

**BARACK OBAMA** raises \$453,000 at event  
in Portola Valley home. Page 7

# The Almanac

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

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FEBRUARY 28, 2007

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## Power 2 People

David Sowerwine pedals a portable  
70-watt generator to produce light to read  
with his grandson. His company provides  
such generators to remote Nepal.

Page 12

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# Inside

This week's news, features and community events.

## FIRST SHOT



The Almanac/David Boyce

### Artistic promise

Jessica Sanchez, left, Kristie Nash, Aili Jiaravanont and Maya Lozinski, all members of the drama club at Menlo-Atherton High School, performed along with painters and musicians at the school's Winter Arts Festival on Saturday, Feb. 24.

## Atherton

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## On the cover

David Sowerwine pedals a portable 70-watt generator to produce light to read with his grandson, Owen Sowerwine, 8. His company, EcoSystems, is providing such generators and batteries to bring light to villagers in remote Nepal. Photo by Veronica Weber. Story begins on **Page 12**

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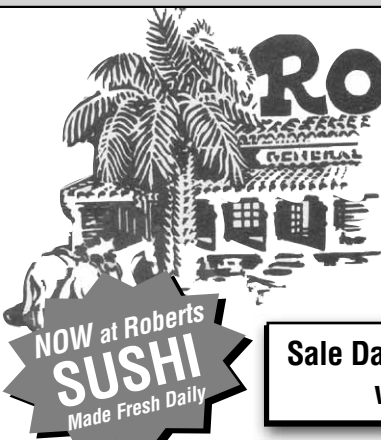
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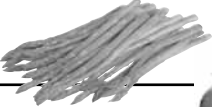
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If you are a seller in today's real estate market, you need every edge that will help distinguish your home from others. With this in mind, try greeting potential buyers with a well-placed bouquet in the foyer. An example of an eye-catching bouquet is one that combines white alstroemeria, Sprengeri asparagus fern, and limonium with delphinium, juniper, and gerbera daisies. Make an expanded version of a handheld arrangement by binding the stems together with ribbon. Then, cut the thick cluster of stems level across the bottom so that the arrangement will stand in a shallow vase. Like a fire in the fireplace or bread in the oven, flowers in the home add a welcoming note that speaks to the senses.

If you are selling your home consider flowers to help set the mood for prospective buyers. At ROBERTS MARKET, we also recommend baking fresh cookies before showing your home, so that the entire house smells delicious. If you're new to our area, we welcome you to stop in and introduce yourself. We pride ourselves on catering to our valued customers' needs. Remember, our wine department is the most extensive in the area, much more than most liquor stores. And don't forget fresh cut flowers from our floral department to grace your table.

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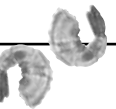
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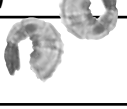
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## Hot Hot Hot

Things got pretty heated last week when the Atherton City Council discussed the San Mateo County civil grand jury report questioning the fire safety of some Atherton homes. In particular, the Menlo Park Fire Protection District officials got heavy criticism from Mayor Alan Carlson for their comments about the town's building department.

Councilwoman Kathy McKeithen attempted to dampen the fiery rhetoric.

"I think we all better calm down before one of us has a heart attack and the fire department has to be called," she said, injecting a little levity into the Feb. 21 meeting. "I don't know how they would respond to you right now."

"I'll just use (our) own defibrillator on the wall right there," said Mayor Carlson, indicating the emergency medical equipment mounted in the Town Council Chambers. "The police are trained in how to use it."

## The end is nigh

The town's roadwork on Valparaiso Avenue, between El Camino Real and Emilie Avenue, could be finished as early as next week, said Duncan Jones, Atherton's public works director, on Wednesday night, Feb. 21.

The project has shut down the westbound lane of the heavily traveled road that borders Menlo Park and spawned several perplexing detours.

Mr. Jones said that the first layer of pavement already is on, and the final layer of pavement could go down this week, barring delays caused by rainy weather.

## Save the planet

Atherton has a major Earth Day event in the works. Details are still being hashed out, but the town's Environmental Programs Committee is planning big things for Saturday, April 21, at Holbrook-Palmer Park. Expect it to be informational, educational and entertaining, said committee member Valerie Gardner. Atherton Councilman Charles Marsala said San Carlos-based Tesla Motors will have two of its prototype electric roadsters on display at Earth Day.

## Atherton steamed over grand jury report

■ Mayor says town has no obligation to submit home-building plans to fire district for review.

By Andrea Gemmet

Almanac Staff Writer

The smoke detectors stayed silent, but the mood was so heated it could have sparked a two-alarm fire in the Atherton Town Council Chambers when the council met there last week.

That's when Atherton officials took aim at the Menlo Park Fire Protection District, in the wake of a San Mateo County civil grand jury report questioning the fire safety of Atherton buildings.

Atherton Mayor Alan Carlson, at the Feb. 21 council meeting, delivered a blistering rebuke to the report and the media coverage of it. Mr. Carlson questioned the validity of the report's findings, the competency of the fire protection district, and the usefulness of the grand jury's

recommendations.

"With all due respect to the members of the civil grand jury, I think the report is faulty," he said. "I'm steamed."

The fire district came under attack for agreeing with the grand jury's recommendation that the district should examine all home-building projects, including major remodels, "that were not reviewed for fire safety" during the 11 years Mike Hood served as the town's building official; and for sending the town a letter stating the district expects to be paid for costs incurred while doing so.

The estimated number of construction projects that may be involved ranges from several hundred to a thousand.

Cooler heads did prevail, but ultimately the council made no promises when it came to



*'If Atherton never had a legal obligation to submit hundreds of plans to the district to sign off on, and if the town's building department had that responsibility, why the heck would we want to send a truckload of plans down to the fire district?'*

MAYOR ALAN CARLSON

the recommendations in the civil grand jury's Feb. 6 interim report.

The report calls for immediate action to address possible health and safety issues related to the town's residential construction projects, stemming from the building department's management problems under former building official Hood, who retired at the end of June.

The Atherton Building Department has been under

heavy scrutiny for the past year, including a secret investigation into personnel matters and a three-phase audit conducted by the town's finance department that included a review of some building permits.

The grand jury concludes that "some projects in the town were not covered by the (audits) and may violate the health and safety standards in the 2001 California

See **GRAND JURY**, page 8

## Las Lomitas district voters face big decision on 59% hike in parcel tax for schools

By David Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

More than 100 volunteers are phoning and knocking on doors in the Las Lomitas Elementary School District to win support for Measure P, a proposed \$115 increase in the annual parcel tax for residents and businesses in the K-8 district. The election is Tuesday, March 6, but many are voting earlier by mail.

District trustees are taking a risk. A survey late last year showed that for any increase above \$98, support fell short of the two-thirds voter approval required for passage.

An increase of \$115 "is definitely a stretch goal," said Lee Anderson, president of the Board of Trustees. "The district is counting on the high regard that the community has for the schools."

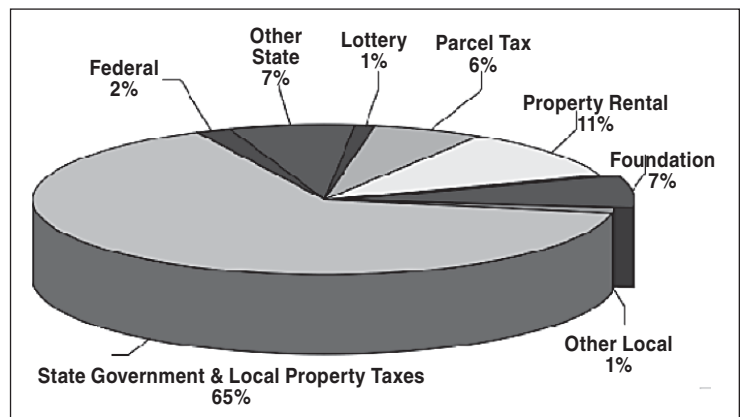
The volunteers have been engaged in the "Yes on Measure P" campaign for two months, said campaign co-chair Marci Coggins.

The district includes parts of Menlo Park, Atherton, Woodside and nearby unincorporated areas, including Ladera. About 11 mailings will have been made by election day, Ms. Coggins said.

If approved, the measure would raise the \$196 tax to \$311, a 59 percent increase. Unlike the existing parcel tax, this tax would have no expiration date; ending it would require a vote by the trustees.

Income from the current tax, \$774,500, represents 6 percent of total district revenues of \$14 million. That percentage would rise to between 8 percent and 9 percent, or about \$1.2 million, if Measure P passes, said district business manager De Modderman.

Las Lomitas needs the money to maintain "the highest possible quality of education" and provide "the best qualified staff available" in a state in which education



**Sources of district funding, 2005-06 fiscal year:** The share of revenues from parcel taxes in the Las Lomitas Elementary School District would rise from 6 percent in the data shown above to about 9 percent if two-thirds of voters approve Measure P.

funding is described as "precarious," according to a resolution unanimously approved by the trustees in December.

Among the more specific priorities, the money would help to maintain the district's elective offerings such as foreign languages, music and art, and science, math and technology classes.

Whether the measure passes or fails, the district will be trimming expenses, Mr. Anderson said. Increases in

special education and support services, introduced this year, will continue, and officials expect modest enrollment growth for the next few years.

If Measure P passes, belt tightening could mean that departing staff would not be replaced, he said. If the measure fails, the district's response would "almost certainly involve layoffs," he added. "We would do everything we can, under any budget scenario, to minimize impacts (on) students."

## Getting out the vote

The two-thirds voter approv-

See **TAX**, page 8

*An increase of \$115 'is definitely a stretch goal,' says board president Lee Anderson.*

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## City's communication system is fractured, says councilman

■ Council needs an independent audit committee to go over the city's books, he says.

■ **MENLO PARK**

Check out Town Square on AlmanacNews.com

By **Rory Brown**

Almanac Staff Writer

Menlo Park City Councilman Richard Cline has some problems with how the city communicates with residents.

"Right now, our system of communicating with the public is fractured," he said, and he's not alone.

The privatization of the city's aquatics center and the enacting of a new utility users' tax are just two decisions that have sparked different groups of residents to accuse former and current council members of making decisions without enough public information and input.

Now Mr. Cline

and Councilman Andy Cohen have asked the council to consider an "Open Government Initiative"—a list of goals that they say will allow for more public input, and clarify how the city makes decisions.

Those goals include creating an audit committee to study the city's fiscal situation; letting city commissions have more input on council decisions; and holding mandatory council meetings in the Belle Haven neighborhood.

"Right now, it's not as easy as it should be for the public to see everything its council is doing," Mr. Cline said. Other goals include posting council meeting agendas two weeks in advance and improving the city's Web site.

Mr. Cohen called the list of goals "a good start."

The two councilmen have requested the matter be put on a future council agenda.

**Audit committee**

In light of opposition to the city's new utility tax, the most pressing issue to address is creating the audit committee, Mr. Cline said.

The committee would consist of council members and other "qualified residents" and would issue quarterly—and possibly monthly—reports regarding the city's budget, he said.

Since voters approved the tax, the city's finance department

*'With our budget, the more questions you'd ask, the more different answers you'd get.'*

COUNCILMAN RICHARD CLINE



announced a \$3.7 million budget surplus for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2006.

Although city staff said the city faces a long-term deficit without the tax, some residents have questioned the accuracy of the city's financial projections, and argued the tax wasn't needed in the first place.

"With our budget, the more questions you'd ask, the more different answers you'd get," Mr. Cline said. "We need to do a better job of getting the city to present numbers clearly."

The audit committee's meetings would be open to the public, under the Brown Act, the state's open meeting law. ■

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Bids are due to the Public Works Department at Town Hall on Tuesday, March 20, 2007 by 3:00 p.m. at which time they will be opened and read aloud. Bids shall be submitted in sealed envelopes marked on the outside "Town Center Project Phase 2" followed by the appropriate bid package number. Fax bids or bids received after the designated time will not be accepted. Copies of construction documents are available at the Public Works Department.

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# Barack Obama raises \$453,000 at event in Portola Valley home

■ Host cites candidate's "authenticity" as a winning trait.

By David Boyce  
Almanac Staff Writer

Presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama rolled into Portola Valley around 8 p.m. Monday, Feb. 19, spent 45 minutes speaking and taking questions from some 300 donors, and came away with \$453,000 to add to his campaign for the 2008 election.

