

PORTOLA VALLEY YOUTH, 17,
in coma after car crash. Page 9

The Almanac

THE HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER FOR MENLO PARK, ATHERTON, PORTOLA VALLEY AND WOODSIDE

AUGUST 16, 2006 www.AlmanacNews.com

| VOL. 41 NO. 50

FAREWELL TO THE CHIEF

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with Woodside fire,
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is retiring

Page 12



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Inside

This week's news, features and community events.

FIRST SHOT

Water safety

Swim instructors, from left, Lauren Kirkpatrick, Sarina Gross, Loree Watanabe and Sergio Callejas demonstrate swim strokes to children participating in the Family Connections program at the Onetta Harris Community Center pool in Menlo Park. In front are barbell floats used in the swim instruction. See story on **Page 20**.



The Almanac/Marjan Sadoughi

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On the cover

Mike Fuge, a firefighter with the Woodside Fire Protection District since he was 19 years old, came up through the ranks, becoming chief in 1992. During his 42-year career, he's battled big fires, championed the county firefighter/paramedic program, and been named Room Mother of the Year by Selby Lane School. Now, he's anticipating a retirement of simple pleasures. Photo by Marjan Sadoughi. Story begins on **Page 12**.

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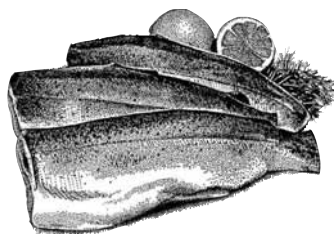
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Fishing for Something Different

One of the quietest yet biggest changes in American eating habits of recent years has been the trend toward fish. One reason is a greater awareness of the potential health benefits of eating fish. Another is the growing abundance of formerly "unknown" varieties of fish at markets and on menus across the country. For example, have you ever heard of ocean catfish, also known as wolf fish? Despite its brutish sounding name, this big, white fish offers up surprisingly tender, even sweet fillets. Alaskan white bass is another mild-tasting newcomer to many American kitchens. With today's improved, super-fast transportation networking, fresh fish from virtually anywhere in the world may be coming soon to a menu near you!

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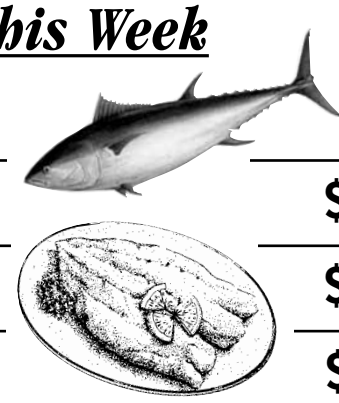
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Fans get Giant reward

It was one heck of a ballgame for Menlo Park resident Alice Kleeman and her 23-year-old daughter Georgia. Georgia entered the “My SF Giants Contest” and won a trip to a game pitched by her “Giant” crush, Noah Lowry. Alice got a chance to sit in the booth during the third inning with her “Giant” crush, announcer Mike Kruczkow.

And there weren't the only ones to get special goodies at the game, Alice says. Her other daughter Lexy, a teacher at Hillview Middle School, caught a foul ball in the fourth inning and Lexy's boyfriend Mike caught one in the eighth inning.

“What are the odds?” says Alice.

Having a Wales of a good time

“It sounds just like a novel. You should write a book,” people tell former Atherton resident Sylvia Nichols Jones when she recounts how she fell in love with Wales — and a Welshman.

So she did. “No, I Live Here” is an autobiographical account of Ms. Jones' visits to Conwy, Wales, in 2001 and 2003. Shortly after arriving in North Wales, she met a local man, Peter Jones, who enjoyed showing her around. Apparently, she enjoyed it too, because the couple is now married and living in Wales.

“I decided to tell our story and to share my enthusiasm for Welsh scenery and history,” says Ms. Jones, who lived in Lloyd Park in Atherton from 1992 to 2001. “No, I Live Here” is both a romance and guidebook, says her friend Louise Sherman of Palo Alto.

The book has not been published in the United States, but is available on line from www.ylofa.com.

*Edited by Andrea Gemmet,
agemmet@almanacnews.com.*

‘Slate politics’ shaping council race

■ Schmidt, two others, change mind about running for council.

By **Rory Brown**
Almanac Staff Writer

Three community activists who had earlier announced they would run for seats on the Menlo Park City Council — including former mayor Steve Schmidt and his wife, Brielle Johnck — have abandoned their plans, citing a mix of disgust and despair associated with behind-the-scenes politics as the reason.

Mr. Schmidt, who in March told the Almanac he planned to run, said he changed his mind because of the political feuding fueled by “slate politics.”

He was referring to an elaborate candidate selection process conducted over the last few weeks by influential figures in

the community opposed to the current, three-person council majority — all of whom are up for re-election this November.

Mr. Schmidt said the goal of the process was to create a “residentialist” slate of candidates that will garner more votes than the current majority, but influential members of the community used the process to get their special interests represented among the approved candidates.

Ms. Johnck took out candidate papers last week after Mr. Schmidt decided not to run. She said Monday, however, that she won't file them, largely because she is also deterred by the behind-the-scenes politics that also prompted Elizabeth Lasensky to change her mind about running.

■ MENLO ELECTION

The deadline for filing papers is Wednesday, August 16, at 5 p.m.

The three would-be candidates are associated with the “residentialists” — effectively a Menlo Park movement whose members generally oppose increased development and traffic.

The group is openly against the current council majority of Nicholas Jellins, Mickie Winkler and Lee Duboc, whose seats are up for re-election this year. Those three members garner more support from business and real estate interests than their council colleagues, Andy Cohen and Kelly Fergusson, who are often supported by the residentialists.

Although only two members of the current majority — council members Winkler and Duboc — are running for re-election,

Transportation Commissioner John Boyle, who said he often agrees with the two incumbents, is also running for a council seat.

Their own slate

Although residentialists are united in their opposition to the current council majority, they have disagreed on who, within in their own group, should be on the ballot.

Two residentialist groups have formed — a group that includes former Menlo Park mayors and current council members Fergusson and Cohen, and a group of anti-development residents — to whittle down the list of residentialists on the ballot.

The groups forged a compromise to support a slate of just three candidates so votes cast in opposi-

See **VOTE**, page 8



Dawn Naso, Artisan Shop co-chairman, shows handmade quilts by California artists that are featured in the new shop at Allied Arts Guild.

The Almanac/Marjan Sadoughi

Auxiliary opens Artisan Shop at Allied Arts Guild

By **Jane Knoerle**
Almanac Lifestyles Editor

The opening of the Artisan Shop at Allied Arts Guild is another step in returning the historic site to the vision of its founders, Delight and Garfield Merner.

When the Merners created the Menlo Park showplace almost 80 years ago, it was their dream to develop a setting where artists and craftsmen could work in a creative

atmosphere. The Spanish Colonial buildings and lush gardens were inspired by the Merners' visits to Granada, Spain.

The new Artisan Shop is operated by volunteers of the Woodside-Atherton Auxiliary, which owns the Guild. It features many hand-made, one-of-a-kind items, and is located in the Court of the Potters, which housed the original potters who worked at the Guild.

The building across the way was the stu-

dio of famed photographer Ansel Adams. Outside the shop's doors are frescoes by Maxine Albro, a student of Diego Rivera.

The Court of the Potter also includes a gallery operated by the Menlo Art League. The Portola Gallery, formerly located at the Portola Valley Town Center, is also opening soon in the Allied Arts Guild complex. It will display the works of seven painters and

See **ARTISAN**, page 21



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Atherton man wins \$4.1 million at World Series of Poker in Vegas

The saying “you have to spend money to make money” certainly applies to Atherton resident Michael Binger.

Mr. Binger finished third in the No-Limit Texas Hold'em Main Event at the World Series of Poker in Las Vegas, taking home about \$4.1 million.

Mr. Binger has a Ph.D. in particle physics from Stanford University, and has lived in Atherton

since 2000, the Associated Press reported.

He outlasted all but two of the 8,773 players who paid the \$10,000 entry fee to play in the event.

He was knocked out of the event by the eventual winner, Jamie Gold of Mailbu, who won the \$12 million grand prize.

Mr. Binger could not be reached for comment.

— Rory Brown

Happy trails ahead for PV schools' Ryder

By Marjorie Mader

Almanac Staff Writer

When Mary Ann Anderson Ryder retired last month, the Portola Valley School District lost not only its capable and cheerful administrative assistant, but also the district's official poet laureate.

Before her departure, she penned: “I feel compelled to compose a rhyme After all, 22 years is a mighty long time I couldn't end this long a run Without having some poetic fun.”

She went on for seven more stanzas.

“When I was hired in 1984, I had no idea of what was in store,” said the former teacher at Nueva School in Hillsborough. She made a smooth transition from the classroom to administration, providing support to four superintendents, and recording minutes for more than 400 school board meetings.

“Mary Ann has been a guiding and nurturing presence to generations of Portola Valley teachers, having participated in hiring every single teacher (except one) and administrator currently working in the district,” said Portola Valley trustees in their resolution honoring her. “She has always kept the interests of the children at the forefront.”

They added, “Mary Ann's wit, wisdom, guidance and sparkle will be sorely missed.”

For more than two decades, Ms. Anderson Ryder has been the welcoming person greeting parents, visitors and prospective teachers in the district office, which moved from an original classroom at Corte Madera to a portable building during the era of construction and, finally, to the district office's new digs at Corte Madera, complete with “indoor plumbing.”

Her parting gift to the district was compiling its history during the past 22 years in a book and presenting it to trustees at her final board meeting. She included articles and photos about the early community productions, parcel-tax and bond elections, changes in leadership and achievements of the schools, teachers and students.

The trustees' wishes for “wonderful adventures and much joy” in her retirement already are being fulfilled.



The Almanac/Marjorie Mader

Mary Ann Anderson Ryder says “Thanks for the Memory” after 22 years as the administrative assistant to superintendents in the Portola Valley School District.

She's the lucky winner of a trip for two to Asia — anywhere Japan Air Lines flies.

“I bought a \$10 raffle ticket at the International House's annual spring fair in Berkeley to show support for I House, where my daughter works, and then forgot about it,” she says. “I couldn't believe I actually won.”

She and her husband, Marc Ryder, are poring over travel books and maps as they plan their Asian tour, probably in October. The only stipulation is that Tokyo must be the first stop.

