

RISING revenues and a big foundation grant boost Menlo Park schools. Page 25

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JULY 4, 2007 www.AlmanacNews.com | VOL. 42 NO. 44

SOLAR FLARE-UP

As solar energy grows in popularity, it sparks concerns about firefighter safety
Page 10



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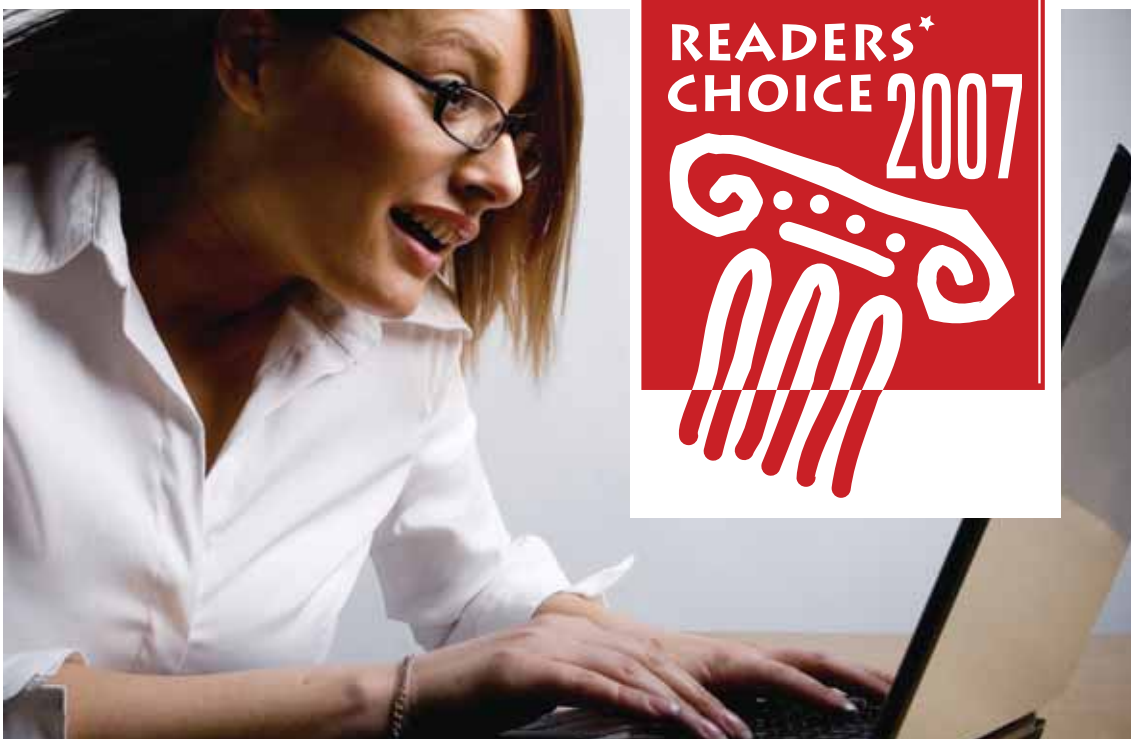


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Inside

This week's news, features and community events.

FIRST SHOT



The Almanac/Veronica Weber

I want to hold your hands

Sisters Sofia and Lara Karodagan dance with friend Rekha Ramanathan during a performance by a Beatles cover band, The Sun Kings, at Fremont Park in Menlo Park on June 27. The group was the first performer in the city's annual summer concert series. Next up: Cheeseballs, a 1970s and '80s cover band, will play at Burgess Park at noon as part of the city's July Fourth celebration.

Menlo Park

■ New city manager's pay level is justified, say council members. His total compensation: about \$256,000 a year. **Page 9**

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■ Giving the castoff new meaning: Exhibit of Marianne Lettieri's assemblage art opens this week. **Page 7**

Schools

■ Rising revenues, foundation grant boost Menlo Park district schools. **Page 25**
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On the cover

Solar panels and firefighters don't mix? As more environmentally conscious residents turn to sun power for their electricity, local firefighters are voicing concerns about their own safety when it comes to battling blazes at homes equipped with photovoltaic systems. Photo by Veronica Weber. Story begins on **Page 10**.