The Democratic senator from Illinois visited the home of Portola Valley resident Eileen Chamberlain-Donahoe, who confirmed the amount raised — the minimum donation was \$1,000 — and added that Mr. Obama's "authenticity" has removed any doubt about her vote next year.

"I've met John Edwards and think he's great, and I think Hillary (Clinton) is great, but they don't compare," she said. "I think people are shocked to hear people in politics speak in such a true way. People are just sick of polarization in this country. I think (Mr. Obama) represents the possibility that we can rise above that and actually solve some problems instead of pointing fingers at each other."

While the event was located in Portola Valley, fewer than 10 residents attended, said co-host Danna Breen. Ms. Breen, a commissioner on the town's Architectural & Site Control Commission, said she invited Mayor Ted Driscoll and Councilwoman Maryann Moise Derwin, but both were unavailable.

Ms. Breen said her e-mail invitations went out without regard to party affiliation. "It's all about the dialog," she said. "It's important for everyone to stay open. How lucky we are that there's such a large pool of candidates, both Republican and Democrat."

She said she and her daughters had their pictures taken with Mr. Obama before his public remarks. "... I loved his spirit of unifying," she

said of the evening. "I came away feeling wonderful about that."

Councilman Steve Toben, who said he hopes every 2008 candidate for president pays a local visit, said he was asked to talk about Portola Valley with Mr. Obama. He said he declined, in part to the cost (\$1,000 minimum donation) and because "it was not an event where I felt I could really add value."

Resident Angela Siddall, a retired psychotherapist and registered Democrat, did give \$1,000 and called Mr. Obama a good listener and described his self-deprecating sense of humor as "lovely."

"He is just exceptional, and he's not full of himself, you know," she said. "Compared with the person in power at the moment, what a great representative (Mr. Obama) would be. ... He really addressed some of the big things that all politicians have to look at."

Among them: a more "socialized" health care system, a "more fair" tax system, and an end to the war in Iraq.

Ms. Siddall said John Edwards, a "really smart man who's very ethical," might yet sway her, but added: "I don't see that anybody would give me the same kind of experience" as Mr. Obama.

He was reportedly short on specifics, but no one interviewed for this story faulted him. "It's early days," Ms. Siddall said in a typical comment. "I don't think you can have a plan for everything at this point."

Among the volunteers recognized for raising money for Mr. Obama was Steve Westly, an Atherton resident, venture capitalist and a recent Democratic candidate for governor. Mr. Westly, who was not present, is a co-chair of Mr. Obama's California campaign, said a spokesman for Mr. Westly's political action committee, the California Leadership Committee.

Mr. Obama is scheduled to return to the Bay Area for another fundraiser on Saturday, March 17, Ms. Breen said. Send e-mail to Ms. Breen at pvlily@aol.com for more information. ■



Photo courtesy of "Obama 08" campaign

Sen. Barack Obama spoke last week in Los Angeles after visiting the Bay Area and the Portola Valley home of Eileen Chamberlain-Donahoe.

## Clinton, Edwards court local support

The Midpeninsula must be quite the cash-cow for presidential hopefuls.

Beside Barack Obama, two other contenders for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination courted supporters at local events recently.

On Feb. 16, Andy and Deborah Rappaport hosted an intimate dinner for Democrat John Edwards, the party's 2004 nominee for vice president, at their home in Woodside.

In 2004, the Rappaports were among the country's biggest donors to political action committees supporting the Kerry/

Edwards presidential campaign and other progressive causes, making over \$7 million in contributions.

Last weekend, Hillary Rodham Clinton reportedly attended two evening fundraisers, one in

Atherton and one in Woodside, after speaking to Google employees on Feb. 23. Google CEO Eric Schmidt moderated the event at the Mountain View campus, asking Ms. Clinton questions submitted by Google employees.

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## REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Gloria Darke



### What to do?

**Q.** Dear Gloria, After 5 days of excruciating negotiations with the seller, we finally got in to contract at a price the seller was not happy with but we feel it was what the house was worth. Now we have a property inspection which points out all sorts of problems with the house. We feel the seller should fix these things but our agent is telling us it will probably cause the contract to fall apart. What should the seller be responsible for in selling a house? We really like the house and don't want to lose it.

— Mary K., Menlo Park

**A.** Dear Mary, One of the problems you may be encountering is that the sellers of your potential new home are probably still in last years hyper-active market. They are unrealistic in setting their list price and when a market-value offer comes in they think they are not getting what their home is worth. Now the inspection report comes in and they are going to think that they are getting further pounded on. The objective for you

now is for both parties to come away from the negotiating table with a win-win attitude. Before you go back to the sellers with a long list of items to be fixed/corrected you should have a clear understanding of the purchase contract agreement. For example, the contract does state that the roof is to be free of leaks. If the property inspection reveals that there have been previous leaks and the roof should be replaced that is a major expense that you will be facing. The seller may order another report and this inspector says the roof can be patched. To save the deal, you may have to accept a patched roof and be prepared to replace it in 2-5 years. Forget the faucets that leak, having GFI's installed, the minor plumbing and wiring issues; just put a few thousand dollars aside and take care of these items as time and money permit. The house, if it is older, is not expected to be perfect. The big picture is that you have found the house you want to live in at a price you have determined to be fair.

For answers to any questions you may have on real estate, you may e-mail me at [gdarke@apr.com](mailto:gdarke@apr.com) or call 462-1111, Alain Pinel Realtors. I also offer a free market analysis of your property.

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# Fire board says it will bill Atherton for reviews

By Renee Batti  
Almanac News Editor

The local fire district is at the ready to hire a fire safety engineer to join the district in helping Atherton comply with a civil grand jury recommendation that would involve reviewing hundreds of completed building projects for fire safety compliance.

But board members of the Menlo Park Fire Protection District made it clear last week that it expects the fire engineer's costs — and any other costs incurred during the review — to be picked up by the town.

The board on Feb. 20 voted 4-0, with board member Rex Ianson absent, to send Atherton a letter stating its expectation of reimbursement — a move that prompted a testy rebuke of the district by Atherton Mayor Alan Carlson and provoked some grumbling among a few other council members when the council reviewed the letter at its Feb. 21 meeting.

Fire Chief Harold Schapelhouman said that determining the costs of the fire safety engineer, who would work under contract, and additional staff time needed for the project "is dependent on Atherton; they've got to let us know how much work is called for, how many plans need to be reviewed."

The San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury's report on the Atherton Building Department includes a recommendation that the fire district "examine all projects constructed during the

tenure of the previous building official that were not reviewed for fire safety." That would involve a period of about 11 years.

The reviews are needed, the grand jury said, because its investigation found "mounting evidence of irregular or improperly issued building permits" for projects that now may pose safety risks for residents.

Chief Schapelhouman and Atherton City Manager Jim Robinson met Feb. 12 to discuss how the town and the district should proceed in addressing the grand jury's recommendations — a meeting the chief described as "a very productive first step."

He told the board that he had brought up the subject of who would pay the costs of whatever review program is put into place, and was told that such costs were "not budgeted, and there are no funds allocated for this purpose."

"I don't like their response, 'we haven't budgeted it,' " said fire board President Ollie Brown. "We haven't budgeted it either."

But the board's finance committee decided the district needed to act now and worry about the costs later, Mr. Brown said.

It was Peter Carpenter, the only Atherton resident on the board, who pushed for sending the letter stating the board's expectation of reimbursement. The district must be clear "about what we expect," he said. "There's nothing to preclude us from putting the claim on the table." ■



The Almanac/Veronica Weber

**A shared laugh** lightens the mood for Las Lomitas School District volunteers, from left, Mary Wright, Lauren Sabatini, Lee Ann Yasukawa and Marci Coggins in their campaign to win two-thirds voter approval for Measure P in the March 6 election.

## Schools seek voter approval for tax hike

### TAX

continued from page 5

al needed to pass a tax measure in California is a hurdle. "For every no vote, we have to get two yes votes," Ms. Coggins said.

If there is a note of urgency in that comment, it does not reflect the district's history with parcel taxes. In 1995, a \$98 tax won an 81 percent majority of the votes. Voters doubled the tax in 2001 with 76 percent approval.

The district has 7,710 registered voters, said Melinda Dubroff of the San Mateo County Elections Office.

About 45 percent are permanent absentee voters. Of the total, 972 are parents with children in the district, said Mary Wright, a parent who handles statistics for the Measure P campaign.

Even if the measure passes, a respectable turnout for this election is important, board president Anderson said. A low turnout could be "a bit of a political headache" in that a relatively small number of people could be seen as imposing a tax increase on the greater number who did not vote, he said.

Looking back to elections over the past five years, turn-

out is strongly correlated with the type of election, Ms. Wright said. The general election in the November 2004 presidential election drew 6,198 registered voters from the Las Lomitas district, but the March primary attracted only 3,916. ■

### ■ INFORMATION

For more information on Measure P, go to the "Yes on Measure P" campaign site, [www.laslomitas.org](http://www.laslomitas.org), or the San Mateo County Elections Office site, [www.shapethefuture.org](http://www.shapethefuture.org).

## Atherton steamed over grand jury report

### GRAND JURY

continued from page 5

Building Code and Health and Safety Code."

At last week's meeting, council members called for a meeting with the fire district's board of directors to clarify the district's issues and to address the recommendations in the grand jury report.

Council members questioned the purpose of reviewing all plans approved during the Hood era,

and expressed an unwillingness to pay review fees to the fire district.

Mayor Carlson said the town was never obligated to submit plans for single-family homes to the fire district, and was legally entitled to delegate health and safety review to the town's building director.

"If Atherton never had a legal obligation to submit hundreds of plans to the district to sign off on, and if the town's building department had that responsibility, why the heck would we want to send a truckload of plans down to the fire district when they never had that responsibility and they never asked for that responsibility?" he said.

The letter from the fire district saying that it expects to be reimbursed for all costs just adds "insult to injury," Mr. Carlson said.

"I have no problem with loading up all the plans and sending them to the fire district, but they should pay for it," said Councilman Jerry Carlson. "If that's their job, doggone it, they should pay for it."

Councilwoman Kathy McKeithen conceded that fire safety is a valid issue, but said that the fire district is in a better position to fund a review of past plans. She questioned the purpose of going through 11 years-worth of records when it could affect a property owner's insurance and ability to sell the house, especially since there would be no way to compel anyone to remedy any problems that might be found.

"I realize the end result is not money; it's the safety of the people in the structures and of the firefighters. But if we can't enforce it,

there's no point to spending the money on an esoteric exercise," Ms. McKeithen said.

The letter from the fire district, signed by board president Ollie Brown, also asked the council what steps the town has taken "toward compliance with the issues" raised by the grand jury; when the district can expect to receive "relevant plans and materials" for review; and what actions the town intends to take should houses be found to be "non-compliant" in terms of fire safety.

Council members openly wondered why fire district officials never previously expressed concerns about potential health and safety issues.

"I'm on my third term on the council, and the only time we hear from the fire district is when they come down to introduce a new fire chief — which they do with some regularity," said Mayor Carlson.

The fire district clearly knows where to find the Atherton council, he said, questioning why the town first heard of issues regarding fire hydrant location, access to homes and insufficient water flow in December 2006.

"The Menlo Park Fire Protection District has not raised this issue to the Atherton Council before this," he said.

Ms. McKeithen suggested the council consider a compromise: a review of a sampling of building plans to see if safety hazards truly exist. Town staff told the council that they have letters showing that the fire district has reviewed a far higher percentage of the town's open permits than was cited in the grand jury's report.

"We have taken the report seriously, and we have begun our own review," said City Manager Jim Robinson. "We found that some of the information provided to the grand jury probably needs some revision." ■

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# Board expects to decide scope of Hillview rebuild March 6

■ Dates set for meetings on Laurel, Encinal and Oak Knoll school designs.

By Marjorie Mader  
Almanac Staff Writer

Options for rebuilding Hillview Middle School on the playfield or on the existing school site will be discussed Tuesday, March 6, at community meeting at the Menlo Park school.

The school board of the Menlo Park City School District expects to decide at the meeting which general approach to budget for in the overall master plan.