To keep busy, they are remodeling their home in Cupertino, enjoying a more leisurely pace and babysitting the grandchildren. ■

Atherton incumbents face no opposition

With Atherton's three City Council incumbents facing no opposition in November, the council may decide to cancel the election.

Councilmen Alan Carlson, Charles Marsala and Jerry Carlson all filed to run for the three

■ ELECTION 2006

available four-year terms. At the Wednesday, August 16 meeting, the council agenda calls for a discussion of appointing the three incumbents or going

ahead with the general municipal election on November 7.

The only chance for a contested Atherton City Council election is if a write-in candidate emerges. The filing period for write-in candidates runs from September 11 to October 24.

REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Gloria Darke



How to buffer heated negotiations

Q. Can't we sell our house on our own and save money by not paying commission?

— M.N.

A. Yes, it is possible. Keep this fact in mind. Only 15% of real estate sales occur without the services of a real estate professional. Consider this practice in mind. There is a very good reason why many seasoned realty professionals often have another Realtor represent them in their own transactions—gladly paying a justly earned commission. The reason is simple. When inexperienced property sellers

or buyers represent themselves, they can become unnecessarily emotional during the heat of tough negotiations. When push comes to shove, in the heat of a battle, runaway emotions can lead to a poorly drafted agreement, unsatisfactory terms and conditions or worse yet, a blown sale.

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County may vote on eSlate machines in November election

By Marion Softky
Almanac Staff Writer

Next November 7, San Mateo County voters — at least those who still like to cast a ballot at a precinct — will confront new state-of-the-art dial-up, electronic voting machines.

The Board of Supervisors is expected to approve on August 15 the purchase of 2,100 eSlate voting machines from Hart InterCivic of Austin, Texas.

The eSlate voting system complies with new federal and state laws, serves voters who have different abilities and languages, and provides a verifiable paper trail, said Chief Elections Officer Warren Slocum. “It’s the only unit in the marketplace that meets all needs.”

The new electronic voting system will cost \$10.5 million. The federal and state governments will provide \$4.5 million each, with the county making up the rest. Since 1992, the election department has saved up \$900,000, Mr. Slocum said. He expects the new system to save the county \$1.2 million over four years.

Hard choice

“This was a very hard decision, said Mr. Slocum at an August 8 briefing in Redwood City.

San Mateo County has a history of getting early and accurate returns in its elections; over the years it has been one of the first California counties to produce results in national elections.

From the 1960s until 1992, the massive Shoup voting machines were fast and accurate. The election building at Tower Road was built to house the 800-pound machines, Mr. Slocum said; 1,537 of them were sold for scrap

in 1992 for \$70,000.

While the “Eagle” optical-scanning machines — which the county has used from 1992 through June of this year — have been very popular, Mr. Slocum gave several reasons to replace them before November.

The Eagle machines do not meet new federal and state requirements for serving people with disabilities, Mr. Slocum said. They are also getting old, and the county no longer has a maintenance contract. Plus, they make elections very complex and use huge amounts of paper.

In June, for example, voter turnout was less than 37 percent, and more than half of county voters voted absentee, said Election Manager David Tom. But even though about 18 percent of voters actually voted at one of 472 precincts, the county was required to provide paper ballots for 75 percent of the registered voters at each precinct — including different ballots for different communities in three languages.

“The cost of printing ballots we couldn’t use was \$175,000,” said Mr. Tom. “18 percent of voters actually showed up, so guess what? Almost 60 percent of the ballots we ordered had to be destroyed.”

New voting experience.

The new eSlate machines don’t use touch-screen technology. You dial in your vote on a wheel a little like an iPod. It is easy to change your vote if you make a mistake. And you get another chance to check — and to change — the paper ballot that is recorded along with your vote.

There will be three-to-five eSlate machines in each of the county’s 480 precincts next November. One of these will

candidates to do so.

Both incumbents are part of a three-member council majority that includes Mayor Nicholas Jellins. The three council members vote together on major issues and all of their seats are up for re-election.

Mayor Jellins will not seek another term.

The three council members were elected in 2002.

Although Mr. Boyle has not explicitly aligned himself with Ms. Winkler and Ms. Duboc, he said he often agrees with their decisions, and some of the current



The Almanac/Marjan Sadoughi

Jerry Carlson, an Atherton councilman, takes the new eSlate electronic voting machine for a spin. He tried out one especially designed for people with disabilities during a recent demo by San Mateo County officials.

be a special machine for people with disabilities.

That special eSlate machine is built lower to accommodate wheel chairs; it has earphones and Braille for people who can’t see well; and easy jelly switches for people who can’t manipulate the dial. There’s even a “sip-and-puff” device for quadriplegic voters.

“For the first time, people with disabilities can vote privately and independently — like everybody else,” said Mr. Slocum.

Atherton Councilman Jerry Carlson checked the machine out using earphones; he gave it a good grade. “The verbal prompt was really very good,” he said.

Before deciding on eSlate, the county researched all four voting machines on the market, Mr. Slocum said. It worked with the Commission on Disabilities and checked the machines out at six Universal Voting Centers for the June election.

The next step is to train the

county staff, the 2,200 poll workers, and the public to use the unfamiliar machine. Classes will be going on from now to November, and Mr. Slocum promised to provide demonstrations at meetings, street fairs, and other events.

“It will still be accurate; it will still be quick,” he promised.

To learn more or arrange a demonstration, call 363-1884, or e-mail: vote2006@smcare.org with a request. More information is available on shapethefuture.org. ■

Groups to protest new voting machines

While the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors seems poised to approve eSlate voting machines August 15, some people oppose the plan, arguing that the machines have not yet been determined to be secure.

Open Voting Consortium spokesman Brent Turner said that conversations he’s had with board members have convinced him that they haven’t thoroughly investigated the reliability of the

new machines, or the electronic voting system in general.

He said that his organization would protest the hearing tomorrow along with the Raging Grannies, a local activist organization, at 8:30 a.m. at 400 County Center (corner of Bradford Street and Hamilton Avenue) in Redwood City. A hearing will be held for public comments, starting at around 9 a.m.

He called the argument that the

new system will save paper a “red herring,” and contested the idea that the current system doesn’t serve the disabled well. Instead, Mr. Turner cited “clerk convenience” as the main reason for the new system.

Mr. Turner is urging the board to wait until it learns more about the system’s accuracy, and until both the state and national legislatures review pending legislation to make the system more transparent.

Winkler, Duboc to seek re-election

■ Incumbents join John Boyle as only candidates to file papers.

By Rory Brown
Almanac Staff Writer

Incumbents Mickie Winkler and Lee Duboc have publicly announced they will seek re-election.

Both council members have filed their candidate papers, joining Transportation Commissioner John Boyle as the only

majority’s political opponents have speculated that the three candidates will run as a slate.

Opposing candidates

Three other candidates have taken out candidate papers, but have yet to file them as of 1 p.m., August 14.

The deadline to file candidate papers is August 16.

The candidates are parks commissioners Richard Cline and Heyward Robinson and Linfield Oaks resident Vincent Bressler.

For election news updates, check AlmanacNews.com. ■

VOTE

continued from page 5

tion to the current majority aren’t diluted among four or more candidates, according to Mr. Schmidt.

Parks and recreation commissioners Richard Cline and Heyward Robinson, and Linfield Oaks resident Vincent Bressler, won the groups’ support.

Mr. Schmidt was rejected as a slate candidate largely because he isn’t staunchly opposed to further development in Menlo Park, he said.

“It’s no longer about picking the best candidate,” he said. “It’s evolved into this calculation — a

balancing act. That really disappointed me.”

“You just can’t fight the slate politics,” said Ms. Johnck. “Candidates have been chosen and blessed, and that’s that.”

Bayfront Park advocate Ms. Lasensky, who announced in April she intended to run for council, said she failed to garner support from the two groups, which partially led to her decision not to run.

“It was clear that I had very little support from these groups, and if I ran, I was going to be labeled a spoiler,” she said. “This is slate politics — you can’t just run as an individual in this city.” ■

Menlo native, 25, killed in crash

■ Driver arrested on suspicion of drunken driving in Santa Barbara accident.

Alexander James Baer, 25, who was born and raised in Menlo Park, was killed early Sunday morning, August 7, in a head-on auto crash in Santa Barbara, where he was a student.

Mr. Baer, who moved from Menlo Park to Santa Barbara six years ago, was a passenger in a

See obituary on Alexander James Baer on **Page 20**.

Ford Focus driven by Jessica Rose Binkerd, 22, of Santa Barbara.

The car crashed into another car on Highway 154, authorities said. Mr. Baer was pronounced dead at the scene about 2 a.m.

Sunday. Ms. Binkerd was arrested on suspicion of drunken driving, police said.

A Mass to celebrate his life was held Monday at the Church of the Nativity, 210 Oak Grove Ave. in Menlo Park.

Mr. Baer, who was a senior at the University of California at Santa Barbara, attended Nativity, Ladera and Hillview schools in Menlo Park.

Portola Valley youth in coma after crash

A 17-year-old Portola Valley boy is in Stanford Hospital in critical condition after the 2001 Mitsubishi Eclipse he was riding in overturned at about 2:45 a.m. Saturday morning, August 12, on Portola Road near Old La Honda Road in Woodside, said Lt. Ken Jones of the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office.

The driver of the car, Portola Valley resident Justin Hughes, 18, suffered a broken ankle and a broken wrist from the accident, Lt. Jones said. The passenger, whose name was not released because he

is a juvenile, had "severe neurological damage (and) internal injuries" and was in an induced coma, Lt. Jones said.

Mr. Hughes managed to extract himself and call in the accident, Lt. Jones said. Medics from the Woodside Fire Protection District found the passenger unconscious inside the car, which was lying on to its roof in a dry creek bed. Both the driver and the passenger were wearing seat belts, Lt. Jones said.

In recalling the incident, Lt. Jones said that Mr. Hughes told

him that he had just left a party where he had been drinking, that he was traveling at about 70 mph, and that they were headed to Menlo Park when he lost control of the car on a curve and overturned in a culvert. The speed limit in that section of Portola Road is 40 mph.

A test for alcohol in Mr. Hughes' blood is in progress. If the test comes back with a blood-alcohol level higher than the legal limit of 0.08 percent, charges for felony drunken driving could be filed, Lt. Jones said.

'No contest' plea in fatal bike accident

The Colorado driver whose car killed bicyclist and Menlo Park teacher Michelle Mazzei, 34, last fall has pleaded no contest to misdemeanor vehicular manslaughter.