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RETIREMENT CELEBRATION SALE

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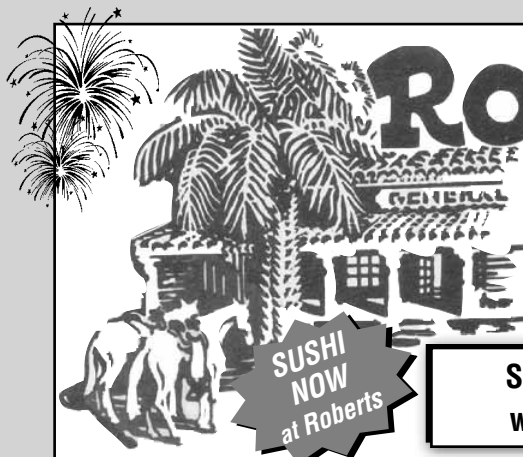
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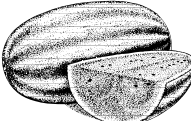
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Local News

MENLO PARK | AHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

Driver not at fault in bicycle fatality, CHP says

■ Bicyclist Rodney Smith turned into a traffic lane, CHP reports.

By David Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

The Sand Hill Road traffic accident that killed bicyclist and Portola Valley resident Rodney Smith apparently happened as a result of Mr. Smith turning from the eastbound bike lane out into the path of an eastbound car traveling at about 35 mph, the California Highway Patrol reported Wednesday.

A CHP investigation concluded that Mr. Smith, 67, "was making a U turn" and was at fault in the May 25 accident, CHP

Officer Eric Parsons said. The accident occurred along Sand Hill Road between Whiskey Hill Road and the Interstate 280 interchange.

The car's driver, Woodside resident Anthony L. Rose, 87, is not being charged.

Mr. Smith, a former chief executive officer and president of San Jose-based Altera Corp., was wearing a bicycle helmet, CHP Officer Grace Castillo said.

He and his wife had donated \$1 million to the town of Portola Valley's open space fund. They were also active in efforts to rid the



Rodney Smith, a former chief executive San Jose-based Altera Corp., and his wife had donated \$1 million to the town of Portola Valley's open space fund.

town's roads of litter.

The cause of death was multiple traumatic injuries, according to the San Mateo County Coroner's Office. Mr. Rose was not injured.

The damage to Mr. Rose's green Volvo indicated a substantial impact.

Damages to the car included a broken right headlight lens, a large basketball-sized dent in the right front quarter panel, a "large" hole in the passenger side windshield, and a dent in the roof above that hole, the CHP said. The car was towed from the scene.

The hood had black scuff marks, possi-

bly made by the handlebars on Mr. Smith's bicycle. Damages to the bike included a detached front wheel and a broken front fork, the CHP said.

Mr. Smith was found 46 feet and his bike 74 feet from the point at which the vehicle came to rest, the CHP said.

Clarification

In a May 30 story on the accident, the Almanac reported that the Smiths had given \$1 million to the town's open space fund in an effort to clean up litter in town. Local residents who are familiar with the donation say the donation was not tied to the Smiths' interest in ridding the town of roadside litter.

The Almanac was unable to reach Ms. Smith for comment. ■

Too much junk mail? Megan Reed will lighten the load

By Natalie Jabbar
Special to the Almanac

Fourteen-year-old Megan Reed has fostered a love of nature since she was a young child, and now she's making it her personal mission to protect the environment, one phone call at a time.

When the rising Sacred Heart Preparatory sophomore recently overheard her mother, Janine, complaining about unwanted magazines, Megan offered to call the publications to remove her mom from the mailing lists.

She understood when she started the project that junk mail "is really annoying," but it didn't take her long to realize that the widespread practice of printing and mailing unsolicited material is significantly wasteful as well as annoying.

Then, an idea dawned on her:

The school year was coming to a close, so why not spend part of her summer helping others put a halt to their junk mail, for the sake of the environment?

That's when the young Menlo Park resident created "Lighten Up: See Your Way to the End of Junk Mail." Through this service, Megan does the work for people who receive unwanted mail but don't have the time to call and remove themselves from mailing lists.