The meeting, also a scheduled school board meeting, starts at 7 p.m. in Hillview school's multi-use building at 1100 Elder Ave. in Menlo Park.

The district's design team is working on developing more information on the two "rebuild options" in response to trustees' direction and comments from community members at the Jan.

30 meeting at Hillview.

Terry Thygesen, president of the Menlo Park City School District's Board of Trustees, said the board plans to review and take comments on the additional analyses at the March 6 meeting.

She said many months and many meetings with staff, parents, neighbors, city officials and other interested parties will take place to develop the actual design for Hillview.

Hillview, which serves all the district's sixth-, seventh- and eighth grade students, is projected to grow from 659 students now to a peak enrollment of 911 students in 2014. The board supports Hillview's continuing as the district's middle school.

#### Other schools

Earlier in response to enroll-

ment projections and analyses of school facilities, district trustees decided that Laurel School, now serving grades K-2, will become a K-3 school; Encinal, now a grade 3-5 school, will become a K-5 school. Oak Knoll will continue as a K-5 school.

Conceptual site plans proposed for both Laurel and Encinal schools will be presented at a public meeting on Tuesday, March 13, at 7 p.m. in the Encinal School library at 195 Encinal Ave. in Atherton.

The public meeting on the conceptual site plans for Oak Knoll School is scheduled for 7 p.m. Monday, March 19, in the Oak Knoll School library at 1895 Oak Knoll Lane in Menlo Park.

Funds for providing additional facilities at the district's four sites — Laurel, Encinal, Oak Knoll and Hillview — to house a projected influx of students will come from the \$91.1 million bond measure approved by 71 percent of the voters June 6. ■

# Summit Prep wins five-year charter

By David Boyce  
Almanac Staff Writer

The future of Summit Preparatory Charter High School, the choice of at least 116 students from the Almanac's circulation area, seems more secure after a decision last week granting the school a five-year charter.

Data showed Summit's enrollment applications dropping off after the Sequoia Union High School District's grant of an atypical two-year charter in May 2006. In response, district trustees unanimously approved on Feb. 21 the school's request, first made in January 2006 and repeated in October, for a longer and more typical charter, said board president Olivia Martinez.

The board also reinstated Summit's program to reserve freshman seats for kids from

families who were early volunteers at the four-year-old school. District officials had described that program as elitist because it appeared to favor families from Atherton, Woodside, Portola Valley and Menlo Park.

But Summit provided data that showed that many more freshmen were eligible for reserved seats than actually took them.

The quest for a longer charter "was very stressful and time consuming," said Summit's Executive Director Diane Tavenner. "I think all of us — parents, students, teachers, everybody — feel very much more comfortable and secure to have the kind of time to do what we want to do."

Asked why the trustees changed course after just seven months into a new and tentative charter, Ms. Martinez noted

the board's desire for "due diligence" to evaluate the school's performance, and added that the initial staff report did not foresee Summit's predicament with fewer applications.

"We didn't want to do anything to undermine their program," she said. "I think we came to a better understanding of our respective positions. It's a matter of people sitting down like adults and working this thing out."

"We look forward to learning from (Summit) and having them as part of our family," she added.

Fifty freshmen from the Almanac's circulation area have been accepted at Summit, by lottery, for the 2007-08 school year, Ms. Tavenner said. Lotteries are required when a freshman class is oversubscribed, as Summit's has been for the last three years. ■

# COW sees red over Webcasting donation

By Andrea Gemmet  
Almanac Staff Writer

Don't look a gift COW in the mouth.

Citizens of Woodside, or COW, a watchdog Web site, is circulating a testy account of being rebuffed in its efforts to donate money for one year of Webcasting service to the town of Woodside.

COW's unnamed blogger trains a skeptical eye on Woodside town government, and the site has been raising money for Webcasting, in order to make videos of town meetings available online.

Currently, only meeting min-

utes and audiotapes of council meetings are available.

On Valentine's Day, a courier attempted to deliver a \$31,045 cashier's check to Town Hall only to discover that Town Manager Susan George had some qualms about accepting a restricted donation from an anonymous source without permission from the Town Council.

The anonymous account on the COW Web site, headlined "What is wrong with our town?" says, "We are absolutely moo-less and can't believe what Town Manager Susan George did yesterday ... We brought a cashier's check for

\$31,045 of your very generously donated money to the Town and we were turned away — that's right the money was refused."

Ms. George told the Almanac that she made a quick decision when the cashier's check was placed on her desk.

"It would not be prudent to accept the money since the council never talked about Webcasting, to my knowledge," she said. "I thanked the young man for the generosity of COW and told him I'm not in a position to accept,

See COW, page 18

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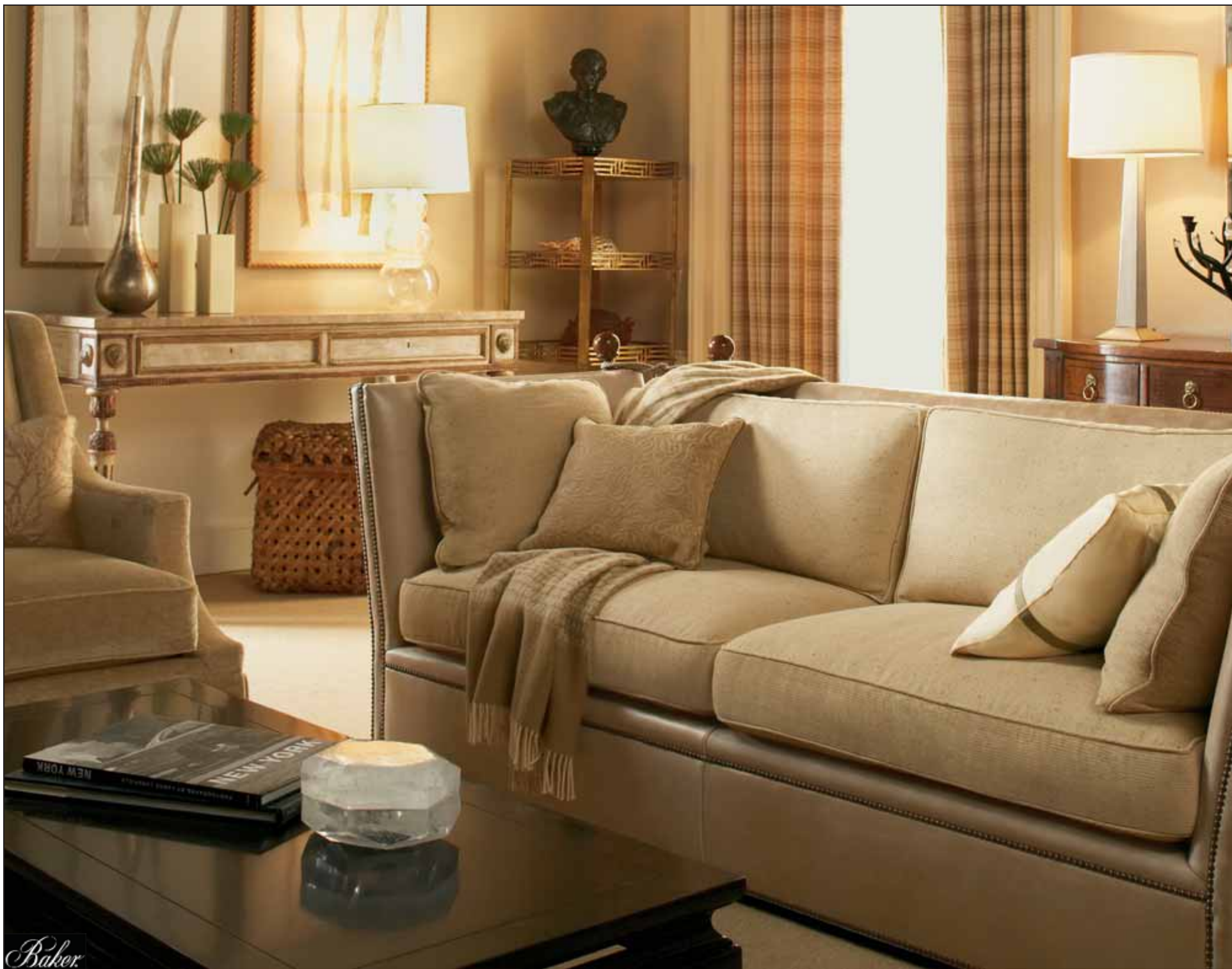
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# Town Center construction will affect use of sports fields

Sports-minded residents of Portola Valley and their out-of-town teammates should note that construction on the new Town Center complex will affect the availability of the town's fields and other recreational facilities through 2008 and into 2009.

The facilities affected include the soccer field, baseball field, play yard and tennis courts at Town Center. Other venues such as Rossotti Field (soccer) and Ford Field (baseball) are listed, too.

The soccer field at Town Center will be open for the 2007 spring and fall seasons and spring in 2008, according to the current schedule on the town's Web site. Check under Town Center Activity at portolavalley.net.

For more information, call Assistant Town Administrator Steve Willis at 851-1700, ext. 18, or send him e-mail at swillis@portolavalley.net.

## Steve Toben joins citizenship panel

Portola Valley Councilman Steve Toben will be a panelist in the Tuesday, March 6, discussion, "Making Citizens out of Residents," to be held between 7:30 and 9 p.m. in the Garden Court Hotel at 520 Cowper St. in Palo Alto.

Also on the panel will be City Manager Ed Everett of Redwood City and Palo Alto Weekly Publisher Bill Johnson.

Palo Altans for Government Effectiveness is sponsoring the event, part of its "Developing Civic Engagement" series.

## PV man named to pension study

Portola Valley resident John Cogan is joining a new 12-member commission to examine the financial impact of unfunded pension and health care plans for local and state public employees.

Mr. Cogan, a Republican and

a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, was one of six commission members chosen by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. Mr. Cogan is also on the governor's Council of Eco-

nomics Advisers and served in the Office of Management and Budget and the U.S. Department of Labor during the Reagan administration.

In announcing the commission, Gov. Schwarzenegger called "soaring" pension and health care obligations "one of the biggest problems facing governments" in that they threaten funding for "education, public

safety, environmental protection and health care."

Legislative leaders chose the other six commissioners. "We need a careful review of pension issues that is fair and responsible to workers and taxpayers alike," said Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez in a statement.

Senate confirmation is not required and commission members are not paid.

# Town may borrow millions from county for Town Center

By David Boyce  
Almanac Staff Writer

Private fundraising is sputtering a bit in Portola Valley as community activists beat the residential bushes for the final \$4 million to \$5 million needed to pay for a new \$20 million complex at Town Center.

"A couple of major donors" are biding their time, and some pledges won't come due until 2009, months after the new library, Town Hall and community hall would have opened their doors, said Mayor Ted Driscoll.

To have the money to meet tight construction schedules, the mayor has drafted a letter to San

Mateo County Supervisor Rose Jacobs Gibson asking the Board of Supervisors for a \$4 million line of credit. The Town Council will discuss the letter at its 8 p.m. meeting Wednesday, Feb. 28, in the Historic Schoolhouse.

Supervisors Rich Gordon and Jerry Hill are receptive, Mr. Driscoll said, given a recent discovery that the county had shorted Portola Valley its share of property tax revenues for 17 years. In a settlement, the county agreed to restore four years of back payments, about \$1.8 million.

"The county's already got some \$4 million or \$5 million of our tax money... in their reserves (of about

\$250 million)," Mr. Driscoll said. "In the end, it remains their money, but at least we get the use of it."

At a cost. The town wants to pay interest equivalent to what the money would otherwise earn — about 4 percent, Mr. Driscoll said.