Theodore Charles Thornborough, 69, appeared in court in Redwood City on Friday, August 11, and entered his plea. By doing so, he avoids a jury trial.

The charge, misdemeanor vehicular manslaughter with-

Teachers organize bike ride in memory of Michelle Mazzei. **Page 18**

out gross negligence, carries a penalty of up to one year in county jail.

On October 2, 2005 Mr. Thornborough was driving on westbound Woodside Road near the on-ramp to northbound Interstate 280 when his Mercedes veered into the bicycle

lane and struck Ms. Mazzei, who died of her injuries.

Mr. Thornborough is set to appear again before Commissioner Kathleen McKenna on October 10 for sentencing.

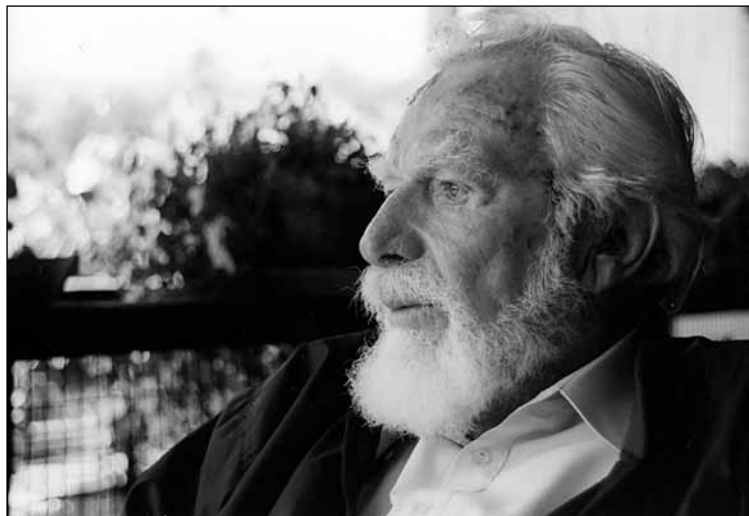
Ms. Mazzei was a popular fourth-grade teacher at Oak Knoll School in Menlo Park. She was taking a Sunday morning bike ride along a route on Woodside Road that she had ridden many times before.

Litton inducted into whitewater hall of fame

Wild rivers have been with us since the beginning, but preserving such rivers for their scenic and recreational values, and running them in rafts, canoes and kayaks did not catch on until the 20th century.

In honor of Portola Valley resident Martin Litton's early roles in both protecting and navigating such rivers, Mr. Litton has been named as one of six new 2006 inductees to the International Whitewater Hall of Fame in McHenry, Maryland.

Among the accomplishments that led to Mr. Litton's induction include helping to block construction of several dams in western states in the 1950s and 1960s, and running rafting trips on the Colorado, Snake, Salmon, Grande Rhonde, Owyee and Green rivers from the 1970s



Martin Litton is honored for his early role in protecting and navigating wild rivers.

through the 1990s.

During this time, Mr. Litton also produced an 85-minute film on the Grand Canyon and lectured widely about the

then-little-known beauty of the canyon at river level. He celebrated his 80th birthday by rowing a dory 277 miles through the Grand Canyon.

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New cleanup efforts at contaminated site

■ Public comment sought on Tyco cleanup.

Public comment is sought on efforts to decontaminate soil and groundwater at the Tyco Electronics Corp. site in Menlo Park.

Studies conducted in 1989 and 2003 revealed contaminated soil and ground water beneath the Tyco site, located in the city's industrial zone at 300 Bohannon Dr.

The contamination is largely due to the long-time manufacturing of plastics and electrical insulation products at the site, according to the California Department of Toxic Substances Control.

Although more than 5,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil have been removed from the site since 2000, and a cap was constructed to contain further contamination, long-term measures are necessary to decrease health risks to humans and animals, according to the state agency.

The state is recommending the installation of five wells near the capped area of the site to monitor the soil and groundwater, periodic inspections of the cap, and restricting future use of the site to commercial and/or industrial purposes only.

Comments on the cleanup process can be e-mailed to wchui@dtsc.ca.gov. Comments must be sent by September 11.

For more information, call the Department of Toxic Substances Control at (510) 540-3910.

Ruskin to discuss disaster preparedness

State Assemblyman Ira Ruskin, D-Redwood City, is scheduled to lead a discussion on legislative issues pertaining

■ MENLO BRIEFS

to disaster preparedness.

The discussion is scheduled for Saturday, August 19, from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., in the Menlo Park council chambers at the Civic Center, between Laurel and Alma streets.

Mr. Ruskin is a member of the joint legislative committee on emergency preparedness.

Chamber seeks nominees for Golden Acorn Awards

The 34th annual Golden Acorn Awards banquet will be held Thursday, September 21, at the Stanford Park Hotel. The Menlo Park Chamber of Commerce, which sponsors the event, is looking for nominations for two individuals, one firm, and one nonprofit organization to be honored at the banquet.

Categories include: educator/public service (individual), community service (individual), business excellence, and a nonprofit organization.

Those nominated should have made significant contributions to or a major impact on Menlo Park. Nomination forms are available at the Chamber of Commerce office at 1100 Merrill St. in Menlo Park.

Candidates seminar on the computer

Candidates for election and others who want to learn about the mechanics of running for office can get a free audio file of a "Candidate Seminar" at the San Mateo County Elections Office Web site, www.shapethefuture.org. You can hear the 90-minute seminar by clicking the "Candidate Seminar" link at www.shapethefuture.org.



Woodside Town Manager Susan George lights a statement of the town's debt on August 2 at a small "Burn the Mortgage" party.

The Almanac/Marjan Sadoughi

Burn, baby, burn: Debt paid off

The town of Woodside, unlike most of us, is debt-free.

Town Manager Susan George said Woodside had racked up more than \$4.5 million in short- and long-term debt by the time she was hired in 1993.

The debt was thanks to two major projects — building the Town Hall complex and buying property for the parking district — as well as poor bookkeeping and a "What do you mean we're out of money,

■ WOODSIDE

we still have checks left!" mentality, she said.

The town has been paying it off ever since, to the tune of \$243,000 a year.

The Woodside Town Council recently voted to use \$1.9 million in cash reserves to pay off early the remainder of the debt. Town officials and staff celebrated on August 2, the day the check cleared, with cham-

pagne and a very small bonfire at a "Burn the Mortgage" party held behind town hall.

She said clearing the debt has been a team effort, and thanked council members for their strong commitment to sound financial management.

"It's a real good feeling," Ms. George said as she watched the document smolder.

Councilman Paul Goeld quipped that the \$1.9 million was "more than some of our citizens spend on wine in a year."

Sheriff in race for health-care district board

By Renee Batti

Almanac News Editor

Sheriff Don Horsley will be on San Mateo County's ballot this November, but not as a candidate for the post he's held for the last 13 years. Instead, he's running against three incumbents for a spot on the Sequoia Healthcare District board.

The filing period for the race closed August 11. Incumbents Art Faro, Jack Hickey and John Oblak also qualified to run for the three open seats on the five-member board, which co-owns and helps to oversee Sequoia Hospital in Redwood City.

■ ELECTION 2006

The entry of Mr. Horsley into the race is seen as a major threat to board member Hickey, a Libertarian who for years regularly ran for public office — then stunned local political observers by finally winning a race four years ago. He is now completing his first and only term of public office as a member of the Sequoia board.

When he ran for the board in 2002, Mr. Hickey said his goal was to dissolve the district, which taxes property owners in Menlo Park, Atherton, Portola Valley, Woodside, Redwood City, San Carlos and Belmont.

Mr. Horsley said he was asked to run for the board by someone affiliated with the district. He's hoping to unseat Mr. Hickey, whom he calls "a character" but criticizes as "disruptive of the process."

"Jack is opposed to pretty much everything," Mr. Horsley said, referring to Mr. Hickey's record of being the only "no" vote on most significant decisions made by the board.

Mr. Hickey is strongly opposed to a number of standard practices of the board, such as awarding nonprofit health groups in the county, in addition to Sequoia Hospital, millions of dollars in grants in support of their programs. "I've always advocated private philanthropy" and opposed the use of public money for support of nonprofit groups, he said.

Mr. Horsley will be leaving his post as sheriff at the end of the year, and will be succeeded by Undersheriff Greg Munks. But he said he was interested in remaining in public office, in service to a hospital that "has benefited the community for many years."

Art Faro, the former CEO of Sequoia Hospital, is running for his third term on the board. John Oblak, president of Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, was appointed to a two-year board term in late 2002 by the county Board of Supervisors. ■

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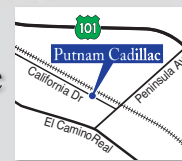


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Woodside fire Chief Mike Fuge describes the noisy diesel pumps that cost him some of his hearing.

Photos by Marjan Sadoughi

Farewell to the Chief

MIKE FUGE

When 19-year-old Mike Fuge set out to get hired by the Woodside Fire Protection District in 1964, two things helped clinch the deal for him, he says — he lived within a five-minute drive of the fire station, and he had good penmanship.

Living nearby was mandatory, since firefighters spent every other day off on call by the telephone. The nice handwriting was a bonus, since firefighters recorded all their calls by hand in the logbook, and the chief at the time, John Volpiano, was a stickler for good penmanship, Chief Fuge says.

Forty-two years later, after working his way up through the ranks to become chief in 1992, he has one key piece of advice for his colleagues after he retires on August 31: “Keep using the logbook. I told the guys, ‘Don’t ever lose that.’”

Sure, the fire station has computerized records, but there’s something about those thick stacks of leather-bound logs that tell the story of the fire district in a way that no print-out ever could.

“Every now and then families come in and want to look through the logbooks and see what

calls their granddad went on,” Chief Fuge says.

In a profession that’s fiercely attached to its traditions, firefighters also have to constantly adapt and upgrade their skills as technology, science and medicine evolve. This dichotomy is very apparent at the Woodside fire district, which is often among the first to embrace new life-saving technologies and other innovations, but where firefighters also hold on fiercely to the customs that make the job more of a way of life than just a profession.

Fires make up just a small fraction of the calls these days, and since the events of 9/11, firefighters have had to learn how to respond to all kinds of threats, including weapons of mass destruction.

When he joined Woodside fire, CPR was just starting to be used, Chief Fuge says.

By the time he became chief, firefighters had emergency medical technician training, and under his leadership, Woodside became one of the first departments in the county to staff every fire engine with a firefighter/paramedic. Now, about 60 percent of their calls are for emergency medical help, and the

district runs an ambulance out if its main station, Chief Fuge says.

