said, "it didn’t make a whole lot of sense." Over the course of the next few months, as it became clear that something significant was happening, he began gathering a group of experts and analysts to look into the new spate of illegal gun-related incidents.

One of Sena’s main goals is to work on educating law enforcement about firearm laws and reporting unserialized guns to get a better sense of the scope of the problem — and the networks of illegal trafficking. The group is also working to develop sources and increase communication among agencies, which is important for identifying when different jurisdictions are investigating the same suspects.

Silberman said in an email that the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office is actively collaborating with the Western Region Crime Gun Intelligence Working Group: "San Mateo County Sheriff Carlos Bolanos “is dedicated to supporting the group’s efforts to combat illicit ghost guns with the combined resources of his crime lab, crime analysts and detectives.”

The Santa Clara County District Attorney’s Crime Strategies Unit has established the Gun-Related Intelligence Program (GRIP), a crime-reduction initiative that is specific to illegal firearms, including ghost guns. With three intelligence analysts, investigators and prosecutors, GRIP each week identifies shooters and traffickers and plans out strategies to apprehend and prosecute criminals involved in gun-related crimes. They look at trends and patterns and get restraining orders.

The GRIP team works with law-enforcement agencies to plan and execute searches and find the guns and perpetrators and get them off the streets — preferably before they commit any violent crimes, McKeown said.

This year, more than 1,000 law-enforcement officers received training on gun laws. And detectives from multiple cities in Santa Clara County meet regularly with members of the GRIP unit to share information, Palo Alto’s Philip said.

**Could new legislation stem the tide of ghost guns?**

Leaders at all levels of government are actively working to close loopholes on ghost guns.

In September, San Francisco — which has seen a 2,600% increase in confiscated home-made firearms since 2016 — the city’s supervisors voted unanimously to ban the sale and possession of ghost gun kits and parts and prohibit construction of unserialized firearms. Violation of the ordinance, which was officially signed into law in early December, is punishable by a $1,000 fine and further legal action from the police and the city attorney.

In the East Bay, Oakland recently joined other cities like Los Angeles in proposing new legislation to ban ghost guns outright.

Federally, the Biden administration is pursuing several possible regulations, such as amending federal legislation so that laws about firearms are extended to include gun kits and parts.

In May 2021, the ATF published Proposed Rule 2021R-05 in the Federal Register, which, if adopted, would amend the definition of a “firearm.” The rule would require serial-number registrations on the gun frame, or “receiver,” and would define which licensed firearms dealers can be registered to add the serial number. The rule would also require certain manufacturer’s identifying information. "If it passes, it would be a major departure. Ghost-gun kits could potentially be illegal," McKeown said.

In a controversial move, Gov. Gavin Newsom proposed last December a law that would allow private citizens to sue who manufactures, distributes, or sells an assault weapon or gun kit or parts.

In response, the California Rifle and Pistol Association said in a statement: "The latest attack on law-abiding California gun owners is Newsom’s response to a recent Supreme Court ruling reacting to a Texas law prohibiting abortion. Law-abiding gun owners and businesses are not the cause of criminal misuse of firearms. Yet, Newsom and other anti-gun politicians seem to believe the threat of frivolous lawsuits will somehow address their own failures."

Similar to Newsom’s idea, in January, state Assemblymember Mike Gipson (D-Carson), chair of the Select Committee on Police Reform, introduced Assembly Bill (AB) 1594. The bill would allow civil lawsuits against a gunmaker or industry member for creating or maintaining a public nuisance — conditions that are dangerous to public health and welfare — if their failure to follow federal, state, or local law caused injury or death.

There are also California state laws that have been approved and are waiting to go into effect. On July 1, 2022, anyone selling ghost-gun parts must follow similar rules to those for selling ammunition, including requiring background checks of buyers.

Also on July 1, the state’s expanded “red flag” law will make it possible for concerned employers, coworkers, family members and schools to request a court to seize ghost guns from a person who might pose a danger to themselves or others.

Another law, state Assembly Bill 879, which goes into effect in July 2024, requires the sale of firearm precursor parts — necessary components such as a receiver or frame — to be conducted by or processed through a licensed firearm precursor part vendor. The law creates an application process for firearm precursor part vendors. A currently licensed firearm dealer or licensed ammunition vendor would automatically qualify.