A loan may not be necessary. The construction budget includes an unallocated \$1.6 million for contingencies, and \$400,000 in new property tax revenues every year are boosting town reserves, Mr. Driscoll noted. ■

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Grayland Jones  
Sherry Jones  
Nancy Kaneshiro  
Patrick Kelly  
Sharon Kelly  
Mamie Kiyohara  
Laurie Knapp  
Eric Kruger  
Kim Kuczon  
Jean Lamson  
Lesli Leong  
Susan Logie  
Nicole Lycett  
Kristin MacInnes  
Maria Marchi  
Jill McCreadie  
Erika McElroy  
Grace Medina-Chow  
Suzanne Mitchell  
Jennifer Montalvo  
Shelley Moran  
Doe Myers

### Brenda Nixon

Anne Oakes  
Jill Ohline  
Robert Olds  
Nancy Olson  
Melanie Passovoy  
Heather Peterson  
Fehmeen Picetti  
Jason Picetti  
Michelle Pitt  
Barbara Porro  
Wally Powell  
Kristine Reis  
Diane Rhein  
Diana Romley  
Marja Rudge  
Mimi Sabo  
Beverly St. John  
Sandra Sale  
Sue Sartor  
Darrell Sasagawa  
Ed Sena  
Patricia Skjervheim  
Mary Ann Somerville  
Marie Stosz  
Katie Sullivan  
Christine Terborgh  
Jennifer Thelen  
Bobbie Thielmann  
Whitney Thwaite  
Joanne Tinkham  
Gerald Traynor  
Michelle Walcoff  
Rease Walsh  
Catherine Wedge  
Kellie Yoon  
David Zieper

(partial list)

[www.LasLomitas.org](http://www.LasLomitas.org)

# Please Vote YES on Measure P!

Committee for Las Lomitas Schools, 2160 Camino A Los Cerros, Menlo Park, CA 94025 • ID# 1292589

# Pedaling to light



## Menlo Park couple brings low-tech solutions for wire bridges and pedal-powered electricity to villagers in Nepal

The Almanac/Veronica Weber

**David and Haydi Sowerwine** have returned from Nepal to their Menlo Park home, adorned by prayer flags. They still run EcoSystems in Nepal, which builds cable bridges and pedal-powered generators to improve the lives of village people. David is managing director; Haydi is assistant director.

**J**ust think. The 100-watt electric light you casually flick on a dozen times a day uses enough electricity to provide reading light for 2,000 houses in Nepal.

David and Haydi Sowerwine of Menlo Park are trying to remedy that situation, big time. With the aid of a grant from the World Bank, they are launching a program to bring clean electric light to thousands of dark smoky dwellings in the rugged boondocks of Nepal — and also in Myanmar, formerly Burma, where 98 percent of people have no power. And potentially the technology could help the powerless around the world.

“Hundreds of thousands of children in Nepal can’t study in the evening because they have no light,” says Mr. Sowerwine, standing beside a pedal-powered generator in his Menlo Park garage. “With one tenth of a watt of light, kids can study in the evening.”

Mr. Sowerwine holds up a tiny LED (light-emitting diode) attached to a battery pack. This 1/40th watt light bulb is bright enough to light a home, dimly, or allow a child to study. “One little motorcycle battery is enough to take care of basic light for two to three weeks — both general light and task light,” he says.

The Sowerwines are testing their PedalPower70 generator system in Nepal through a company, EcoSystems Pvt. Ltd., that they founded during a 14-year stay in the mountain country from 1991 to 2005.

The system involves a compact, pedal-powered generator. A vigorous pedaler can pump 70 watts into a 12-volt battery. This can then charge portable six-volt motorcycle batteries, which are placed in circuit boxes that make sure the battery isn’t overcharged or damaged.

Villagers can then carry a pair of battery boxes home and use them for weeks, until they need to be recharged. The batteries can support dozens of lamps for shorter periods of time, according to company literature. Or they can support other low-wattage applications, such as recharging smaller batteries or sterilizing water.

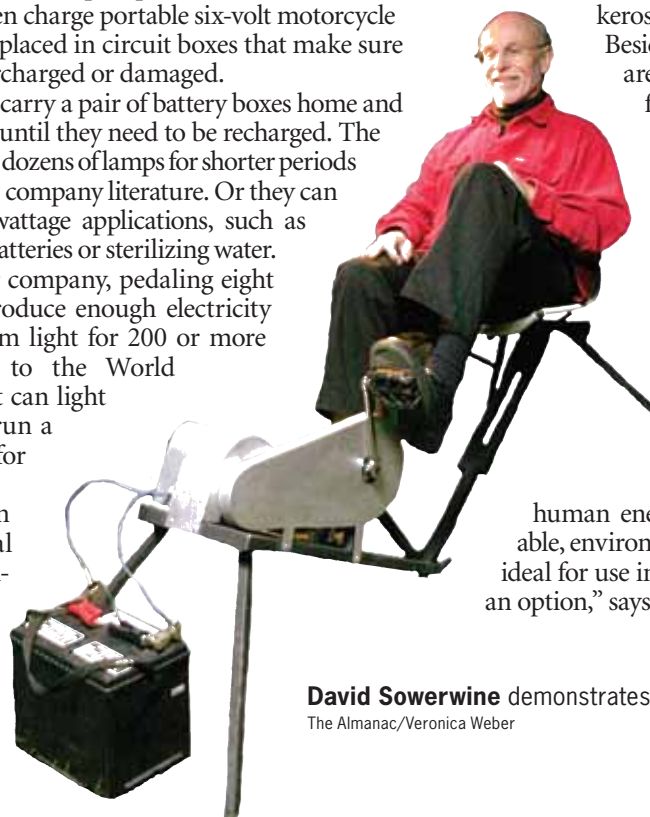
The village power company, pedaling eight hours a day, can produce enough electricity to provide minimum light for 200 or more homes, according to the World Bank web site. Or it can light a schoolroom and run a television and DVD for students.

With more than half of all Nepal households lacking electricity, Mr. Sowerwine also sees tremendous environmental advantages to his village power sys-

tems. They provide clean power, in contrast to alternative methods, such as burning kerosene or cow dung, or lighting open fires. Besides, Mr. Sowerwine says: “Open fires are inefficient. Now they can use a closed firebox to cook with. That’s a very good solution.”

The World Bank sees worldwide promise in the system. In May 2006, PedalPower70 won an energy award from the international bank. It was one of 30 awards given from 2,600 entries, Mr. Sowerwine notes. The award carries a grant of \$160,000 over two years, which is underwriting tests in 15 villages in Nepal — and in Myanmar.

“PedalPower70 is an innovative pedal generator that harnesses human energy to produce an extremely affordable, environmentally sound source of power that is ideal for use in remote areas where grid access is not an option,” says the World Bank citation. “The system



**David Sowerwine** demonstrates a pedal-power generator.  
The Almanac/Veronica Weber



Photo courtesy of David Sowerwine

**Village kids** spill out of the steel basket as they cross a river in Nepal on one of the 31 wire bridges built by David and Haydi Sowerwine and the EcoSystems team.



The Almanac/Veronica Weber

**David Sowerwine** shows a model of one of 31 wire bridges constructed in Nepal to carry people and cargo across deep valleys. The baskets ride on a cable and are propelled by riders with a loop, like a tenement clothesline, attached to pulleys on either bank.

is also affordable; the up-front investment is only US \$10. The program will establish local production, distribution, and maintenance, and license its technology to entrepreneurs globally.”

#### Bridges to hope

The Sowerwines’ 14 years in Nepal also produced another award-winning way to improve

the lives of some of the world’s poorest people: wire bridges.

Using technology developed to haul bananas from plantation to packing plant, the Sowerwines and their company have built 31 cable bridges across chasms in Nepal.

So far there have been more than 1.6 million safe trips as isolated villagers go to school, or the clinic, or the market, even during

the monsoons that swell mountain streams into raging torrents. “I’m quite confident in the safety of these bridges,” Mr. Sowerwine says proudly.

In 2003, the Sowerwines won a \$50,000 award from the Tech Museum of Innovation for their WireBridge project. They were among 25 winners in five categories chosen from more than 500 nominations from 70 countries.

Small carriage seats, which can carry people or goods, dangle from cables strung across a valley that can be up to 570 feet across — “the length of two football fields; you can barely see the other side,” says Mr. Sowerwine.

Passengers propel themselves with a tenement-style clothesline that loops across the valley between pulleys at each end.

“The first time people ride it, they are white-knuckled,” says Mr. Sowerwine. He describes the ride: you sit inside the chair so you can’t fall out and shove off. The first half of the ride is downhill and fast, with the wind in your hair. The center is quiet and beautiful. It’s fairly easy to pull yourself up with the rope. If villagers on the far side are feeling helpful, or in a hurry, they help pull from the bank.

The wire bridges cost about \$15,000 each — not much for this country, but far more than Nep-

alese villagers can pay. And the government doesn’t contribute. So the Sowerwines have been raising money overseas to fund the bridges.

Among the local groups that have contributed to a bridge in Nepal are Holy Trinity Church and the Flora Family Foundation in Menlo Park. “It is an elegant solution to a development challenge,” said Steve Toben of Portola Valley, president of the Flora Family Foundation. “It’s great work.”

#### Power couple

These contributions to the well-being of far-away villagers did not happen by accident. David Sowerwine brought technical background and extensive experience in business around the world to Nepal. And he and Haydi stayed in Nepal long enough to learn its lessons — some of them hard — and to know the people, and how to get things done.

David, a Montana kid studying chemical engineering at Stanford, found his calling in 1958 when he took a term in Germany. He got into East Germany and was even in Moscow when Nixon and Khrushchev engaged in their famous “kitchen debate.”

“It was a fabulous window on the world,” Mr. Sowerwine recalls. “I decided I wanted to be involved in developing countries.”

His early career took him around Asia for eight years doing planning for Esso (now Exxon). He earned an MBA at Stanford, and then learned agriculture around Latin America with Dole/Castle and Cooke. Later he lifted the technology used to move bananas in Honduras and used it in designing the wire bridges in Nepal.

Mr. Sowerwine became prominent in Menlo Park in the 1970s when he joined the movement to “Save the Hill,” the then-bare slope that rises at the end of Valparaiso Avenue toward Sharon Heights. Now the face of the Hill is Sharon Hills Park; there are homes at the top.

Mr. Sowerwine’s career has been anything but static, as he changed jobs and started a couple of small ventures. He bought his house on Olive Street in 1972, and has lived there off and on ever since. “I have moved into that house four times,” he says.

In 1979, Mr. Sowerwine met and married Haydi, who worked with the Palo Alto design firm, IDEO. It was a second marriage for both. They moved into the Olive Street house with their five children between 10 and 16. “It was a zoo,” chuckles Mr. Sowerwine.

Ms. Sowerwine has local roots. Her father was Emott Caldwell, who bought the grocery store in Woodside from the Neuman family in 1950, operated Caldwell’s General Store for 10 years, and

sold it the Roberts about 1960. Woodside artist and architect Jim Caldwell is her brother.

In 1991, the kids were grown, and the Sowerwines rented out the house again. They moved to Katmandu, where Mr. Sowerwine took a job with the U.S. government to help “kick start” agribusiness in Nepal. “We introduced protea flowers and blackberries and raspberries to bring new value to the economy,” he says.

#### 14 years in Nepal

In Nepal, the Sowerwines navigated — and learned from — three projects that fizzled, before they evolved the programs that are helping ordinary people around the country.

Within a year and a half, agribusiness had not taken off. But Nepalese friends encouraged the Sowerwines to stay, and arranged to extend their visas as they looked for something worthwhile to do.

Two more projects foundered on government demands and conditions. Mr. Sowerwine thought of an innovative way to clear the garbage that clogs Katmandu Valley by hoisting it to a landfill in another valley, while quarrying limestone from that valley for building in and around Katmandu.

Too good to be true? Yes. The government wanted them to hire relatives of government officials and continue employing all 800 garbage employees. “We were very naive,” says Mr. Sowerwine. “It was a corruption issue.”

A second project, to build a network of video learning centers in rural schools, also stalled because of demands for payoffs. “Strike two,” Mr. Sowerwine says. “We couldn’t get permission to set up a superior education system without paying big bribes.

“These were a remarkably good way to educate people,” he recalls wistfully. “You don’t have to wait until they’re literate.”

Strike three never happened. “We needed something outside of the ministries,” Ms. Sowerwine says. “So we thought, Back to Central America! Back to bananas!”

Their first effort was to develop “wire roads” — a cable system that would carry people and goods suspended from cables across long distances — using a technology developed to transport bananas from the plantation to the packing plant.

But their engineering work drew audiences. “These were villagers who thought we were working on bridges,” Mr. Sowerwine says. “They wanted bridges. So we backtracked.”