The firefighter/paramedics were usually the first emergency personnel to arrive at calls, and in 1999, San Mateo County adopted the system countywide, working out a deal with the AMR ambulance company and other fire departments.

“Paramedics were probably the biggest achievement for the district, because of its location. That was a real problem, waiting for an ambulance and for paramedics to get here,” he says.

Having firefighter/paramedics take the emergency calls cut response times, especially for people in the more remote areas of the Woodside fire district, which covers Woodside, Portola Valley and adjacent unincorporated areas like Los Trancos Woods and Emerald Hills.

“He was instrumental in getting the paramedic program up and running,” says Capt. Kevin Bianchini, a 25-year Woodside firefighter.

Peter Berger, an 18-year member of the district’s board of directors, credits Chief

By Andrea Gemmet

Fuge with a long list of accomplishments during his tenure: numerous public education programs; the Citizens Emergency Response and Preparedness Program, or CERPP; the annual flu shot clinic; building the new station 19 in Emerald Hills; the multi-agency wildland fire drills; and getting emergency generators for Woodside and Portola Valley's town halls.

"We have one of the most knowledgeable and best wildland fire forces around," he says.

It wasn't always that way. When a huge wildfire struck the Arastradero Road area in the early 1980s, firefighters from San Mateo and Santa Clara counties discovered that they couldn't even communicate with each other while they were battling the blaze, Chief Fuge says.

"We have this huge fire going on with 13 homes burning, and we've got two independent operations going on because there is no coordination between the Santa Clara County and the San Mateo County units," Chief Fuge recalls. "It really showed us our serious weaknesses, so the two counties got together, and we started developing wildland training exercises that got huge."

As a result, the two counties developed an annual wildland fire drill that kept growing in popularity. Chief Fuge, then a battalion chief and training officer, represented San Mateo County agencies in organizing the drills. At its peak, as many as 55 agencies participated in the three-day exercise, Chief Fuge says. Other fire departments came for the training — and the catered Cajun food — and Woodside benefited by learning how to move large volumes of resources, he says.

"After the Oakland hills fire, they invited us to come over and work with them so they could learn how to do the same type of thing," Chief Fuge says. "We felt it was kind of an honor that there was this recognition of the training program that we developed."

Proof of the program's success came when a wildfire broke out near downtown Woodside on Albion Avenue in August 2002.

The blaze, sparked by a eucalyptus branch falling on power lines, burned more than 10 acres and several outbuildings, and embers

caused a roof fire about a mile away.

The fire was the biggest in the county since the automatic deployment plan went into effect in 1999, Chief Fuge says, and it showed how effectively it worked.

Originally designed to respond to medical calls as part of the county paramedic agreement, it is also used for fire suppression. County dispatchers will automatically deploy the nearest fire engine to an emergency, regardless of jurisdiction, throughout San Mateo County.

Chief Fuge called at the Albion fire "the low point and the high point" of his career.

"I thought, 'This is the one we've been dreading,' and that was the low point," he says. "And the high point was, a lady lost her roof, but that was it. The success was incredible. I felt so good, I don't think I slept for two days, I was so happy."

When Chief Fuge was appointed successor to Chief Art Kitto in 1992, he took over a highly regarded department that was one of the best in the region, if not the state, Mr. Berger says.

"Mike said he knew that a pretty high bar had been set for him, and within months he'd reached that bar and surpassed it," he says.

"He's determined when he wants to get things done, but he's very articulate when he wants to be convincing," Mr. Berger says. "As the chief, he's more of a leader than a manager."

Battalion Chief Rick Lombardo, who joined Woodside fire in 1975, credits Chief Fuge with putting a renewed focus on



Chief Fuge (in white shirt) is surrounded by firefighters from San Carlos, Belmont, Redwood City and Foster City during an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training session in Woodside. Local firefighters get to know each other well, because they train together and often work together at emergency calls, thanks to mutual aid agreements.

community spirit, whether rescuing the proverbial cat-stuck-in-a-tree or throwing the annual holiday open house. Another key accomplishment was creating a wellness program for firefighters, he says.

About 10 years ago, an off-duty firefighter died of a heart attack, Mr. Lombardo says. "That really bugged Mike, and he always wanted to do something to change that."

Now, instead of a battered collection of free weights, the fire station's training room holds a rainbow array of giant gymnastic balls, as well as more sophisticated equipment, and personal trainers come in regularly to coach firefighters on nutrition and training regimens.

Chief Fuge says when he started to suffer from asthma a few years ago, he was so impressed with his improvement after working with a local personal trainer that he brought her in to work with all the other firefighters.

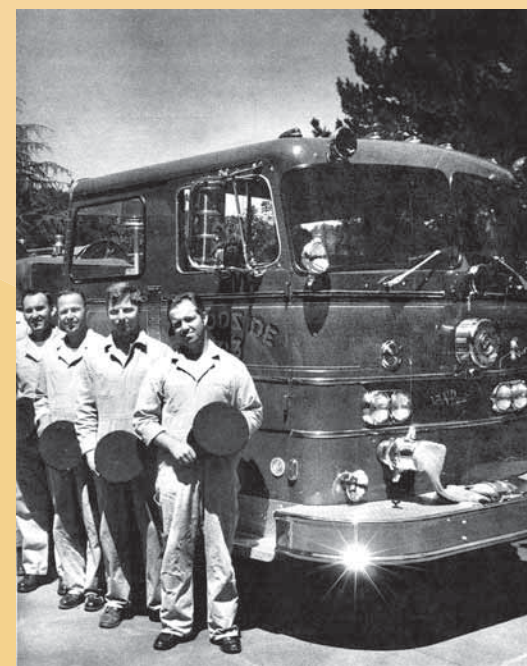
Back when he started out, firefighters were a lot more careless with their health, Chief Fuge says. Everybody smoked cigarettes, nobody thought about ear-protection while running noisy equipment, and inhaling smoke was preferable to using the cumbersome — and uncool — air tanks, he says.

As a result, firefighters tended to not live long enough to enjoy their retirements.

When asked if he keeps in contact with any of the firefighters he worked with when he first started, Chief

Fuge had to admit that most of them were dead.

"That's the sad part, a lot of them died young because their lungs were shot," he says.



In this 1970 photo, Mike Fuge (at the head of the line) poses with his Woodside fire colleagues. Back then, firefighters wore coveralls during the day while they cleaned fire engines, the station and the equipment, and didn't put on their uniforms until 5 p.m., he says.

Things are different now. Not only have there been dramatic improvements in safety equipment, but its use is no longer optional.

"He was very progressive, a lot more progressive than his predecessors," says Ron Puccinelli who retired last year after 48 years with Woodside fire. He recalls meeting Chief Fuge as "a young kid."

"My first impression of him was that he



Brotherly love: Capt. Dan Abrams of the Redwood City Fire Department wrestles Chief Fuge into a hug during a break in an EMT training session for county firefighters.

See **MIKE FUGE**, page 14

Fire chief worked his way up through ranks

cover story



A brass bell is passed among members of the San Mateo County Fire Chiefs Association, honoring the chief who has served the longest. When Chief Fuge retires at the end of the month, the bell will leave Woodside and go to Colma.

MIKE FUGE

continued from page 13

was definitely a people-person," Mr. Puccinelli says. "He's a great family man; his family has always been his pride and joy."

Of course, that doesn't mean he didn't occasionally goof off. "We've had a lot of good times together," Mr. Puccinelli says.

He recalls one time in the late 1960s when the young firefighter was on call and supposed to stay next to his telephone.

"We stretched the rules a little bit," Mr. Puccinelli says. "We were over on the coast and Mike ended up saving somebody's life — a person was drowning in the surf. It got written up in the newspaper, and when the chief saw it, he looked up (Mike's) days off. I don't think he ever got in trouble for it, though."

Mr. Puccinelli says that once Chief Fuge

retires, he is looking forward to going on more off-road jeeping trips and convening the regular officers' meetings in a local coffee shop instead of at the fire station.

As for Chief Fuge himself, he says one of the downsides of being a chief has been working a regular Monday-through-Friday schedule.

"When you're on shift, it creates some problems, but there are also a lot of ben-



efits," he says. "I was really involved with my kids when they were going to school. I was the first man to be awarded Room Mother of the Year at Selby Lane School."

And the bond that forms between firefighters on the same shift, who train together, eat together, live together and fight fires together, can't be broken, he says.

"It really is a lifetime relationship, and that's the part I just loved," Chief Fuge says. "They call it the brotherhood, and it's really true."

Those bonds extend to firefighters from all over the world that he's met, says Chief Fuge. One of his best friends is an Australian firefighter he met at the biennial World Police and Fire Games in 1987. Chief Fuge, who competes in archery, says they call each other weekly and already have plans to meet up at next year's games in Adelaide, Australia.

There's another reason they call it the brotherhood: Just like siblings, firefighters tease each other, and give each other nicknames, some of which can't be printed in a family newspaper.

Chief Fuge got plenty of ribbing for his short stature, Mr. Lombardo says.

"We used to use him for getting into tight spots," he says. "A lot of those big estates had basements or attics with very low ceilings."

Despite his height, when he retires, Chief Fuge is leaving some big shoes to fill, Mr. Lombardo says.

Woodside Battalion Chief Armando Muela, who heads the district's emergency medical services, will become the new chief.

Chief Fuge says he's looking forward to enjoying some of life's simpler pleasures, things he hasn't had time for since becoming chief, like washing his car, doing yard



A curio cabinet filled with replica fire engines and fire stations is the centerpiece of Chief Fuge's office. Chief Fuge is reflected in the cabinet's mirror and glass door.

work, and strolling down every aisle when he goes to Costco. Of course, there are his three children and grandchildren to spend time with, his favorite archery course at Huddart Park beckons, and he has hunting trips planned with retired Woodside Battalion Chief Bob Nahmens.

But there will still be a fire-fighting Fuge in San Mateo County. One of Chief Fuge's two sons is a firefighter with the Central County Fire Department.

"That's my connection, so it makes it a little bit easier to retire, knowing that I'll be able to visit his department and get involved in what they do," he says. ▀

More elbow room in store at new Emerald Hills station

Woodside firefighters in Emerald Hills are going to have a bigger, better fire station soon. With a target completion date of September 15, Woodside Fire Protection District's new station 19 at the corner of Wilmington Way and Jefferson Avenue will replace the much smaller station on California Way.