Customers place junk mail accumulated over several weeks in a brown paper bag that Megan collects. She then calls each vendor to remove the customers' names from their mailing lists, afterwards recycling both the junk mail and the bag it came in. She charges \$20 to cover transportation, phone and postage costs.

Megan was influenced in part



Megan Reed, in the backyard of her Menlo Park home. She is also raising funds for a South Africa school.

by a talk given last spring at her school by 15-year-old Taylor Francis, an environmental advocate personally trained by Al Gore. "I always knew that global warming was happening, but Taylor really brought the issue

close to home," Megan recalls.

Through Lighten Up, Megan says she is claiming responsibility for the future, and making small steps to reduce the causes of global warming. As a further testament to her conservation

goals, Megan tries to bike to her customers' homes rather than travel there by car.

"We try to keep it green all the way through," her mother

See MEGAN, page 8

Hometown Peninsula promotes local, independent businesses

Fifteen local businesses are among the founding members of a new organization, Hometown Peninsula, that's dedicated to keeping "Peninsula hometowns alive and thriving by encouraging these communities to buy from locally owned, independent businesses," said Clark Kepler,

owner of Kepler's bookstore.

The organization aims to provide a voice for independent, locally owned businesses and raise awareness of the benefits of buying local products and services, he said.

"When you shop at a mega-retailer chain store or an online retailer,

most of your dollars leave the local economy," said Mr. Kepler in a press release. "You may save a few cents, but the loss to our hometowns results in local unemployment, higher taxes, and reduced services."

Among the values of independent businesses, he said, are:

■ They talk with their customers directly and enjoy fulfilling and exceeding their expectations.

■ They have onsite owners who are right there answering questions and making decisions, rather than relying on a corporate office, thousands of miles away.

■ They reflect the character of their communities. They support local causes, participate in and fund community activities, patronize other local businesses and keep money in the community.

See HOMETOWN, page 8

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**NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING
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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
CITY OF MENLO PARK
PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING OF JULY 16, 2007**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Planning Commission of the City of Menlo Park, California, is scheduled to review the following items:

The following items require a Notice of Public Meeting or Public Hearing:

Use Permit/Danielle Paye/1177 Johnson St: Request for a use permit for excavation into a required side yard setback for access to a basement garage and for a detached secondary dwelling unit, associated with construction of a new single-family residence on a standard lot in the R-E (Residential Estate) zoning district.

Use Permit/Marc Lindsell/5 Elder Court: Request for a use permit for excavation into a required side yard setback for a light-well associated with a basement in the R-1-S (Residential Single-Family Suburban) zoning district.

Use Permit/Sprint PCS/300 Constitution Drive: Request for renewal of a use permit for one existing wireless telecommunications antenna module with three panels on Building 104 and an associated equipment shelter in a fenced area adjoining Building 104 in the M-2 (General Industrial) zoning district.

Variance, Use Permit, Architectural Control/Hayes Group/250 Middlefield Road: Request for a variance, use permit and architectural control for installation of six new parking spaces located within the front setback, for establishing the total number of parking stalls per the use-based guidelines rather than the zoning district requirements, and for exterior building modifications and site improvements, including changes to the width of the driveway entrance along Middlefield Road, new windows, doors, balcony railing on the existing building, and new enclosures for trash and mechanical equipment for an existing building located in the C-1 (Administrative and Professional District, Restrictive) zoning district.

Architectural Control/Bill Hagman/1010 Doyle Street: Request for approval of architectural control to remodel the exterior of a commercial building in the C-3 (Central Commercial) zoning district.

NOTICE IS HEREBY FURTHER GIVEN that said Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on this item in the Council Chambers of the City of Menlo Park, located at 701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park, on Monday, July 16, 2007, 7:00 p.m. or as near as possible thereafter, at which time and place interested persons may appear and be heard thereon. If you challenge this item in court, you may be limited to raising only those issues you or someone else raised at the public hearing described in this notice, or in written correspondence delivered to the City of Menlo Park at, or prior to, the public hearing.