In July 2025, the Department of Justice will be required to electronically approve and retain the records of the purchase or transfer of firearm precursor parts through a vendor. Sena said violations of these AB 879 will be misdemeanors.

"Unfortunately that does not always translate to deterring criminals," she said.

**The dangerous bottom line**

In some ways, ghost guns are a novel development amplifying an existing problem of illegally owned weapons.

"It’s just another avenue for bad things to happen," said John Donohue, an economist and professor at Stanford Law School. Of primary concern is that most of the people buying ghost guns are, for criminal or other reasons, not supposed to have access to guns in the first place.

"The bottom line is, it’s pretty unusual that there’s a really legitimate reason for a ghost gun," Donohue said. With "more gun dealers in the United States than Starbucks and McDonald’s combined," he said it’s fairly easy for a legal buyer to find and purchase an already assembled firearm.

Leishman agreed.

"With no checks and balances, you’re really going to find yourself in a position where the guns are going to get in the wrong hands," he said, adding that the black market is now "saturated" with illegal weapons. "And unfortunately, individuals who are really targeting these types of firearms are the ones that are either prolific or engaging in criminal activity."

Though Sena said law enforcement has made some progress in the last year, he thinks what’s being considered is just the tip of the iceberg.

"When you talk about getting a handle on the situation, I think we have a long way to go," he said. "We have not decided how these firearms are actually still on the street."

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By Sheryl Nonnenberg

What have people been doing to keep calm and sane during the pandemic? Cleaning closets, baking bread, learning a new language?

Karen Kienzle, director of the Palo Alto Art Center, was musing about this over a year ago and thought it might be a good theme for a show. She recruited Ann Trinca, an independent curator, to organize a group exhibition that is now on display. “Creative Attention: Art and Community Restoration” features the multimedia work of 18 artists and, according to the press statement, addresses “practices of mending, healing, restoration, belonging, sustainability and resiliency.” The show is on view until May 21.

Trinca explained that she was contacted in October of 2020 with the idea of an exhibition that would respond to current political events and discord, as well as the impact of the pandemic. “We wanted to incorporate programs, partnerships and installations that would help people cope with distress and suffering,” she said. “We also wanted to celebrate the positive effects of looking at art, learning about others and opening your heart.”

Because she believes that “every artist is a healer,” it was no small task to narrow the scope to just 18 artists. “We researched artists who had previously partnered with their communities or had produced new work in reaction to the pandemic,” she said. It might be expected that a show with such serious themes might be heavy going. That’s not the case here, both because there is an array of media (everything from video to ceramics) but also because the artists were free to express their own take on the subject.

Most of the work is contemporary, often created just last year, but the show opens with four bright, bold and hopeful prints by Corita Kent, dated from the early 1970s. The serigraphs here are typical of her playful abstractions, usually involving calligraphic strokes in primary colors, each with thoughtful quotations by such literary notables as D.H. Lawrence penned at the bottom. They may not be current but they are still relevant and food for thought.

Jeremiah Jenkins is represented by an eye-catching display of ceramic bowls and plates, each a simple form in off-white, that have been embellished with shards of blue and white pottery. These broken pieces are affixed in such a way as to be decorative, as well as a great example of recycling. According to the label statement, the artist is interested in “the way things are made and the way they break.”

Addressing the need for healing during a time of illness is the work of Tucker Nichols. His “Flowers for Sick People” could not be more homespun — small, childlike renderings (done in oil on canvas) of flowers that are displayed with a penciled message on the wall below. The artist started posting the flower drawings on his website and social media in order to “use the everyday language of flowers to soothe everyday suffering with everyday kindness.” Just looking at them will bring a smile.

On a more somber note, Angela Hennessy has created a large-scale wall hanging that is dedicated to her African American ancestors. Made from synthetic hair that has been braided, woven and crocheted, the piece commands attention, both because of its bold black and white contrast but also the laborious nature of its construction. In her label statement, Hennessy, who is an associate professor at California College of the Arts, said that her work “calls upon African and European grief and mourning practices, as well as the significance of hair in racial identity and beauty politics.”