Besides giving the station's female firefighters some privacy with separate bedrooms and bathrooms, it provides a community meeting room, something that is sorely needed, said Chief Mike Fuge.

The district's fire marshal, fire prevention unit and CERPP training (disaster training for residents) will relocate to the Emerald Hills station, he said, solving a space-crunch in the main Woodside Road station.

The station project was seven years in the making, in part because the property was tied up in an eminent-domain lawsuit over its value. Once ground was finally broken, construction was delayed by this year's lengthy rainy season. Chief Fuge said he's promised to attend the celebration when the station is finally completed.



Woodside fire's new station is nearing completion.

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Cingular Wireless again denied antenna permit

Cingular Wireless will have to go to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors to seek approval to raise an antenna tower at a Menlo Park fire station by 11 inches.

The San Mateo County Planning Commission presented factual findings at its August 9 meeting, backing up its decision to deny a permit for the tower. Several neighbors objected to it, questioning the need for the tower, its aesthetic qualities, and their risk for the effects of radiation.

The Planning Commission

agreed with the neighbors' concerns, voting 4-1 against the permit in the first meeting. The vote went 3-1 in the second meeting as one of the commissioners was absent, said County Contract Planner Kevin Guy.

The permit would have allowed Cingular to extend the 59-foot, 8-inch communication tower and antennas to 71 feet at the fire station at 3322 Alameda de las Pulgas.

Cingular has until August 23 to appeal the decision to the Board of Supervisors.

Four local special districts under review by LAFCO

By Marion Softky

Almanac Staff Writer

Next week, a low-profile but powerful government agency will review the operations and services of four obscure special districts that provide services to local communities.

The Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) will hold a public hearing Wednesday, August 16, at 2:30 p.m. to review services and sphere of influence for the San Mateo County Harbor District, the San Mateo County Resource Conservation District, the Skyline County Water District, and the Los Trancos County Water District.

The meeting will be held in the Board of Supervisors Chambers at 400 County Center, at the corner of Hamilton and Bradford streets in Redwood City.

Formed in 1963, LAFCO oversees changes of boundaries and services of government agencies. Its mission is to prevent urban sprawl and promote efficient and orderly growth of urban services.

A major question before LAFCO will be the future sphere of influence of the Los Trancos County Water District. The tiny government agency provided water to 278 customers in the rural communities of Los Trancos Woods, Vista Verde,

and Blue Oaks in Portola Valley, until April 2005, when it sold its water system to the California Water Service Co.

In May, LAFCO reviewed the services provided by the district, and suggested it consider dissolving, since it collects taxes, and no longer provides water. On the agenda for August 16 is a decision on the sphere of influence. This has been zero since 1985 because LAFCO believes other agencies could perform its services.

David Smernoff, president of the water board, said he hopes LAFCO will give the district a sphere of influence corresponding to the area it serves. He noted the district provides very local services, such as water conservation, emergency preparedness, and management of half a dozen acres and two small lakes. "We think we have valuable services to provide," he said. "We are very efficient and very local."

Martha Poyatos, executive officer for LAFCO, noted that even a zero sphere of influence does not cause the agency to dissolve. There has to be an application for dissolution filed by either a public agency, voters, or property owners within the district, she said.

For information and staff reports, go to www.sanmateo-lafco.org. ■

Free repairs for low-income homes

Rebuilding Together Peninsula is now accepting applications for free home repairs and renovations on low-income homes and community centers. Application deadline is October 1.

RTP does cleanup, painting, and minor repairs. The work is done in one day by volunteers on

National Rebuilding Day, slated for April 28, 2007.

To qualify you must own and live in your home and be low-income. You and any of your able-bodied family must work alongside the volunteers. To apply, call the RTP office at 366-6597.

Helicopters fighting West Nile virus over lakes and marshes

A helicopter will be hovering over Searsville Lake and its marshes on Wednesday, August 16, dropping granules of a larvicide designed to kill mosquito larvae as part of a program to combat West Nile virus by reducing mosquito populations.

The helicopter will be back on September 5, September 27, and October 18.

While birds infected with West Nile virus have been found this year in Santa Clara, Alameda and Marin counties, only one infected bird has turned up in San Mateo County. An infected crow was found in Moss Beach in April, said Chindi Peavey, chief vector ecologist for the county Mosquito Abatement District. "So far, it's been real quiet," she said.

The granules dropped to control mosquitoes are about the size of coarse sand and contain bacteria specific to mosquitoes, according to a district press release. The material does not harm fish, birds or other animals.

Ms. Peavey reminds people to get rid of standing water around their homes where mosquitoes might breed.

People who are having problems with mosquitoes and being bitten should call the district at 344-8592.

People who find dead birds, especially, blue jays and crows, should also call the district. "We definitely want to hear about dead birds," Ms. Peavey said. "But they have to be fresh."

Dead birds may be reported to the district, or to the state's West Nile hotline at 877-WNV-BIRD.

For more information, visit smcmad.org.

Free mosquito packets for seniors at county fair

Seniors who visit the San Mateo County Fair on Tuesday, August 15, (when all seniors over 62 will be admitted free) should be sure to pick up a mosquito packet.

As part of the county's "Fight

the Bite" campaign to combat West Nile virus, the county health department will hand out free packets containing mosquito repellent, wipes, and informational brochures on West Nile virus.

The health department is targeting seniors because people over 50 are more likely to develop

serious symptoms if they get West Nile virus.

"There is no cure or available vaccine at this point," said Catherine Sallenave, assistant county health officer.

She has these tips to avoid mosquito bites: drain standing water; be careful at dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most

active; DEET is an effective insect repellents; dress in long sleeves and long pants if you're going to be where mosquitoes are active; doors and windows should have tight-fitting screens.

The fair is at the San Mateo Event Center, 2495 Delaware St. in San Mateo. For information, go to sanmateocountyfair.com.



Photo courtesy of Women's High Tech Coalition

Women in high-tech

The Women's High Tech Coalition partnered with the California Women's Caucus for a recent meeting with state legislators at the Atherton home of Jillian-Manus Salzman. From left, are Carol Henton, vice president of the Information Technology Association of America; Assemblywoman Rebecca Cohn, D-San Jose; Jillian-Manus Salzman, publisher and philanthropist; state Sen. Elaine Alquist, D-San Jose, District 13; and Leslie Bar-Ness, field representative for Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Debate on wireless computing, privacy

If plans mature to blanket Silicon Valley with a free wireless computer network that anyone can log into from any parked car, coffee shop or living room, questions of online privacy will arise.

Should you encrypt e-mail messages? Should you buy fire-wall software? What are the chances of being victimized by a hacker sitting in a nearby motel room?

A debate on the issues and tradeoffs is set for 7:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. on Wednesday, August 23, at the Mayer Theater at Santa Clara University, 500 El Camino Real in Santa Clara.

Speakers include Nicole Ozer of the American Civil Liberties Union, Lauren Gelman of Stanford's Center for Internet Security, and Sherman Hall of the Atherton Police Department.

For more information, call (408) 271-7213.

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Community

NEWS OF LOCAL PEOPLE AND EVENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

Teachers organize bike ride in memory of Michelle Mazzei

Oak Knoll School teachers have organized the first Michelle Mazzei Memorial Family Bike Ride to honor the fourth-grade teacher who was killed in a bicycle accident October 2.

The family event takes off on Sunday, September 17, at 8 a.m. from Oak Knoll School, 1895 Oak Knoll Lane in Menlo Park.

Riders will pedal along residential streets, following a 1.5-mile loop one to four times. The route is the same one used for Oak Knoll's annual Otter Run in June. A junior bike path for little children will be set up in the play area behind the classrooms.

Former students of Ms. Mazzei, Oak Knoll students and their families, colleagues and friends are invited to save the date and sign up for the ride, said teachers Karen Clancy and Noelle Gonsalves, who are organizing the ride.

The event will honor Ms.



Teacher Michelle Mazzei was riding a bike on Woodside Road near I-280 when she was struck by a car.

Mazzei's life, energy and her love of the outdoors, they said.

Funds raised that are not used for the event will go to the Michelle Mazzei Fund for Environmental Education, established at the Palo Alto-based nonprofit Environmental Volunteers.

Registration fee is \$20 for adults and \$10 for children;

participants will receive a T-shirt and water bottle. Riders may register online at active.com, or pick up a form at the school office. Early registration is encouraged to enable the organizers to order T-shirts for all participants.

There's still time to sign up as a sponsor for the ride. Sponsors' names will be placed on the back of the T-shirts and fliers. For more information, check the school Web site: oakknollschooll.org; or contact Karen Clancy at kclancy@mpscd.org or Noelle Gonsalves at ngonsalves@mpscd.org.

Checks can be made out to Environmental Volunteers, with the memo line stating "Michelle Mazzei Bike Ride"; they can be turned in at the Oak Knoll office or mailed to Environmental Volunteers, 3921 East Bayshore Road, Palo Alto, CA 94303.



The first winners of the Woodside Community Theatre Scholarship are Jamie Lease and Christian Taboada, recent high school grads.

Two win scholarships from Woodside Community Theatre

The Woodside Community Theatre is giving back to the community by handing out its first scholarships to two local high school seniors.

Jamie Lease, a recent graduate of Canada Middle College, and Woodside High graduate Christian Taboada have each won \$500 scholarships.

"The money is coming from ticket sales," said Mindy Bowles of Woodside, a Woodside Community Theatre producer. "We hope this becomes an annual award so that we can encourage kids in theater, and continue to bring theater to Woodside."

To qualify for the scholarship, applicants needed to either act or work in one of WCT's shows, which have included "Annie Get Your Gun," "Kiss Me Kate," and "Oklahoma."

Applicants also need to plan to pursue theater or performing or visual arts in college.

Both Jamie and Christian plan to attend U.C. Irvine in the fall. Jamie starred as Laurie in "Oklahoma," while Christian appeared in the chorus and, most recently, played the lion in Woodside High's "The Wiz."

WCT's next show is "Anything Goes," coming up in November. Auditions start August 28. More information will be posted on woodsidedtheatre.org.

New book on Health Council

Gail Drewes will sign copies of her book, "The First Fifty Years," at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, August 15, at Kepler's bookstore, 1010 El Camino Real in Menlo Park.

The book commemorating the 50-year history of the Children's Health Council is rich with photographs, taken from CHC Auxiliary scrapbooks, of Health Council founder Dr. Esther Clark and others who were influential in founding the organization.