The first wire bridge opened Christmas of 1998. Thirty-one have been built so far, and there is a waiting list. “We have a lot of cli-

See **PEDAL**, page 14

# 'It's like a personal Peace Corps'

## PEDAL

continued from page 13

ents, but nobody has any money," Mr. Sowerwine says.

Meanwhile, EcoSystems and its team of engineers and local craftsmen launched the Village Power program and began testing it in villages.

To help train local craftsmen in western technology, EcoSystems supports young engineers who volunteer their time in designing and advancing its projects. Mark Younger of Menlo Park, a graduate of Menlo-Atherton High School, is one; his wife, Ashley, who plans to take nurse's training, volunteers at a leprosy clinic in Nepal. "It's like a personal Peace Corps," says Mr. Sowerwine.

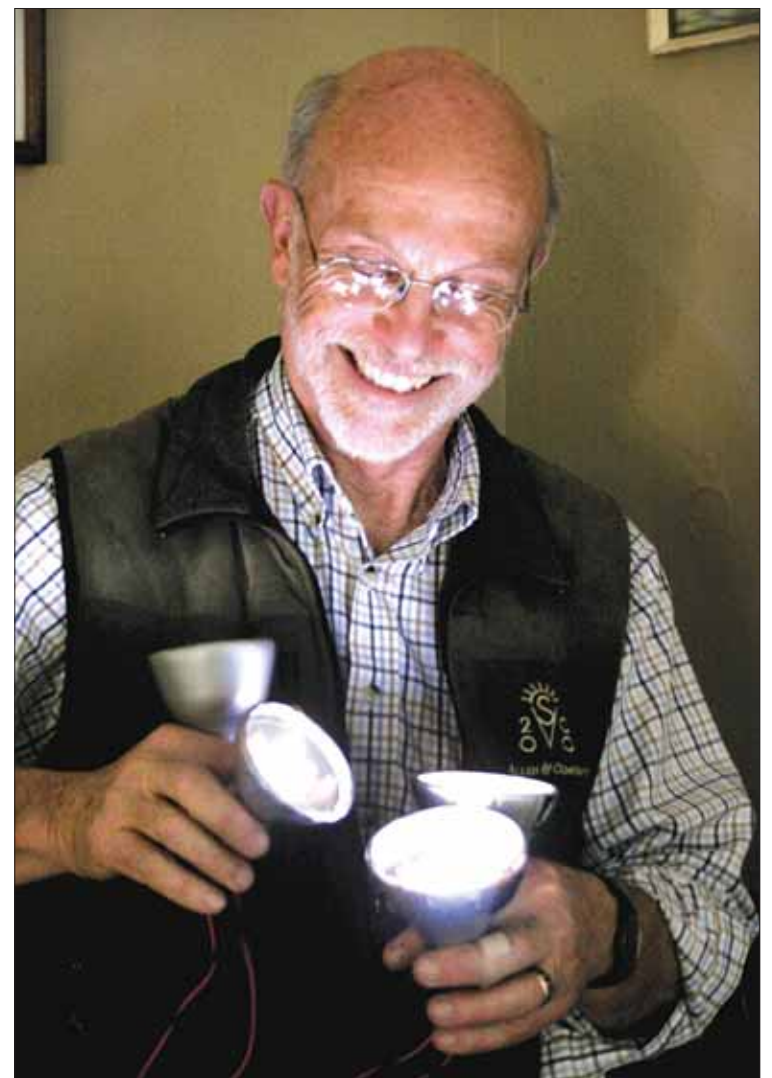
Somehow, the Sowerwines have been moving their projects and knowhow forward in a desperately poor country, with a feudal government, amid a popular uprising.

Dealing with the government remains frustrating, Mr. Sowerwine admits, but mostly, "They're staying out of our way."

The "Maoist" rebellion has been uncomfortable, but there have been no direct threats, Mr. Sowerwine says. Rebels have not interfered with the bridges. He is hopeful that the rebellion is transforming into a true reformist movement.

"The last few years were difficult, with people killing each other," Ms. Sowerwine adds. "It is depressing to see such a wonderful place malfunction."

The huge problem facing Nepal is population growth, Mr. Sowerwine says. Since the 1950s, the population has quintupled. And just since they came in 1991, the population has



The Almanac/Veronica Weber

**At home** in Menlo Park, David Sowerwine demonstrates how tiny LED lamps, embedded in plastic coke bottles that have been cut in half, can produce enough light to cook or study by.

ways to bring transportation and power to poor communities in Nepal, and around the world.

While the Sowerwines already work with a number of international nonprofits, some neighbors are forming a new nonprofit to support their work. "VillageTech Solutions is currently recruiting board members," he says. "It requires special people."

Under the World Bank grant, EcoSystems has to start a program outside of Nepal. So the Sowerwines are working with International Development Enterprises (IDE) of Colorado, an organization that helps poor farmers around the world. IDE is introducing their EcoPower pedal generator and battery system to Myanmar, where practically no villages have electricity.

To start a project like EcoPower in a new country, "you need a partner," Mr. Sowerwine says. "IDE is perfect. They've been there a long time; they know how to get things done; they know what the pitfalls are."

Mr. Sowerwine eagerly describes some of the new projects EcoSys-

tems is working on:

■ **WireRoad:** In addition to bridges, EcoSystems is still developing a WireRoad, a kind of inexpensive rural monorail based on banana cableway technology, to carry people and cargo in more level areas, where roads are rough and unreliable.

■ **Gravity generators:** EcoSystems is designing small generators run by weights — kind of like a cuckoo clock, Mr. Sowerwine says. "People can have their own little in-house generator."

And Mr. Sowerwine will soon be going back to Nepal to work with a Dartmouth engineer to explore ways of storing electricity generated from Nepal's many small hydropower generators that take energy from its rivers. "Batteries are far too expensive; how else can we store it?" he says. "That's where magic comes in. That's what we're exploring."

Mr. Sowerwine remains upbeat. "We want to continue into the future," he says enthusiastically. "We want to keep the engine of innovation going. We think that has great promise for the future." ■

## COVER STORY

"It's a terrible issue," says Mr. Sowerwine. "It's difficult for people here to imagine the level of poverty and despair. It's getting worse because of population growth."

The Sowerwines returned to Menlo Park in 2005. They are managing the business in Nepal from their home on Olive Street, and Mr. Sowerwine returns there several times a year. They also concentrate on obtaining financing for their projects in this country.

"We have a good team in Nepal," Mr. Sowerwine says. "We came back for clean air and 11 grandchildren."

### What next?

In an interview, Mr. Sowerwine sparks ideas like his generator sparks volts. "David sees solutions to problems every day," says Ms. Sowerwine.

His current agenda focuses on at least three areas: raising money to support EcoSystems projects; starting similar projects in other countries; and developing new

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## Medical building proposed for former Acorn site

What is now the abandoned site of the former Acorn restaurant on the northern-edge of Menlo Park could become a two-story building for medical and dental offices.

### ■ MENLO WATCH

Check Town Square on [www.AlmanacNews.com](http://www.AlmanacNews.com)

The City Council is scheduled to consider plans for the 9,825-square-foot building at the intersection of El Camino Real and Spruce Avenue at its Feb. 27 meeting. The meeting starts at 7 p.m. in the council chambers at the Civic Center, between Laurel and Alma streets.

The proposed project does not require a rezoning, but does call for a subdivision of the property and a use permit.

The Planning Commission voted 4-3 on Jan. 28 to recommend council approval of the use permit and subdivision, but commissioners disagreed on the positioning and facade of the project.

The council will have the final say in all aspects of the project.

To view a staff report for the project, go to [MenloPark.org](http://MenloPark.org), click on "City Council", and select the Feb. 27 agenda.

### Council set to act on labor contracts

After a two-week delay, the

Menlo Park City Council is expected to consider two new labor contracts and pay increases for top management at its Feb. 27 meeting.

The labor contracts were on the council's Feb. 13 agenda, but the meeting ran late, and discussion was deferred to Feb. 27. The meeting starts at 7 p.m. in the council chambers at the Civic Center.

If the contracts are approved, employee pension benefits would rise 35 percent for the city's 193 non-safety employees, starting in March 2009.

Council members said the city won concessions for increasing the pension benefit, including minimal salary increases for the employees, but city employees expect to seek hefty pay raises once the contracts expire in 2009, said Keith McLeod, a union spokesperson.

The council will also consider authorizing salary increases of up to 4 percent for the city's department heads and assistant city manager.

## Yee seeks grants for micro-businesses

Very small businesses in California have an advocate in state Sen. Leland Yee, who is proposing a bill to establish a grant program that would assist enterprises that start with five or fewer employees and with less than \$35,000 in equity.

Mr. Yee, whose district includes Portola Valley and Woodside, said that 2.7 million Califor-

nia-based "micro-enterprises" generate \$238 billion in tax revenues, account for 19 percent of employment in the state, and are frequently headed by women and members of ethnic minorities.

Program grants would range from \$50,000 to \$100,000 over two years, he said. The legislation is contained in Senate bill SB 446.

## Nominations invited for school awards

The Portola Valley PTO is asking the community for help in nominating candidates for the Founders Day 2007 awards that honor extraordinary people who have given many years of service to the Portola Valley School District.

The event, held every other year, takes place this year on Thursday, May 10, from 3:30 to 5 p.m., but the PTO board welcomes nominations now.

Nominations should be submitted in writing or by e-mail. Cite reasons the person should receive a PTO Honorary Service Award. Send nominations to PTO presidents Carolyn Carhart-Quezada at [carhart-quezada@sbcglobal.net](mailto:carhart-quezada@sbcglobal.net) or Marti Sterns at [martisterns@hotmail.com](mailto:martisterns@hotmail.com). Nominations also may be dropped off in the Founders Day box in the Ormondale or Corte Madera school office.

For more information, e-mail

Carolyn Carhart-Quezada.

The location for the Founders Day event will be announced at a later date.

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# Community

NEWS OF LOCAL PEOPLE AND EVENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

## Dr. Seuss musical debuts Thursday at Woodside High

A student production of "Seussical the Musical" opens at 8 p.m. Thursday, March 1, at Woodside High School in the Performing Arts Center, with two more evening performances on Friday and Saturday and a 2 p.m. matinee on Sunday.

The play includes characters

from many of Dr. Seuss' books with music, including a final number based on the story "Green Eggs and Ham," according to a Wikipedia entry.

The Woodside High cast includes about 45 students, with more in the stage crew and orchestra. "It's a student orchestra, essentially,"

### AROUND TOWN

said director Barry Woodruff. "It's fairly complex music, so it's going to be interesting."

Tickets are \$18 for adults, \$15 for seniors 60 and older, and \$10 for students. To buy tickets

over the phone, call anytime at 367-9750, ext. 4851.

### Artist talks about camellias

Artist Meryl Urdang will be on hand to talk about her camellia photos from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 27, on the opening day of Filoli's "Camellia Treasures" show, which runs through March 3.

Ms. Urdang's photos are displayed on "Silk Under Glass," an art form where a photo is transferred to silk, then permanently steamed onto the bottom of a glass plate. Ms. Urdang spent two years developing the technique.

Admission to Filoli is \$12 for adults, \$5 for students 17 to 5, and free for children 5 and under. For more information, call the Filoli ticket office at 364-8300, ext. 508.

### Junior League plans spring gala March 3

"Bon Voyage" is the theme for the Junior League of Palo Alto-Mid Peninsula's annual spring gala to be held at 6:30 p.m. Saturday, March 3, at Los Altos Golf and Country Club.

The evening will feature a silent auction, cocktails and hors d'oeuvres in a "Turkish marketplace," to be followed by dinner, a live auction and dancing to a DJ in "Club Monaco."

The cruise theme has been popular with the Junior League in past fundraisers. In 1985 League members actually sailed on the Bay on the Red and White Fleet's "Royal Prince" with dining and dancing under the stars. Raffle prizes for the 1988 gala included a two-week Mediterranean cruise.

Vanessa Roach is chairman for this year's "Bon Voyage." Her committee includes Sherri Dohemann, auction; Vanessa Kelmon, logistics; Leslie Rubin, treasurer; and Pam Brandin and Karin Riley, advisers. Jean Limbach is League president.

Tickets are \$125 per person. For more information, go to [www.thejuniorleague.org](http://www.thejuniorleague.org).