Lynn Beldner, a fabric and fiber artist, has three pieces in the show, including “Emergency Blankets.” This piece consists of nine small squares of flannel fabric in an array of colors and patterns that have been bordered in corresponding colors of satin and hung on the wall. It may be the colors, or the softness of the fabrics, but this piece felt like a comforting hug. The label explains that Beldner made these pieces right after 9/11, “but they still feel emotionally and conceptually necessary.” And, she sagely notes, “emergencies seem to be our new norm.”

A lighter approach has been taken by San Francisco artist Leah Rosenberg with her video piece, “At a Loss for Words.” As the title implies, the piece consists of 10 one-minute videos created to look like silent movies — complete with ragtime soundtrack. In these charming black-and-white vignettes, the artist turns the camera upon herself as she makes tea, sorts a stack of books, plays guitar and ices a cake (to name just a few tasks), all in the comfort of her white pajamas. It’s a fun and clever take on how we have all learned to make the best of isolation by making even the simple tasks meaningful and fun.

When asked why this exhibition is especially timely, given the current pandemic situation, Trinca responded, “I see artists as second-responders, attending to our emotional needs and offering hope. Art can help us relax and slow down and it helps us to connect to other people. My hope for this exhibition is that visitors are deeply affected and have the chance to process complicated emotions.”

The center will host an artist discussion on March 4, a Community Day Celebration on April 10 and is sponsoring weekly virtual meditation sessions, Thursdays at noon through June 30. For more information, visit cityofpaloalto.org.

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CUBAN KITCHEN DUO COOKS UP ‘A MEAL AND TWO MICS’
MOTHER-DAUGHTER TEAM ON OPENING PENINSULA’S ONLY FAST-CASUAL CUBAN EATERY, LAUNCHING PODCAST

By Sara Hayden

ynna Martinez grew up hearing from her parents who'd immigrated from Cuba and Mexico that acceptable career paths included becoming a doctor or a lawyer. Not on that list? Becoming a cook, which was what she really wanted to do.

"Still, I (had) this dream of being the first fast-casual Cuban restaurant in the nation," Martinez says. She studied for a degree in economics while daydreaming about going to culinary school in France and reading about Ray Kroc, the man behind McDonald's.

After a career in banking and being a self-proclaimed soccer mom, Martinez decided to pursue that dream she'd held since high school. Now, Martinez and her daughter Lihl Arrazcaeta run Cuban Kitchen with their small team in San Mateo, drawing customers from across the country. The journey has been filled with twists and turns — which they share with hilarity and heart in their new mother-daughter podcast "A Meal and Two Mics."

"It's never too late, but it's easier to start when you're young," Martinez says with a laugh. "I'm pushing 60, and it would be a lot easier if I were pushing 30."

"Everything works out. We all end up where we're meant to be. This whole journey we've been doing together now, the biggest lesson I've taken away (from it) is your perspective can make or break you," Arrazcaeta says.

What is their perspective? "Really, really optimistic, and looking for the humor in everything." Recently, Martinez and Arrazcaeta caught up with the Peninsula's Cuban Kitchen duo cooks on the Cuban Kitchen website, delightfully accompanied by 'Cafe con Leche' from John Santos and the Machete Ensemble.

A FOOD TRUCK GETS ROLLING

While in New Jersey in 2009, Martinez launched a colorful food truck — actually a converted delivery truck.

At the time, Martinez and Arrazcaeta took their chances with parking tickets amid 20-minute parking limits. Simultaneously running a coffee maker, rice cooker and other appliances would blow out the electricity.

The goal was to secure a brick-and-mortar space, but that didn't pan out in the beginning. One space fell through, another closed after a short stint. Martinez says it closed because it was the wrong place for their business model; Arrazcaeta says it was because she was headed to college.

In any case, it was time for both Martinez and Arrazcaeta to pursue their individual dreams elsewhere.

Arrazcaeta decided to study visual media arts and philosophy animation and motion media, so she set her sights on the West Coast. Martinez thought that sounded good too, so in 2013 they made their move to the Peninsula.

"The reason I moved to San Mateo was the weather. It's that simple," Martinez says. "I was really not having the Northeast. We did that because the money was good coming out of business school."