Based in Palo Alto, the Children's Health Council is a diagnostic and treatment center for children facing developmental and behavioral challenges.

The book includes remembrances written by many CHC Auxiliary presidents.

Refreshments will be served at the book signing, a Kepler's Grassroot Tuesday Night event. For information, call 324-2330.

Seniors' Day Tuesday at county fair

Seniors, age 62 and up, will be admitted free Tuesday, August 15, on Seniors' Day at the 72nd annual San Mateo County Fair. The fair continues through Sunday, August 20, at the San Mateo County Event Center, 2495 S. Delaware St. in San Mateo.

Special activities at Cypress Hall include the "My Fair Lady" contest, now in its 27th year. Television personality Jan Wahl will interview contestants before a live audience and a panel of judges. "Seniors in Show Biz" will entertain with solo, couple and ensemble dancing, ranging from hula to tap.

At 3:30 p.m. the Union Band

will play for dancing on the Examiner plaza stage.

Admission will be free until 3 p.m. Thursday, August 17.

The 72nd annual San Mateo County Fair concludes on Sunday, August 20, with a salute to Mexico and Central America by the La Preciosa musicians and dancers from noon to 10 p.m. on the Celebrity Stage of Expo Hall. During the day, other groups including Ballet Folklórico, will entertain on different stages.

Throughout the fair there will be a wide range of activities, exhibits, celebrity and community entertainment, food and beverages, carnival rides and

amusements. Horse racing will go on at Bay Meadows.

Fairgoers can avoid traffic and parking hassles by taking SamTrans or Caltrain. SamTrans routes stop on El Camino Real, a few blocks away from the entrance to the fairgrounds. Caltrain provides daily service to the Hillsdale station, a short walk from the fairgrounds. For information go to www.samtrans.com or www.caltrain.com.

Admission to the fair is \$9 for adults; and \$7 for seniors, ages 62 and up, and children, ages 6 to 12. For more information, go to sanmateocountyfair.com.

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John La Barbera, left, reads his life story in newspaper from "newsboy" Austin Yokley.

He's 100 and still dancing

John La Barbera of Atherton celebrates his first century

byline>By Jane Knoerle
Almanac Lifestyles Editor

John La Barbera celebrated his 100th birthday July 29 with a party for 115 guests at the Sharon Heights Golf and Country Club, hosted by his daughter, Marie Zahn of Atherton.

The guest of honor was the oldest person present. The youngest was his great-great grandchild, 5-day-old Sebastian Robert Finnegan.

The birthday boy had a grand time dancing with the ladies, even taking a glass of champagne for the birthday toasts. Letters of congratulation were read from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and President George Bush and Laura Bush. There was a papal blessing from Pope Benedict XVI.

Special guests were the Rev. Monsignor Steven Otellini, pastor of Church of the Nativity, and the church's former pastor, the Rev. Donald DeAngelo, who blessed the new baby.

A highlight of the evening was the arrival of "newsboy" Austin Yokley, dressed in old-fashioned garb. His newspapers exclaimed "Extra! Extra! John La Barbera born in tent city months after earthquake rocks San Francisco."

Mr. La Barbera was born August 3, 1906, in a "tent city" in Golden Gate Park, where his family lived after the quake and fires destroyed their home.

He grew up in San Francisco, where he attended barber college and beauty school. He worked with relatives at the Merit Barber Shop on 21st Street in San Francisco.

At 17 he eloped with his childhood sweetheart, Carolina Zisa. They were married 77 years when

Ms. La Barbera died in 2001.

As a young husband and father in the 1930s, Mr. La Barbera began investing in rental properties. After 38 years of barbering, he was able to retire at age 56 to develop and manage his rental properties.

Several years ago, he and his wife moved to Atherton to live with their only daughter, Marie, and her husband, the late Dene Zahn.

At the July 29 festivities, Mr. La Barbera's party began with cocktails, followed by a sumptuous dinner, including ravioli served with his daughter, Marie's special sauce. After filet mignon, there was a tiramisu cake with 100 candles. Cannoli and biscotti, prepared as a gift by baker Augustino Buonocore, were also served.

Charlie Bulanti and his orchestra played for dancing with Mr. La Barbera's relative, Chickie Mitchell, sitting in at the piano.

Mr. La Barbera is no stranger to parties. The Zahns hosted many grand parties at Sharon Heights Golf and Country Club for her parents' wedding anniversaries, starting with their 50th anniversary and ending with their 75th.

Still in good health today, Mr. La Barbera enjoys spending time with his family, reading novels and historical books, and tending his tomato and basil plants. He never misses watching Lawrence Welk's program on public television on Saturday night.

When the Almanac asked Mr. La Barbera for his secret to longevity and good health in an interview eight years ago, Mr. La Barbera said he never smoked or drank, except for an occasional glass of wine. He also advised a diet with "lots of good olive oil, garlic and fresh vegetables." At 100, his advice still stands. ■



Thirty-eight young women made their debut at the Peninsula Debutante Ball.

A time for tradition at Peninsula Ball

Dressed in white formal gowns, 38 young women made their debut on June 17 at the 46th annual Peninsula Ball. The annual event was held at Palo Alto's Crowne Plaza Cabana to benefit Family and Children's Services.

Proceeds from previous balls have contributed more than \$3 million to Family and Children's Services.

The debs, all recent high school graduates, were presented to friends and family. After dancing the traditional

first dance with their fathers, they danced the night away with their escorts to the music of Dick Bright's orchestra.

Anne Englert of Atherton and Sue Davidson of Redwood City were ball chairmen. Dorothy Cartan of Atherton, a longtime ball supporter and former chairman, was honorary chairman.

This year's debs are: Galen Avery, Brooke Badger, Rachel Bolten, Katie Bouret, Becca Carr, Rebecca Child, Christie Clark, Mattie Goldman, Jen Machlin, Layne Marr, Tori

Patton, Ryan McCann, Brittany Brown, Kristie Flatley, Kathryn Molitor, Ashley Carlisle, Lauren Evans, Melissa Mordell, Molly Troedson, Lexi Boutacoff, Michelle Bradford, Jessie Foley, Melissa Irvine, Sarah King, Sarah Montgomery, Erica Swanson, Megan Teixeira, Carmen-Rosa Wisheart, Avantika Chitre, Caroline Hurley, Cait Lighthouse, Molly Magnuson, Nisha Dixit, Lisa Ferch, Ali Lycette, Shayne McGanney, Molly Doran, and Chelsea Ono Horn.

Eagle Scout project aids homeless shelter

Jeffrey Bowman, 15, an Eagle Scout candidate in Boy Scout Troop 222, sponsored by the Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, came up with a project to provide hours of fun for kids living at Shelter Network's Redwood Family House in Redwood City.



Jeffrey Bowman

He — and 17 local scouts who helped him — designed and built a table-top Brio wooden train layout for Shelter Network's transitional family housing facility.

The nonprofit Shelter Network provides transitional housing and support services for homeless families on the Peninsula.

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OBITUARIES

Alexander Baer

UCSB student

Alexander James Baer, a native of Menlo Park, died August 6 from injuries sustained as a passenger in an automobile accident in Santa Barbara, where he was a student at University of California at Santa Barbara. He was 25.

Mr. Baer attended Nativity, Ladera and Hillview Schools in Menlo Park. In 1998 he graduated from Los Altos High School, where he played saxophone in the band. During and after high school, he was a barista and morning manager at Starbuck's in Los Altos.

He completed his lower division college work at Sierra and Santa Barbara City Colleges. He was a senior at UCSB majoring in psychology. For three years he had worked with autistic children at the Devereux facility

A news story on the crash that took the life of Alexander James Baer is on Page 9.

in Santa Barbara. The purpose he found working with them inspired his decision to major in psychology, say family members.

He enjoyed spending time at the family cabin in Bear Valley, skiing and snow boarding in the winter; and swimming in the lake, sliding at the river, and fishing in the summer, say family members.

He is survived by his stepfather and mother, Alan and Susan Arcady Barich of Santa Cruz; father and stepmother Roger and Patsy Baer of Browns Valley; sister Heidi Davis of San Diego; brothers Adam Davis and Adam Baer of Santa Cruz, and Christopher Baer of Morgan Hill; and maternal grandparents Alex and Frances Arcady of Menlo Park.

Curt D. Hume

United Air Lines employee

A memorial labyrinth walk will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday, August 20, at Woodside Village Church for Curt D. Hume. Mr. Hume died July 10 of complications resulting from a fall. He was 90.

Mr. Hume was born in Boston. As a boy he moved with his family to Seattle. He graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in economics and business.

During World War II, he received specialized training in geopolitics at Stanford University. He was then stationed in Assam, India, serving as a cryptographic technician.

As a manager in the personnel department of United Air Lines, he met many people and visited different corners of the world, say family members.

A Woodside resident for nearly 50 years, he enjoyed riding his bicycle, swimming and keeping up on current affairs.

He is survived by his wife, Vickie, and daughter "Ulricka" Karen L. Hume.

John Vasil

Attorney

John Vasil of Menlo Park died July 25 at home after a lengthy illness. He was 76. An attorney, Mr. Vasil had worked until the last days of his illness, say family members.

Mr. Vasil was born in McKeesrock, Pennsylvania. He graduated from Pennsylvania State Univer-

sity and served for four years in the U.S. Air Force. He came to California to attend Hastings School of Law. In 1964, he met his future wife, Dorothea Grivas, when she was visiting from Greece. Two weeks later they were married.

Mr. Vasil practiced law with the firm of Petris & Vasil in Campbell for more than 40 years. He lived in Sharon Heights with his family for more than 30 years.

He enjoyed golf, gardening and his wife's Greek cooking, but his No. 1 interest was his family, say family members.

He is survived by his wife, Dorothea; daughters Caterina Peterson of Pasadena and Joanna Dienstbier of Los Gatos; sisters Mary Vasilakis and Nancy Russon of Pittsburgh; and four granddaughters.

Services were held July 28 at the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross in Belmont. Donations may be made to the Church of the Holy Cross, 900 Alameda de las Pulgas, Belmont, CA 94002; or to the National Hospice Foundation.

Shirley Hoff

Nurse and mother of six

Shirley F. Hoff died July 26 at the home of her daughter, Linda Hoff-Siegel, in Watsonville. Ms. Hoff, a longtime Atherton resident before moving to Watsonville six years ago, was 77.