### One-woman show at Menlo library

Lynn Ruth Miller, author, painter and stand-up comedian, will present her 60-minute one-woman show, "Farewell to the Tooth Fairy," at 11 a.m. Saturday, March 3, at the Menlo Park Library, 800 Alma St.

The stories featured in the show were selected from her "Thoughts While Walking the Dog" columns that originally appeared in the Pacifica Tribune.

Free van service is available for Menlo Park seniors and people with disabilities. For more information, call 330-2512.



### ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

#### TOWN OF ATHERTON STATE OF CALIFORNIA

#### 2007 STREET MICROSURFACING PROJECT PROJECT NO. 06-003

Notice is hereby given that SEALED BIDS will be received at the office of the City Clerk, 91 Ashfield Road, Atherton, California 94027, until 3:00 p.m. Friday, March 9, 2007, at which time they will be publicly opened and read, for performing the following work:

Performing Type II Micro-surfacing per Town specifications on the listed streets which includes notifications, traffic control, prep work, installation, compaction, sweeping, clean up and follow up. 1 year guarantee. Estimate of work to be performed is approximately 54,000 square yards.

Bids must be for the total dollar amount for all work listed by the Town, and shall be submitted in sealed envelopes clearly marked: "Bid of (Contractor) for 2007 STREET MICROSURFACING PROJECT, Project No. 06-003", along with date and time of bid opening.

Plans and specifications may be obtained at the Town of Atherton Reception Desk, 91 Ashfield Road, Atherton CA 94027, for a non-refundable fee of \$15.00. Additional important information is contained in Town of Atherton Standard Specifications, which are available for and additional \$20.00. If shipping is requested, there will be an additional charge of \$20.00.

Bids must be accompanied by a bid security in the form of cash, a cashier's or certified check or bid bond for not less than ten percent (10%) of the amount of the bid, as a guarantee that the bidder, if awarded the Contract, will fulfill the terms of the bid. The Town of Atherton reserves the right to refuse any or all proposals.

Bidders are hereby notified that, pursuant to California Civil Code Sections 3247 and 3248 and Standard Specifications Section 3.02, the successful bidder will be required to provide payment and performance bonds in the amounts stated in Section 3.02 of the Standard Specifications.

Bidders are hereby notified that provisions of California Labor Code, regarding the prevailing wages are applicable to the work to be performed under this contract. Pursuant to Section 1773 et. seq. the general prevailing wage rates have been determined by the Director of the California Department of Industrial Relations and appear in the California Prevailing Wage Rates. Copies are on file at the office of the City Engineer and are available to interested parties upon request. The successful bidder shall post a copy of the wage rates at the job site.

The Contractor may elect to receive 100 percent of payments due under the contract, without retention of any portion of the payment by the Town of Atherton, by depositing securities of equivalent value to the retention amount in accordance with the provisions of Section 22300 of the California Public Contracts Code.

The successful bidder must be licensed under the provisions of Chapter 9, Division 3, of the California Business and Professions Code to do the type of work contemplated in the project at the time the contract is awarded and shall be skilled and regularly engaged in the general class or type of work called for under the Contract. Failure of the bidder to obtain proper and adequate licensing for an award of the contract shall constitute a failure to execute the contract and result in the forfeiture of the bidder's bid security.

Each bidder shall submit with this bid a statement setting forth his/her/its experience and qualifications. The statement shall be made on the forms provided by the Town and must accompany each bid. The three lowest bidders will be required to submit subcontractor's experience and qualifications statements within 48 hours of the bid opening, on forms provided by the Town.

By submitting a bid in response to this advertisement for bids, the bidder shall be conclusively deemed to have read, understood and agreed with all of the information and materials contained in the bid documents, including but not limited to the construction contract, the standard specifications, the special provisions, the required nature and amount of insurance and the documentation evidencing said insurance.

Any questions should be directed to the Streets Superintendent, 91 Ashfield Road, Atherton, CA 94027, telephone (650) 752-0541, preferably no later than 2 days before bid opening.

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Duncan L. Jones, P.E., City Engineer

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Published in THE COUNTRY ALMANAC on February 21, 28, 2007.

## Inspirations



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contact Blanca Yoc at 650-326-8210 ext. 221 • e-mail [byoc@pawebweekly.com](mailto:byoc@pawebweekly.com)

# Get your kicks at Calla's new shoe store in Menlo Park

Carrie Bradshaw would love it. So would Imelda Marcos. Calla Kicks opened Feb. 9 as Menlo Park's first women's shoe store. It features footwear ranging from \$38 patchwork Keds to a gorgeous silk mule adorned with a "diamond" brooch that retails for \$365.

Calla Kicks (slang for shoes) is a sister store to Calla, the women's clothing store on Santa Cruz Avenue that Lee Murphy opened 13 years ago. Ms. Murphy also has another women's clothing store, Pink Wasabi, in Carmel.

Calla has been carrying shoes for 10 years. Calla Kicks seemed like a good idea since "We were doing such a huge business in shoes," says Ms. Murphy.

The store at 1060 Evelyn Street in downtown Menlo Park is located in space formerly occupied by Oh, a retro clothing store. It has been re-

## ■ BUSINESS

molding, and louvered shutters. The look is fresh and feminine.

Shelves are filled with tempting shoe lines: Donald Pliner, Cole-Haan, Merrill, Stuart Weitzman, Coach, Frye Boots, Bernardo Footwear, Rainbow, Jack Rogers Sandals, and French Sole.

Store manager Kate Morey shows a faux snakeskin ballet slipper with patent leather toe from French Sole. "Ballet slippers are going to be huge this spring. So is anything in patent," says Ms. Murphy.

Ms. Morey also models her favorite shoe: a shirred patent shoe with a peep-toe. Peep-toes are another springtime "gotta have it."

Ms. Murphy says the key to Calla's success with shoes has been special orders. "We do special orders every day. Not many stores are



The Almanac/Veronica Weber

**Black fabric mules** adorned with "diamond" brooches are featured at Calla Kicks, Menlo Park's only women's shoe store.



The Almanac/Veronica Weber

**Calla Kicks owner** Lee Murphy shows customer Cheryl di Targiani a pair of red mules at the store's grand opening Feb. 9.

willing to do that. For example, we have the Cole-Haan catalogue and can get an order in three days."

The new store carries shoes from size 2 (for little girls) to 11. There is a fetching line of mother and daughter sandals.

Calla Kicks also carries handbags, including a luscious pistachio-hued bag of softest leather. A gift of a red leather Cole-Haan clutch, with a heart stitching (\$95), coin purse (\$55), or key ring

and locket (\$35) would have it all over a dozen long-stemmed red roses.

The store also features shoe accessories: three pink flannel shoe bags with see-through plastic "windows" are \$28 for the set.

Ms. Murphy is confident about her new venture. She says the secret to her past success is listening to customers and giving them what they want. She and Kate Morey intend to do the same at Calla Kicks.

## Market research firm adds to executive team

Richard Catrone, a 20-year veteran of the consumer research industry, has joined the Menlo Park-based marketing research firm Knowledge Networks as the new senior vice president for operations.

Mr. Catrone, who will be based in the New York City area, comes to Knowledge Networks from the North American operations of Ipsos ASI, an international marketing and public-affairs research firm with

headquarters in Paris.

At Ipsos, Mr. Catrone's responsibilities included identifying and integrating new technologies, finding ways to improve efficiency, and evaluating product business plans.

With Knowledge Networks' focus on government and academic research, an area noted for rigorous methodology, Mr. Catrone brings "invaluable experience in (helping) to develop and implement sound business plans," said Simon Kooyman, Knowledge Networks' chief executive officer.

## Vive! Opens Menlo Park office

Vive!, a transitional program for at-risk teens returning from residential treatment programs to their home environment, has opened an office at 431 Burgess Drive in Menlo Park.

The Colorado-based company's team of Bay Area professionals works with troubled families to transition young people back from wilderness programs and therapeutic boarding schools into home community environments, or even college.

The office is led by director

Diane Harrington. She has a background in marketing and business development, along with experience as a practicing marriage and family therapist. She holds a master's degree in counseling psychology from the University of Santa Clara.

Vive! headquarters are in Boulder, Colorado. There are offices in Menlo Park and Beverly Hills. For more information, call 800-261-0127.

## Coldwell Banker collects toys, coats

Coldwell Banker Residential

Brokerage offices collected nearly 9,500 toys and 3,480 coats during their recent holiday drive. This is 20th year that Coldwell Banker has supported the Toys for Tots and One Warm Coat drives.

## ■ BUSINESS

## 'From Counterculture to Cyberculture'

See posts like this in the Woodside category of Town Square at [AlmanacNews.com](http://AlmanacNews.com):

Jamies MacNiven in his Buck's of Woodside cyber-newsletter reports:

"Fred Turner has just published From Counterculture to Cyberculture, Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network and the Rise of Digital Utopianism and we are carrying it as this month's pick. Fred, Asst. Professor in the Communications School at Stanford, has drawn a remarkable portrait of how we ended up

## ■ TOWN SQUARE

Post news, views on Town Square at [AlmanacNews.com](http://AlmanacNews.com)

here. Here meaning us, sitting in the driver's seat of a new age."

Jamies goes on to tell much more, including how Woodside's own Dr. Larry Roberts is one of the inventors of the Internet. "You can look it up."

For more, check this post in the Woodside category of Town Square.

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# Belle Haven child care worker transferred

■ Union files grievance over the transfer of Vanessa Carlisle; parents upset by move.

By Rory Brown  
Almanac Staff Writer

Menlo Park child care worker Vanessa Carlisle has been transferred out of the Belle Haven program, but according to union officials and parents, the fight to keep “the heart and soul” of the neighborhood’s child care services is far from over.

Ms. Carlisle, who has provided child care services to the predomi-

nantly low-income Belle Haven neighborhood for 23 years, was transferred—against her will—to the Burgess program on Feb. 26.

The union that represents Ms. Carlisle, the Service Employees International Union Local 715, has filed a grievance with the city, according to union spokesperson Jonathan Wright.

Mr. Wright said he cannot discuss the details of the grievance,

but did say, “We think it’s in everyone’s best interests to keep [Ms. Carlisle] in Belle Haven.”

But Community Services Director Barbara Santos George said the transfer is final. She said the Belle Haven program has too many staff members, and the Burgess program doesn’t have enough.

“We looked at some options other than moving [Ms. Carlisle], but there’s nothing we feel could work,” Ms. Santos George said.

Parents, former students, and other community members thought they stopped the transfer

after more than 120 people packed the council’s Jan. 30 meeting, at which 27 people said the removal of Ms. Carlisle would damage the Belle Haven program.

City staff said the transfer would be put on hold, but three weeks later, Ms. Carlisle was officially transferred.

Parents are “outraged” by the transfer, and plan on requesting that council members step in and move Ms. Carlisle back to the Belle

Haven program, said East Palo Alto parent Marcia Dore Perez.

Councilman Andy Cohen is the only member of the council to have publicly support that sentiment. Other council members said the transfer is a personnel issue, and the decision is up to city staff.

“We don’t want anyone in the community to feel like the council doesn’t care, but there’s limited things we can say or do,” said Councilman John Boyle. ■

## Speaker offers tips on raising kids

“How to Raise Responsible Kids Without Raising Your Blood Pressure” is the title of author Jim Fay’s talk for parents on Thursday, March 8, from 7 to 9 p.m. in Hillview Middle School’s multi-use room at 1100 Elder Ave. in Menlo Park.

Sponsored by the PTO Council of the Menlo Park City School District, his talk is free and open to parents and others who care for kids.

A parent of three and author of the book “Parenting with Love & Logic,” Mr. Fay has some 30 years of experience as a teacher, administrator and consultant. He also will speak to teachers in the Menlo Park district on Friday, March 9, during their staff development day.

To assure adequate seating for the March 8 program, people are asked to pre-register by e-mailing Irene Searles at PTO-Council@yahoo.com.

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### COW

continued from page 9

that it’s not up to me, it’s up to the council.”

While the COW Web site at CitizensofWoodside.com accuses Ms. George of refusing to accept even the letter that came with the check, she said that’s not the way it happened.

“(The courier) asked me specifically for his copy of the letter back,” Ms. George said.

According to COW’s version of events, “Susan George even refused to accept our letter to (the) Council explaining the need and desire for Webcasting in Wood-

side. Makes us wonder what other communications from citizens she keeps from the Council.”