Getting back into the workforce after her time as a soccer mom was tough, Martinez recalls. "I was happy to get whatever job I could get."

She worked as a finance manager at a dealership in Half Moon Bay, and then sold high-end electronics in Sunnyvale. On the job, someone asked what she would do if she could. The answer: "I'd open my own Cuban restaurant."

FROM ELECTRONICS TO CHIPOTLE

Martinez didn't have the money upfront to start a restaurant, so she started working at Chipotle to get a view of how its fast-casual concept worked. She left her six-figure sales salary and became a crew member at a Chipotle store in 2014.

Soon after, Chipotle recruited Martinez for a restaurateurship program. "That kind of appealed to me because it made good coin," Martinez says. It was a good opportunity — but it wasn't her own restaurant.

As luck would have it, a San Mateo landlord Martinez initially contacted about finding a restaurant space reached out several years later, saying that someone had helped him when he was younger and he wanted to pay it forward. He offered to help with her restaurant's equipment plans, layout, electrical, plumbing, signage and more.

Martinez borrowed enough money from her relatives and the landlord to pay down the first couple of weeks. Then, in 2015, Cuban Kitchen opened in its own brick-and-mortar location.

Within three months I was able to pay the first month of rent," Martinez says.

CUBAN KITCHEN TAKES OFF

In those early days, Martinez pawned her Cartier and Tiffany jewelry from her time as a banker. One of the first customers, who remains one of the restaurant's biggest clients, was a woman that they had babysat for before. They got the support of an angel investor.

Now, customers are drawn to Cuban Kitchen's fast-casual concept and dishes influenced by the Martinez family's Cuban recipes.

"I always had the good fortune of living with home chefs who were not only passionate about cooking and entertaining, but really good home chefs, starting with my dad, my mom. When I went away to college, I lived with my dad's sister in Chicago who was the best cook," Martinez says.

"I was already around people who loved to cook — and cook really well."

The menu touts the "Best" Cubano S'wich with a choice of sauces such as guava-habanero barbecue and mint-mojito dressing; plates of chicken schnitzel-milanese, pulled pork and vaca frita (fried, crispy shredded flank steak); and limited-time specials like arroz con pollo and oxtail stew.

UPPLYING OTHER ENTREPRENEURS

Starting a restaurant was Martinez's idea; making a podcast was Arrazcaeta's. They do both together.

"The podcast was a way for us to share our story," Arrazcaeta says. "It was very sweet to do that with my mom."

Their small business continues to face challenges daily. As it does, Martinez and Arrazcaeta want to use their platform to uplift other female entrepreneurs in the hospitality industry and other industries similar to theirs.

"There are hundreds of thousands of restaurants that didn't survive the last two years. We're fortunate to still be around," Martinez says.

"We're looking to give back to our community because in the last two years we survived because of this local community," Arrazcaeta says.

Sometimes they give back in the form of "compassion projects," using a portion of what they make to support local schools or fundraisers and efforts to stop anti-Asian hate. Lately, giving back has also taken the shape of conversations with other entrepreneurs to discuss permits and licenses, the pandemic and more.

Cuban Kitchen keeps cooking, and Martinez and Arrazcaeta keep their sights set on that first dream of sharing their fast-casual Cuban concept.

"She's probably the most ambitious person that I know. She's a great example of how you can never be too old to pursue your passion," Arrazcaeta says of her mom. "She's always doing what she loves, and always doing it with love. It's really inspiring. That's what I love to see her do in the restaurant with me. That's what inspires me to go to work every day. It's her."

Cuban Kitchen, 3799 S. El Camino Real, San Mateo; 650-627-4636. Instagram: @cubankitchen.

Clockwise from top right: Mother and daughter Lynna Martinez and Lihl Arrazcaeta outside of their restaurant, Cuban Kitchen; guava-cranberry nectar; New York cheesecake drenched in homemade guava purée; the "Best Cubano S'wich; ropa vieja served with rice, Cuban black beans and sweet plantain. Photos courtesy Cuban Kitchen.
Democracy and journalism go hand in hand.

“Wow, thanks for the insights into how truth is under assault. Keep up the good fight — you have my continued support.”

— Wayne S.

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