Ms. Hoff was a former nurse and the mother of six children. She was the widow of Dr. John E. Hoff, a well-known Redwood City doctor who delivered 10,000 babies, mostly at Sequoia Hospital, during his

career. Dr. Hoff died in 1998. Two of her sons, John and Gary, carry on the family medical practice of obstetrics and gynecology with the Hoff Medical Group in Redwood City. Another son, Martin, is an oral surgeon in Redwood City.

Ms. Hoff was born in San Francisco and graduated with a degree in nursing from St. Mary's College. She was head nurse at St. Mary's Medical Center in San Francisco when she met her future husband, who was a young physician at the hospital.

They were married in 1951 and moved to San Antonio, Texas, while Dr. Hoff was in the U.S. Air Force. They returned to Redwood City to start Dr. Hoff's medical practice. Ms. Hoff retired from nursing to raise her family.

A dedicated mother, she was continually involved in the education and development of her children, say family members. She enjoyed singing, playing bridge, working on her computer, participating in Elderhostel and practicing tai chi with her late husband.

She is survived by her six children: Dr. John D. Hoff of Atherton, Dr. Michael P. Hoff of Dalton, Georgia, Dr. Gary A. Hoff of San Carlos, Dr. Martin J. Hoff of Half Moon Bay, Linda M. Hoff-Siegel of Watsonville, and Charles C. Hoff of San Diego; and 10 grandchildren.

A funeral Mass was held July 31 at St. Pius Catholic Church in Redwood City. The family prefers that memorial contributions be made to organizations for the blind.

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Family Connections offers swimming class

Family Connections, a parent-participation preschool program for families in Menlo Park and East Palo Alto, will offer a six-week water safety course for children in low-income families and their parents this fall.

The program, which will begin on September 5, will be held in the

See picture on **Page 3**.

Onetta Harris Community Center in Menlo Park. It combines classroom water safety instruction with swimming lessons in the pool.

Organizers began offering the course in 2004 when they real-

ized that low-income children are at a greater risk for drowning or becoming injured in a water-related accident, according to executive director Renee Zimmerman. They also found that a number of the students' parents did not know how to swim, and would teach their children to avoid water events altogether.

Children aged 0-5 from families determined to be low-income are invited to participate.

For additional information or to register, call 685-6240 or visit familyconnections.org.

— Renee Zimmerman

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■ POLICE CALLS

This information is from the Atherton and Menlo Park police departments and the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office. Under law, people charged with offenses are considered innocent until convicted.

ATHERTON

Grand theft reports:

- Three ice axes taken from residence, 300 block of Walnut Avenue, July 28.
- Two flat-screen TV's lifted from unlocked garage, 100 block of Rosewood Drive, July 30.
- Students were seen riding a custodian's electric cart toward Flood Park, later recovered on the track at Menlo-Atherton High School, August 5.

Fraud report: Fraudulent account opened using man's Social Security number, 200 block of Stockbridge Avenue, August 9.

Burglary report: Appliances stolen from house that foreclosed recently, 200 block of Stockbridge Avenue, August 10.

MENLO PARK

Grand theft reports:

- Laptop computer stolen in February from business, 1000 block of El Camino Real, July 31.
- Two computer monitors and a projector stolen, Menlo-Atherton High School at 555 Middlefield Road, August 1.

■ OBITUARY POLICY

The Almanac publishes obituaries about people who lived in Atherton, Menlo Park, Portola Valley and Woodside, or played a prominent role in these communities. These obituaries are news stories, written by Almanac staff writers, based on information provided by mortuaries and family members. There is no charge. Due to space limits and other reasons, these stories may not include all the information a family wishes. Some families choose to write their own memorial announcements, and purchase space to publish them in the Almanac. For information about that, e-mail Blanca Yoc in the Advertising Department at byoc@paweekly.com, or call 326-8210, ext. 239.

Fraud reports:

- Check fraud at business, 800 block of Willow Road, August 4.
- Attempt to embezzle money from company-issued credit card, 1300 block of Willow Road, August 7.
- False use of credit card, August 10.

Stolen vehicle report: Business in 500 block of El Camino Real, August 6.

Burglary reports:

- Residence ransacked with undetermined loss, 700 block of Stanford Avenue, July 28.
- Passport, money and jewelry taken from residence, 700 block of Laurel Avenue, August 2.
- Computer and portable music player stolen from residence, 100 block of Kent Place, August 7.

Attempted burglary reports:

- 1300 block of Hollyburne Avenue, July 30.
- Glass door and window smashed at business, 3700 block of Haven Avenue, August 3.

■ COLLEGE GRADUATES

■ **Michael Christopher Hassen** has received a bachelor of arts degree in history from Denison University in Granville, Ohio. Michael, a graduate of Menlo School, is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Hassen of Atherton.

■ **Brian S. Hendrickson** of Menlo Park, received a bachelor of arts degree in engineering sciences, cum laude, from Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. He is the son of Lisa and Dana Hendrickson.

New Artisan Shop showcases wide variety of handcrafted items

ARTISAN

continued from page 5

a photographer.

The Artisan Shop features the work of California artists in ceramics, glass, designer clothing, jewelry, needlework and more. Elegant beaded evening coats, reminiscent of the 1920s, hang next to shawls of hand-painted silk. Handsome pottery fills niches in the thick adobe walls. A glass-fronted case holds antique crystal and silver. Handmade silk pillows in luscious colors fill another corner.

Jewelry by several California

artists is on display. Margy Leibel's necklaces, using large semi-precious stones and freshwater pearls, have been featured in Instyle, Marie Claire, and "O" (Oprah Winfrey's publication) magazines.

"We really have something for everyone," says Tita Koloszi of Atherton, a Woodside-Atherton Auxiliary member. She gives credit to first-year active members of the auxiliary for coming up with the idea.

"They wanted to bring art back to the Guild. They wrote a great business plan to convince the board of directors of the auxiliary," she says. The auxiliary's bylaws had to be changed because members were traditionally not allowed to be involved in businesses at the Guild.

Pamela Mallett and Dawn Naso co-chaired the project. Also involved were Lucille Cole, Ilene Cohen, Esther Eitel and Kay Bates.

The shop's proceeds benefit Lucile Salter Packard Children's Hospital — as do proceeds from the entire Guild operation.

Ms. Koloszi was helpful because she is a member of the Orchard

■ INFORMATION

The Artisan Shop is located at Allied Arts Guild, 75 Arbor Road in Menlo Park. It is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, call 325-2450.

Valley Ceramic Arts Guild. Several of the Orchard Valley artists will have work on display at the shop through October 15. Ceramic items at the store include flower-arranging containers, vessels and sculptural pieces, along with functional items such as cream and sugar sets, pitchers and teapots.

Jo Killen and Doris Fischer Colbrie are coordinating the pottery exhibition. Lee Middleman of Portola Valley, an internationally known potter, is a local member of the Orchard Valley Guild.

The new store is trying to appeal to a wide audience, with items ranging from costly jewelry to hand-decorated flip-flops.

"We're trying everything as long as it's handmade or heirloom," says Ms. Koloszi. ■

■ BIRTHS

Menlo Park

- Deidre O'Neil and Shawn Colo, a daughter, June 9, at Sequoia Hospital.
- Lizeth Cornelio and Armando Torres, a son, July 28, at Sequoia Hospital.

Portola Valley

- Katherine and Daniel Sommer, a son, July 22, at Sequoia Hospital.



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Beautiful Art for Beautiful Living

MARY C. KNAPP

Mary C. Knapp, 82, of Portola Valley, passed away Monday, August 7, at home, surrounded by her children. Known by her friends as "Coopie", she was a native of St. Louis, Mo. where she rode with the Bridlespur Hunt and attended Mary Institute. She attended Bennett College in New York and then moved to California in 1945 when she married Gordon Knapp. She bred and raced thoroughbreds in Northern California for over 50 years. She served on the Northern California Horseman's Benevolent & Protective Association Liaison Committee and was known for her "Day at the Races" parties. She traveled extensively with the racing enthusiasts "Horsing Around" group visiting race tracks and breeding farms worldwide. She volunteered at the Children's Health Council, and was active in the Junior League of Palo Alto, the Valley Auxiliary, and the Tally Ho horse show. She was an avid bridge player and was known for her home-raised chicken eggs. She is survived by her brother Tom Cooper of Houston; her ex-husband, Gordon and their three children; Jim Knapp of San Diego, Cathleen Dorinson of Pt. Reyes Station, and Barbara Romandia of Aromas; and four grandchildren. A garden memorial service will be held at her home on August 19, at 1 p.m. In lieu of flowers donations may be made to Family Service Agency of San Mateo county or Mary Institute in St. Louis.

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EMAIL your views to letters@AlmanacNews.com. Indicate if it is a letter to be published.

FAX to Editor at 854-0677.

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Fire board tackles pensions

Our hats are off to Peter Carpenter, a member of the Menlo Park Fire Protection District board, for continuing to bring up the very difficult issue of funding the huge and ever-growing pension costs that confront this district and virtually every other public safety operation in the state.

(The board is inviting members of the public to comment on what they think the board should consider as it negotiates a new labor contract this year — an agenda item pushed by Mr. Carpenter in the hopes that a public discussion on pensions and benefits will take place — at its meeting August 15. The meeting begins at 7 p.m. in the board room at district headquarters, 300 Middlefield Road in Menlo Park.)

This “rock and a hard place” pension problem is going to continue to squeeze the finances of local districts until something is done. But until now, at least, the districts fear that if they lower retirement benefits they will lose employees to other areas that maintain the high-priced benefits.

Here is what the Menlo Park district is up against:

In 2001-02, its pension costs were \$290,000; in 2005-06, the costs were \$3.5 million, or 18 percent of the district’s \$19.3 million budget.

The reason: In July of 2002, the district increased retirement benefits for firefighters 50 or older with 30 years service from 60 percent of their highest salary to 90 percent until death. The enhanced benefits were being awarded to increasing numbers of emergency workers in the state — a result of the state Legislature’s 1999 approval of a bill allowing public agencies to increase PERS benefits to that maximum level.

Mr. Carpenter has called the escalating pension costs “unsustainable,” and although he supports maintaining benefits for all current firefighters, he believes that it is time for the district to adopt a two-tiered system, with less-generous pension benefits for new employees. Unions have adamantly opposed such a plan, and so far, at least, no action has been taken.