This week’s Woodside Town Council meeting may provide some indication of what council members think about airing video of council, committee and commission meetings online. Ms. George’s report about COW’s offer is item No. 3 on the agenda for the Tuesday, Feb. 27, council meeting.

The Town Council meets in Independence Hall, at 2955 Woodside Road, at 7:30 p.m.; information about meetings is available by calling 851-6790 or by going to [Woodsidetown.org](http://Woodsidetown.org). ■

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## Pedestrian struck in Menlo Park crosswalk

The crosswalk across El Camino Real at Cambridge Avenue in Menlo Park did not protect a 61-year-old pedestrian from Foster City who wound up in Stanford Hospital Thursday, Feb. 22, after reportedly being struck by a vehicle driven by a 63-year-old Menlo Park man.

Menlo Park police would not release the names of the parties, but department spokeswoman Nicole Acker described the pedestrian's injuries as com-

plaints of pain to the head, back and arm.

The driver, who was making a left turn from Cambridge onto El Camino Real, is being charged with failure to yield to a pedestrian in a crosswalk, she added.

The pedestrian was struck on his left elbow by the "side bumper" of a 1991 gray Chevrolet Caprice while crossing from the east side of El Camino Real to the west side, Ms. Acker said.

The car did not run over the pedestrian and the driver claims he didn't see him, she said.

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~All activities 9:30am to 12:30pm~



DATE	ACTIVITY	LOCATION
MAR 3	French Broom Removal	Alpine Inn, PV
APR 7	Weeding / Maintenance	El Palo Alto Park, PA
<b>MAY 19*</b>	Nat'l River Cleanup Day	Manhattan Ave, PA
June 2	TBA	TBA

~9:00am to 12:00pm~

For locations and directions: see [www.SanFrancisquito.org/Events](http://www.SanFrancisquito.org/Events)

This project is sponsored in part by the Dept of Water Resources Urban Streams Restoration Program, the NOAA Community-Based Restoration Program (NOAA-CRP), the Institute for Fisheries Resources-NOAA CRP Partnership, and the San Mateo Countywide Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program - a program of C/CAG

Volunteers are also needed at the Native Plant Nursery - Nursery@Acterra.org Ryan Navratil 650.961.1035 x310 Volunteer@SanFrancisquito.org

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  - Saturday, March 17 (One-Day Intro Class)
- \* **INFANT AND CHILD CPR**  
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  - Saturday, March 24
- \* **PRENATAL YOGA**  
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  - Saturday, April 14

Call (650) 723-4600 or visit [www.lpch.org](http://www.lpch.org) to register or obtain more information on the times, locations and fees for these and other courses.



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**■ POLICE CALLS**

his 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 report:** Old .22 caliber pistol stolen, 100 block of Atherton Avenue, Feb. 18.

**MENLO PARK**

**Grand theft reports:**

■ Dimmer switch stolen, Comcast building at 1205 Chrysler Drive, Feb. 16.

■ Property stolen during move from New York to Menlo Park, 300 block of Sharon Park Drive, Feb. 17.

■ Cell phone, cash, backpack and business cards stolen from unlocked vehicle, Safeway parking lot at 525 El Camino Real, Feb. 18.

**Robbery report:** Purse grabbed with resulting loss of personal items and \$300 in cash, Newbridge Street and Madera

Avenue, Feb. 18.

**Burglary report:** TV and stereo stolen, 2100 block of Clayton Drive, Feb. 20.

**Auto burglary report:** Passenger window broken, 200 block of Van Buren Road, Feb. 22.

**Indecent exposure report:** Occurred at about 6 p.m., 1000 block of University

Drive, Feb. 21.

**Fraud report:**

■ Identity stolen and used to open fraudulent accounts, 400 block of Bay Road, Feb. 16.

■ Check for \$4,000 forged, 2700 block of Sand Hill Road, Feb. 16.

■ Bad check written on victim's bank account, 800 block of Hamilton Avenue, Feb. 20.

**WEST MENLO PARK**

**Burglary report:** Construction tools stolen from residence, 3000 block of Barney Avenue, Feb. 14.

**Theft report:** Five \$250 rolls of copper wire stolen from residential construction site, 2000 block of Manzanita Avenue, Feb. 14.

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**Big Band dance at Woodside High**

The Advanced Jazz Band and three other bands will play for Menlo-Atherton High School's 23rd annual Big Band dance from 8 to 11:30 p.m. Friday, March 2, in the school's J Building. Along with dancing to Frank Moura's award-winning bands, there will be a jazz cafe and silent auction. General admission is \$20; \$10 for senior citizens. Tickets will be available at the door or by sending an e-mail to [WeberAssoc@aol.com](mailto:WeberAssoc@aol.com).

**Freeing women from to-do lists**

Boston-based author and psychotherapist Abby Seixas will conduct an all-day workshop Saturday, March 10, in Ladera, on helping women slow down, tame their to-do lists, and find depth in everyday life. The workshop, which costs \$110, will be held from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Ladera Community Church, 3300 Alpine Road in Portola Valley. To register and for more information, go to [www.deepriverwithin.com](http://www.deepriverwithin.com).

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# Why two school districts?

By Terry DeFelice

The Las Lomas School District in Menlo Park operates only two schools and leases out two other schools. The district has a superintendent and a full administrative staff as well as a school board. The Menlo Park City School District has a superintendent with a full administrative staff as well as a school board. This district has four schools sites.

When I was teaching, districts like Millbrae, San Bruno and Burlingame were considered small districts and still are. These districts have seven or eight school sites. What's happening here? Is no one stating the obvious? This is crazy! These six schools are in Menlo Park. When will the school boards look into forming one



school district? It is positively mystifying to see the waste in duplicate administrative staffs.

Some time ago I asked why the districts just didn't combine since six schools would still be considered a small district. A neighbor told me it has always been that way. The children north of Alameda de las Pulgas attend Las Lomas and the children south of Alameda de las Pulgas attend the Menlo Park City district. Why continue this situation? Palo Alto has one school district, Redwood City and San Carlos have one school district and Alameda de las Pulgas runs right

through Redwood City.

Both school districts in Menlo Park have come before the public to ask again for increased taxes to support their schools. They have indicated that they need more classrooms, yet one site right in the middle of Menlo Park is leased out to a private school. This site on Avy Avenue is undergoing extensive renovations. Why is this site not being considered for Menlo Park public school students?

Is the Las Lomas school district allowing all this renovation to the site without a possible sale in mind? Wouldn't the district make more money selling that prime location to a developer?

I think it is time for the community to suggest that it is a supreme waste of taxpayers' money to support any superintendent and their administrative staff to supervise two schools. Why are we leasing schools out when we need more classrooms in Menlo Park? I just don't get it.

Before more taxpayer money is put in this wasteful situation, the educational community needs to make some effort towards responsible management. And having two separate school districts in our town is really completely illogical and myopic.

*Terry DeFelice is a retired educator who lives on Sharon Park Drive in Menlo Park.*

## LETTERS

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action. Doing so sends the message that walking and biking in the area are not appropriate and encourages motorists to race through the area.

It is no surprise that there are relatively few people using the crosswalk since the narrow sidewalks and high-speed traffic make it difficult and unpleasant to walk in the area. However, the county should be focusing on ways to improve the safety of the area instead of removing the sidewalk, thereby further discouraging pedestrians. I am sure the county can come up with some relatively inexpensive ways to enhance the safety of the crosswalk instead of giving up and removing it.

Laura Teksler  
Sharon Heights

## Course offers alternatives to anger

Editor:

The recent Live in Peace event

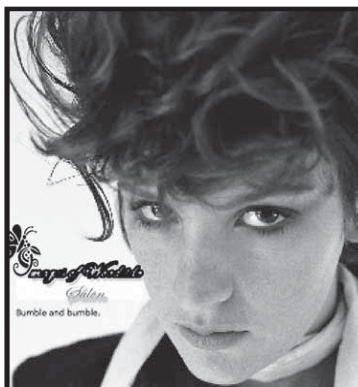
in East Palo Alto brought calls for people to learn alternate ways to handle anger and arguments.

One possibility is available next month. The Alternative to Violence Project (AVP) of California will be sponsoring a basic training workshop the weekend of March 16-19 at the Friends Meeting House in Palo Alto. This training is open to individuals from their teen years to adults.

The program has been offered at specific California correctional facilities for several years and two years ago the call went out to provide this program in all California prisons. Information about the program can be found at [www.avpcalifornia.org](http://www.avpcalifornia.org).

It is a low-cost program and scholarships are available. Those taking the training may be seeking to make a difference in their own lives or in their communities. Here's a chance to keep the momentum going. Come join in.

Talley Kenyon  
Sharon Road, Menlo Park



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The Almanac, established in September, 1965, is delivered each week to residents of Menlo Park, Atherton, Portola Valley and Woodside and adjacent unincorporated areas of southern San Mateo County. The Almanac is qualified by decree of the Superior Court of San Mateo County to publish public notices of a governmental and legal nature, as stated in Decree No. 147530, issued November 9, 1969.

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**WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?**

All views must include a home address and contact phone number. Published letters will also appear on the Almanac Web site, www.AlmanacNews.com, and occasionally on the Almanac's Town Square forum.

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

**MAIL** or deliver to: Editor at the Almanac, 3525 Alameda de las Pulgas, Menlo Park, CA 94025.

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## Warming task force needs public scrutiny

When public officials openly declare that a newly appointed committee “can get more done” if they are not hindered by the restrictions of the Brown Act — the state’s open meeting law — major red flags appear.

And that is the path Menlo Park Mayor Kelly Fergusson has chosen for a new task force on global warming, a subject that could result in some important — and controversial — policy changes for the city.

**EDITORIAL**  
The opinion of The Almanac

Last week the City Council voted 3-1-1, with Andy Cohen opposed and John Boyle abstaining, to back the mayor’s idea and keep the task force an informal body.

Ms. Fergusson emphasized that the task force’s meetings would be open to the public, but because the body will be appointed by the mayor, rather than the full City Council, such a group is not required to advertise or record its meetings. Mr. Boyle the task force should be legally required to keep its meetings open to the public.

Ms. Fergusson and her supporters say they want a more informal group that can communicate via e-mail or online message boards. That is a tantalizing idea, but by going this route, the unfettered behind-the-scenes communications, in which critical ideas could be advanced before being aired in public, may never be seen by the majority of Menlo Park residents.

Given the real need for all levels of society to reduce output of greenhouse gases, we applaud Mayor Fergusson and the council for taking on a problem that may seem daunting for a small community. Menlo Park has a wealth of well-educated residents who are undoubtedly eager to discuss ways for the city to develop an intelligent and useful strategy to reduce carbon emissions in the years ahead.

But to do so using a committee that is not governed by Brown Act requirements could subject the panel to needless criticism by persons left out of the debate. Even if creating a Brown Act-compliant body costs a few more dollars and would be slightly more cumbersome, the payoff is a totally transparent process in which everyone can contribute equally.