Documents related to these items may be inspected by the public on weekdays between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Friday, with alternate Fridays closed, at the Department of Community Development, 701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park. Please note that the items listed are only the agenda items that require a public hearing. Please call the Planning Division if there are any questions and/or for complete agenda information (650) 330-6702.

DATED: June 27, 2007

Deanna Chow, Senior Planner
Menlo Park Planning Commission

Visit our Web site for Planning Commission public hearing, agenda, and staff report information: www.menlopark.org

Published in The Country Almanac on July 4, 2007.



Courtesy of Marianne Lettieri

Marianne Lettieri in her Redwood City studio, with the partially finished "Eden Ready."

Giving the castoff new meaning

Exhibit of Marianne Lettieri's assemblage art opens this week

By **Karen MacLaughlin**

Special to the Almanac

Redemption is a major theme in Marianne Lettieri's work on display July 5 through 29 in the exhibition, "This Place Called Home," at the Main Gallery in Redwood City.

The Menlo Park artist creates powerful, three-dimensional, narrative works, called "assemblages," using vintage objects and ephemera, some of which have been found "like babies in baskets" outside her studio door. ("Assemblage" is pronounced as in French, with a long "a" and emphasis on the third syllable.)

Even the owners of the John Offerman house, the Victorian landmark in which the Main Gallery is housed, gave Ms. Lettieri permission to use molding, decorative trim, and artifacts stored in the basement for her exhibit.

Ms. Lettieri is also the curator for "Give Me Shelter," also at the Main Gallery through July. That exhibition comprises a collection of sculptures by Bay Area artists, each of whom was given a small, house-shaped block of wood to embellish. Proceeds from the sale of that artwork will benefit organizations that provide vocational training for destitute youth in Ethiopia.

"My art is about taking objects that have lost their meaning or whose purpose is not known; taking the broken, the castoff, and altering or reassembling them," she said in an interview at the warehouse she shares with 10 other artistic refugees from the studios of the recently razed

Portola Valley Town Center.

Examples of the castoff are an 18-pane, antique window frame with the original glass intact; a wooden headboard (which will be laminated by a fancy new technology called "lazertran" with a black and white photograph, from the Portola Valley archives, of an unidentified

group of Victorian children); and a full-sized, wooden screen porch door that frames her illustration of "The Prodigal Son." For a pair of pieces about her grandparents, the artist incorporates "pieces of string too small to use."

The studio is impressively neat and organized because she needs "to be able to pick things out," she says. There are bird cages lined up on the shelves, dressmaker's forms on the floor, and a stash of keys, old letters, and ceramic body parts, in separate drawers on a bench.

Born and raised in Cape Canaveral, Ms. Lettieri took to drawing to compensate for a lack of playmates, she says. She received a BFA from the University of Florida in 1971, moved to Silicon Valley in 1978, and worked for Apple Computer, Regis McKenna, and Hill and

Knowlton in their marketing and public relations departments until 1996.

While building her inventory of over 200 assemblage constructions, Ms. Lettieri worked as a mural docent at Hillview Middle School for four years and ran the Encinal Fine Arts Fair for three.

From 1998 to 2001, while her son was attending Menlo-Atherton High School, she served as the school's "public relations advocate," writing newsletters, brochures and press releases, and producing the student television show.

"The act of making something good out of what was formerly useless reminds

me that there is hope for redemption," she says.

To view more of Ms. Lettieri's assemblages, visit www.marianneletteri.com. For more information on the exhibit, go to www.themaingallery.org. ■



Courtesy of Marianne Lettieri

"**The Forwarding Address,**" is a 2-foot-by-3-foot house bearing the addresses of all the places Ms. Lettieri has ever lived.

■ INFORMATION

"This Place Called Home" runs from July 5 through 29 at The Main Gallery, 1018 Main St. in Redwood City. A reception is scheduled for 6-9 p.m. Saturday, July 7.

Resident challenges Menlo Park plan for medical offices

■ Attorney asks City Council to overturn Planning Commission's approval.

By Rory Brown
Almanac Staff Writer

Mike Brady, a Menlo Park resident and an attorney who lives near the site of the former Acorn restaurant on El Camino Real, is appealing to the City Council to overturn Planning Commission approval of a medical office complex at the site.