In prior reporting on this issue, the Almanac has identified a

near “perfect storm” of circumstances that together have stymied action on this costly issue:

■ After 9/11, state legislators, including Sen. Joe Simitian, have shown little enthusiasm for tackling the issue, perhaps because they would be battling the state’s strong public safety unions. Most state officials say local districts asked for the higher benefits during the state’s high-tech boom, and hence put the burden on themselves.

■ Local districts, which need to offer competitive pay and benefit packages to attract and keep public safety personnel, are reluctant to reduce benefits in any way, fearing they will lose employees to other districts.

■ Firefighters and other public safety employees are hardly eager to give up a benefit they believe they deserve after 30 years of service in an often dangerous occupation.

■ Finally, this imbroglio comes at a time when defined benefit pension plans, such as PERS-system public pensions, at all levels of government are receiving more scrutiny as new accounting rules require local governments to cover such unfunded liabilities far into the future. The rules can add millions to already tight local budgets if public agencies are forced to pay for this mandate.

At the very least, the Menlo Park fire board’s decision to discuss pensions is admirable. There are numerous ways to begin reducing this benefit cost, including dropping the 90 percent guarantee to 80 or even 70 percent.

Another idea advanced by board member Rex Ianson during last year’s election campaign would require firefighters to pay more into their pension plan when the district is required to pay more into the PERS system. Mr. Ianson, a retired firefighter with more than 30 years in the district, could convince his former union to help reduce retirement costs.

If no action is taken, escalating pension costs will continue to force public safety programs to eat up a larger and larger share of local budgets, and ultimately will force agencies to ask voters to approve tax increases to pay for them. At that point, we may begin to see real pension reform.

EDITORIAL

The opinion of The Almanac

LETTERS

Our readers write

Drivers need to know about cyclists’ rights

Editor:

Your July 26 story about Tom Maddox getting killed by a car while cycling brings out the importance of automobile safety and responsibility.

Most drivers don’t know that a bicyclist has a legal right to “take a lane” when there is no safe way for a motorist to pass her. Maddox was cycling at 30 mph on the right side of a double yellow line (no passing zone) with a helmet on. Beverly Oaks couldn’t wait 30 seconds to reach a stretch of road where passing would be both legal and safe.

When you are motoring behind a cyclist, just take your time and enjoy the view. You may be saving a life.

Elaine Haight
Cowper Street, Palo Alto

See **LETTERS**, next page



Atherton Heritage Association

Our Regional Heritage

When it opened in 1898 on Valparaiso Avenue, the Sacred Heart Seminary was located in Menlo Park, an area that later became Atherton. The building served as a school for girls from first grade through the second year of college. The structure was heavily damaged in the 1906 earthquake, but later was rebuilt and enlarged as it is today.

LETTERS

Continued from previous page

Cooler heads prevailed in Atherton*Editor:*

The recent flap about disclosure of a confidential investigative report in Atherton shows the danger of Town Council members and local newspapers leaping to conclusions, and the value of experienced municipal attorneys with the courage to follow state law.

The confidential report involved disciplinary actions affecting town employees, who are legally entitled to certain privacy rights. Council members Kathy McKeithen and Jerry Carlson demanded immediate disclosure of the full report.

The Almanac piled on, showing its institutional interest in disclosure of everything by quoting an attorney for the newspaper industry to the effect that immediate full disclosure was mandatory, the Town Council members had a right to demand disclosure, and that it was "career suicide" for the town attorney not to comply.

All of which was premature. Since no municipal attorney can just call up his council members individually and advise them on legal matters without a properly noticed meeting, a full airing of the legal and policy issues had to await a "closed session" with the full council two weeks ago. Then, the town attorney for the first time could advise the council of the issues.

His legal opinions were not only approved by the full Town Council, but they closely track a complex series of statutes and a similar situation in Palo Alto, involving disclosure of an investigative report of city personnel. The Almanac and all Peninsula elected officials would do well to recognize that there often are multiple sides to legal issues that may appear superficially simple.

Doug Aikins
Alpine Road, Portola Valley

Another view of Park Theatre's closure*Editor:*

I want to clarify points touched upon in your article about the Park Theatre.

The theater was not abandoned, but closed by the owner after forcing out Landmark Theaters. He relies on income from his other theater, the Guild in Menlo Park, which he apparently finds sufficiently profitable.

The Park was profitable when closed. Landmark wanted to remain, offered market-rate rent, but was rebuffed. There are ready tenants but the owner states he is not willing to perpetuate the city's expectation that the theater is a film venue.

Three views of city's child care costs

Thrilled to see true costs coming out*Editor:*

Hallelujah! As someone who repeatedly questioned the credibility of the supposed \$444,000 in cost savings to the city that Menlo Park City Council members Mickie Winkler and Lee Duboc claimed over and over again would occur by privatizing the Burgess child care programs, I am glad to see that the true figure has finally been released by the city. (See Almanac story, "Child care programs recover their costs," August 9.)

Now standing at just a paltry \$4,500 in potential savings, this disclosure puts the final nail in the coffin of the folly that was the effort led by Ms. Winkler and Ms. Duboc to give away the city-run programs to a private firm just mere months after the new, fully furnished, \$3.4 million taxpayer-financed children's center was opened.

The only question that now remains is why it took so long for the true figure to be released, given that the budget was formally approved over one month ago, back on June 20. I look forward to the council asking City Manager David Boesch that very question at its next meeting.

Jeff Staudinger
Sharon Park Drive, Menlo Park

Bottom line covered only direct labor*Editor:*

I must take exception to last week's editorial regarding child care costs.

The costs given to the Almanac were only direct labor costs, including current health care and pension. They did not include indirect costs. Indirect costs for in-house programs are usually substantially higher than with subcontracts because they require considerably more management oversight. Whenever direct in-house labor costs are equal to an outsourced program, the outsourced program will cost less.

Also, whenever labor direct costs see more



than a temporary decline, management will also cut indirect overseers because there is less work for them to manage. No responsible city will maintain an excessive management structure when there is no need to do so.

The \$4,500 savings figure is inaccurate due to differences in overhead costs, retirement health care costs, and fees paid into the city by the private providers that were not considered by the Almanac. For example, one provider is offering to pay the city \$108,000 in rent. There was no accounting sleight of hand, only a misunderstanding on the part of the Almanac of the true net cost.

Claiming that private child care providers would provide a lower quality of child care is like contending that children cannot receive as good an education at private schools as they can at public schools. Children's Creative Learning Center's Shores Child Care Center in Redwood City (a private child care provider) was awarded "Child Care Center of the Year" by the Professional Association for Childhood Education in 2005. The center was selected for its exceptional commitment to California families through providing the highest quality of child care.

Most peninsula cities have chosen to outsource child care services because of the high quality of the outsourced programs at costs well below those for in-house provided programs. Menlo Park should follow their lead.

Hank Lawrence
Sharon Oaks Drive, Menlo Park

Actual cost was uncovered*Editor:*

Thank you for the diligent research that uncovered the true cost of Menlo Park's child care program.

The conclusion seems irrefutable that the City Council majority's arguments for privatization were not based on the facts.

My children, now attending Menlo-Atherton High School, benefited from Menlo Park's after-school program when they were younger. While I wish they had been able to enjoy the new facilities being completed, the program served them and our family well. It is essential that our city provide high-quality, affordable child care for the entire community.

Arguments for privatization, whether of public swimming pools or child care programs, are based more on ideology than economics. Some people simply do not believe in providing publicly funded services to the community, and wish thus to minimize public investment. They are free to have that ideology, but citizens should carefully analyze their arguments, particularly when they suggest that privatization leads to "more efficient government."

Much more often than not, the alleged efficiencies of privatization prove illusory, or worse, the cost savings, if there are any, come directly out of the pockets of employees. I, for one, do not want my city budget to be reduced by "privatizing," i.e. lowering the wages of child care workers.

The entire community benefits when the people who provide us with public services — whether they be city managers, police officers, child care providers or swimming pool workers — are part of an organized, professional workforce. Thanks again to the Almanac for providing more factual support for that argument.

Galen Rosenberg
Laurel Avenue, Menlo Park

The removal and near destruction of the Park's neon sign didn't just result in angering "some people in the community" but caused the city attorney to serve the owner a cease and desist order to prevent further illegal demolition of the theater.

The plan is to gut the theater, permanently destroying the cultural venue. The facade will remain "as a symbol of the past" in the words of the owner.

The north wall will have five identical doors with five identical windows in between each, giving the theater the appearance of a storage facility out by Bayshore Freeway. Five identical spaces will run the entire width of the theater. The plan is destructive, graceless, and I believe does not come close to meeting state requirements for the protection of historically significant buildings. The city has no obligation to facilitate or approve the owner's plan.

Winter Dellenbach
Palo Alto

Coyote Point worker shocked at closure plan*Editor:*

As a past employee of Coyote Point Museum I feel the need to write this letter expressing my dismay and astonishment that a board of directors may be allowed to close the museum.

I understand the museum has been operating with a deficit for the past few years. If the board had been willing to hire a development director, it is unlikely there would have been a deficit. As the former director of development at Coyote Point, I know what is involved in raising money.

One of the most crucial parts of fund-raising is the board. Boards of nonprofits are expected to give and to raise money. At some nonprofits board members are asked to drop off if they do not think it is their obligation to give and to get money. I understand the present museum board does

not think raising money is their responsibility. I suggest the members of this board who refuse to raise money resign and let the Save Coyote Point Museum group form a new board that will raise money to see that Coyote Point Museum remains a vital part of the Bay Area community. I know many of the people involved with Save Coyote Point Museum and I have the utmost confidence they will be able to raise the money needed.

I hope the Board of Supervisors will not let money be the deciding factor in what happens to Coyote Point Museum. I ask the supervisors to not allow the present board of trustees to close Coyote Point Museum and to encourage the Save Coyote Point Museum group to step back in and return the museum to financial stability.

What is happening to Coyote Point Museum is no less than a model of a dirty corporate takeover and the losers are the

people of San Mateo County.

Kathy Heffernan
Past director of development
Camp Connell, California

Something can be done about noisy air conditioners*Editor:*

Summer is here and so are the air conditioners. Does anyone else ever feel overwhelmed by the constant sound of the air conditioners — sometimes day and night?

It seems rational that all air conditioners, and heat pumps — installed in the past, present and future — be required by building code to be enclosed in some substantial sound-absorbing material, all sides and top included. It can be done efficiently and safely without hurting the machine. Noise does carry. We all deserve freedom from unnecessary noise, even on a hot day.

Jackie Leonard-Dimmick
Walnut Avenue, Atherton

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