**LETTERS**  
Our readers write

### It's clear the city needs more revenue

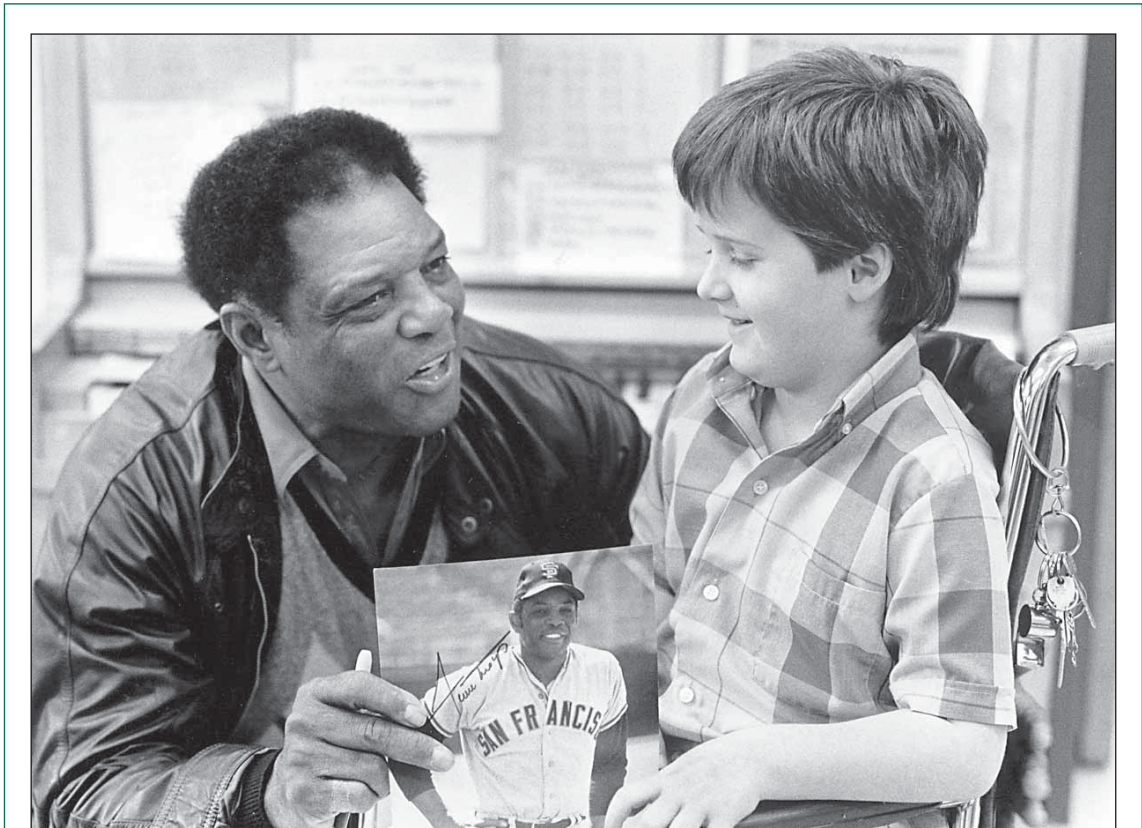
Editor:

Nobody likes the idea of a new tax, even if it’s nominal for some, so I applaud the Menlo Park City Council for making a difficult decision. When one puts together all the pieces of the budget puzzle, it’s clear the city needs more revenue at this time.

I know the city has surpassed expectations yearly on the revenue line for the last 10 years and this fact has convinced many people that it means we don’t need more income. This is just one piece of the puzzle. It does mean that the city’s estimates for revenue were low. However, the deferred expenses the city faces in the form of massive employee pension and retirement benefit costs (OPEB), as well as under-funded road and storm drain repairs will outpace even better-than-expected revenue from current sources.

Liken it to a family budget. Maybe you continue to beat your estimate of income, but your living expenses are outpacing your ability to fund your retirement or make necessary but costly home repairs. You even made your bonus this year, but the windfall is still not enough to maintain your home or save for retirement. This windfall will help with basic expenses and keep you going, but the longer you wait to repair your roof, the more expensive it will be.

The city has had very conservative fiscal management, taking care that spending did not outpace income. However, this has been at the cost of putting off very



Atherton Heritage Association

### Our Regional Heritage

Former San Francisco Giants baseball player Willie Mays, an Atherton resident, presents an autographed photo to a patient at Stanford Children’s Hospital during a 1985 visit.

large-ticket items such as road repair, staffing the police department, paying out retiree benefits, or even being able to think about updating the general plan. Finally now we can get that roof fixed.

**Katie Ferrick**  
Budget Advisory Committee member, 2005-06,  
Bay Road, Menlo Park

### New tax based on false assumption

Editor:

Our new council, elected on a

platform of openness and inclusion, spent last Tuesday night defending the new utility tax that barely passed, the result we now know of false assumptions, false ballot information and phone lobbying that threatened a disastrous loss of services.

The testimony was dramatic. We now know in fact we had a big budget surplus, and almost certainly will again this current year. Were they defending a new tax that we were tricked into voting for? In response, one actually said, “It’s time to

spend.” Who are these people?  
**Henry Riggs**  
Callie Lane, Menlo Park

### Why allow child to ride in heavy traffic?

Editor:

I am writing in response to the Feb. 14 photograph of the little girl squeezed between two SUVs as she rides to school.

I am not writing, however, to support the author’s pleas to

See **LETTERS**, next page

# Tax debate: halt it now, or tax to the max?

**Boyle:** “The tax would probably not have been on the ballot had the \$3.7 million surplus been known”

By John Boyle

In my first three months on the Menlo Park City Council, one thing clearly stands out: We need fuller and more timely information on our city finances.

Due to limited resources, our city’s financial team has an incredibly difficult job, and they are doing the best they can. However, we need to do better. Similar cities have found ways to do more frequent financial reports and have formed audit or finance committees to work with the city staff to improve the process and its transparency. I plan to continue pushing the city to embrace these types of “best practices.”

Perhaps the most pressing example of how this lack of financial information has impacted all of us is the new utility user tax.

Last summer, based partly on erroneous forecasts, our former council decided to place the UUT on the ballot. Many other people endorsed, campaigned, and voted for it based in part on poor information.

I think our City Council owes it to the public to minimize this tax. If you watched our Feb. 13 council meeting, you know that I lobbied to consider repealing the UUT or to set it at zero. Instead the council voted 4-1 (I opposed) to proceed immediately with the UUT at the maximum rate.

In my view it is not clear that the tax is needed. We have a long history of overly conservative forecasts like last year’s. The city’s current long-term forecast projects annual deficits of approximately \$1 million without the UUT. But over the past 10 years, the city’s **actual** outcome has **always** beat the forecast by a significant amount, ranging from \$2.5 million to \$9.5 million each year. There are other reasons to reconsider the tax:

■ Although I’m not advocating deficit spending, I believe that with a record \$35 million general fund reserve, we can afford to use a more optimistic forecast until proven wrong.

■ If we do implement the tax, it will be hard to not spend it.



John Boyle

■ Once expenses ramp up, it will be hard to reduce them.

■ The UUT measure would probably never even have been placed on the ballot (let alone passed) had the \$3.7 million surplus been known and disclosed.

## The employee contracts

The negotiations that led to the pending city employee contracts are another example of where better financial information would have helped the council. Again using erroneous estimates, the prior council proceeded down certain negotiating paths. When the new council took office, an official impasse had already been declared. We made the best of an unfortunate situation by getting the SEIU and AFSCME unions to accept a three-year package that includes a significant pension increase, but also includes minimal raises (0 percent in year one, 1 percent in year two, and 2 percent in year three).

While the 35 percent pension increase is dramatic, it is the same as what the vast majority of our peer cities are offering. We would be at a loss to recruit and retain our top employees if we remained uncompetitive in this regard. This was an especially important point as we look to hire a new city manager. Also, by avoiding any substantial near-term salary increases, the total cost to the city is projected to be lower than any other available alternative.

A side note: The reason for the 4 percent immediate increase for management vs. the deferred 3 percent cumulative increase for the unionized employees reflects the fact that our unionized city workers are currently paid at levels consistent with other cities, while our management staff are currently paid at a rate significantly below the **averages** elsewhere.

*John Boyle is a member of the Menlo Park City Council.*

## NOTE

On Feb. 13, the Menlo Park City Council voted 4-1 to set the new utility users’ tax at the maximum rate: 3.5 percent on utilities (water, gas and electric bills) and 2.5 percent on communications (landline phone, cell phone, cable TV and Internet bills). The opposing vote was cast by new council member, John Boyle. Below, Mr. Boyle, and Councilwoman and Mayor Kelly Fergusson, who voted for the tax, explain their positions.

**Fergusson:** “Without the utility users’ tax, the \$1.9 million annual structural deficit remains”

By Kelly Fergusson

The need for the utility users’ tax (UUT) is based on Menlo Park’s ongoing and 10-year projection of a structural deficit in the city’s annual finances. Over the past 10n years, the budget was “balanced” by failing to spend money on proper street maintenance, and failing to pay for other known liabilities. The city’s purported “balanced budgets,” including year-end “surpluses,” masked an unhealthy ongoing annual financial picture.

Over the past five years, city councils made extremely difficult choices to cut services and raise fees. Two years ago, the city manager proposed a way to solve the \$2.9 million structural deficit once and for all — hold the 2005-06 budget static, with no set-asides for infrastructure and known liabilities, and concentrate freed-up staff time on devising long-term cost saving and revenue-improving strategies.

Staff’s strategies were then ranked by public input to the Your City/Your Decision process. In early 2006, the City Council implemented \$1 million of these deficit-reducing strategies, including staff cuts. (Twelve percent of staff positions have been cut since 2001). Still, a \$1.9 million annual structural deficit remained. Public input favored a tax to close the remaining gap.

In summer 2006, the City Council unanimously placed the UUT on the ballot for the voters’ decision. Despite \$100 million in big-oil anti-tax TV ads (to defeat Prop 87) during the November 2006 election, and subsequent failure of every other local tax measure up and down the Peninsula, Menlo Park’s UUT still passed.

Without the UUT, the \$1.9 million annual structural deficit remains. Pointing to the 2005-06 “surplus” as reason to eliminate the tax misrep-

resents the big picture of the city’s finances. Likewise, pointing to past history of “surpluses” fails to account for lack of street maintenance and liability payments in those years. No UUT in 2006-07 would cause a \$1 million deficit — that’s fiduciarily unsound.

Deferred maintenance, known liabilities, service levels, employee compensation — all these comprise the true cost of running the city, and must be considered when looking at its whole financial picture. Voters and past and present councils understood this and took needed action to restore our city’s financial health.



Kelly Fergusson

## Labor agreements

Read no further if you object to employees receiving annual cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) — we are too far apart philosophically. But assuming COLAs are reasonable, your council negotiated a cost-effective labor agreement while granting the employees’ top priority — the 2.7 percent at 55 pension benefit.

By foregoing 3.6 percent, 2.5 percent, and 2.5 percent COLAs for respective years of a three-year contract and accepting only 0 percent, 1 percent and 2 percent, the employees entirely pay for their improved retirement benefit. In fact, taxpayers SAVE about \$200,000 annually compared to COLAs.

Bottom line, Menlo Park taxpayers are getting a better deal than did taxpayers in Palo Alto and Redwood City. Hyped-up rhetoric around this issue isn’t based on the numbers.

## 4 percent executive raise

Easy decision. Top staff hasn’t had any raise in two years. City Manager Boesch just resigned — and his salary was \$30,000 annually below market rate. We can’t afford squandering our human capital with penny-wise, pound-foolish salary policies.

*Kelly Fergusson is a member of the Menlo Park City Council. She holds the title of mayor.*



## LETTERS

*Continued from previous page*

eliminate shoulder parking. I am writing to ask him, a father, why in the world he allows, encourages, and probably insists, that a small child ride her bike thorough heavy traffic. I am a bicyclist, environmentalist, and commuter; I hate traffic, and am uncomfortable advocating that kids get off their bikes.

I am also the parent of two Menlo-Atherton students and on many, many mornings I have

sat in traffic at the intersection of Ringwood Avenue and Middlefield Road and watched as small children try and navigate their heartbreakingly tiny bikes around the packed cars. On every occasion, I ask myself, “What in the world are their parents thinking?” I worry about those kids getting around every car and riding up on to the shoulder; then I see them again as I head out Middlefield, when the traffic has picked up speed, and I worry all over again.

So, I have to ask, what causes a parent to allow a little child to ride her bicycle in very heavy traffic? I personally have been involved in two accidents as a cyclist, so I have a deep understanding of how vulnerable you are on a bicycle when you are hit, even glanced, by a 2,000-pound vehicle.

I also know that many of the drivers around Menlo-Atherton are new drivers, whose driving judgment is not highly developed. Most are teenagers and are sleepy in the morning. Some

are showing off for their friends, who are also often in a rush as they are late.

This is not an appropriate, even close to appropriate, environment for a child to be riding her bicycle. Instead of asking the county to modify the parking, I ask the parents to stop allowing their children to ride their bikes to school under such dangerous conditions.

**Mary T. Dumont  
Cerritos Manor, Menlo Park**

## Bad decision to remove crosswalk

*Editor:*

I was disappointed to read that the county Board of Supervisors is considering removing the crosswalk at Santa Cruz Avenue and Palo Alto Way in Menlo Park.

While I agree that the safety of the crosswalk is compromised due to the high speed traffic, removing it is absolutely the wrong course of

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