Mr. Brady claims that the applicant for the 9,825-square-foot project took advantage of the city's relaxed building guidelines in getting the project approved.

The City Council is scheduled to hear Mr. Brady's appeal at its July 17 meeting. The Planning Commission approved the two-story project, located at 1906 El Camino near Spruce Avenue, on May 7.

Joe Colonna, who is listed as the applicant for the project, said he would not comment before the council hears the appeal. Mr. Colonna has another office project proposed nearby — at 1706 El Camino Real, the site of the closed Gaylord India restaurant. That proposal has not yet been reviewed by the Planning Commission.

When city staff considered the

proposal for the Acorn site, elevator shafts and mechanical rooms weren't included in measuring the total square footage of the complex — a practice that has been used over the past several years, according to staff.

But that calculation allowed the project — listed at 9,825 square feet — to slip under a requirement for a traffic study on projects of at least 10,000 square feet.

"[The developer] is trying to be clever and circumvent the rules," Mr. Brady said. "The city has been laid back in the past, but that's not an excuse for this project. I just don't buy that."

In May, after hearing residents' concerns about how square footage was calculated, the council directed staff to abide by a stricter, "more literal" definition of the rules, rather than grant exceptions.

But the council also decided projects already in the pipeline would be exempt from the stricter definition, which means the Acorn site project should be off the hook.

But City Attorney Bill McClure noted that the policy set by the council is not binding, and council members could choose to ignore it. ■

HOMETOWN

continued from page 5

By supporting locally owned, independent businesses, communities "keep their dollars working for them as they enrich the local economy, increase the diversity of available products, and improve the quality of life for us all," he said.

The next meeting of Hometown Peninsula is set for 5:30 p.m. Monday, July 9, at the Menlo Park Presbyterian Church Social Hall, 700 Santa Cruz Ave. in downtown Menlo Park.

The founding businesses are: Advanced Mail Marketing, Beltramo's Wines & Spirits, Casa dei Bam-

bini, Cindy's Flowers, Gleim the Jeweler, Health Education Services, K. Breisch Associates, Kepler's Books, Elizabeth Lasensky, Les Koonce Financial, Menlo Florist, Milk Pail Market, Scout's House, Village Stationer and We Fix It Green.

The goal is to grow to 80 members this year, and founding membership is open through 2007, Mr. Kepler said. ■

■ INFORMATION

For more information on Hometown Peninsula, go to www.hometown-peninsula.org or call 462-5506, ext. 208.

Draeger's cooking demos at festival

Chef instructors from Draeger's market will give cooking demonstrations on subjects from cupcakes to summer dips and chips during Menlo Park's annual downtown street festival, Connoisseur's Marketplace, to be held this year on Saturday and Sunday, July 21-22.

The demos, each lasting 20 minutes, will be given from 11

a.m. to 4 p.m. each day of the festival at Draeger's market, 1010 University Drive in Menlo Park.

This is the 21st year for the food, art, music, and family fund festival. For more information, call the Menlo Park Chamber of Commerce at 325-2818 or go to www.miramarevents.com.



The Almanac/Veronica Weber

When the chips are down

Woodside fire Chief Armando Muela comforts Cali, his wide-eyed Labrador, while volunteer veterinarian Bill St. Lawrence of Village Square Veterinary Hospital implants an identification chip into her shoulder. This summer, low-cost pet ID clinics will be held on three Saturdays, from 10 a.m. to noon, at fire stations in the Woodside Fire Protection District: July 28 at Station 7 at 3111 Woodside

Road in Woodside; Aug. 25 at Station 19 at 4091 Jefferson Ave. in Emerald Hills; and Oct. 6 at Station 8 at 135 Portola Road in Portola Valley. The pet ID program, costing \$25 for cats or dogs, is sponsored by CERPP, the citizens emergency preparedness group. "We all know how traumatic it can be to have a lost pet. Imagine how this situation could be compounded in an emergency," says Chief Muela. For more information, call Gaylyne Mann at 851-1584 or send e-mail to gmann@woodsidefire.org.

'It's important to help others when you're the lucky one'

MEGAN

continued from page 5

chimes in.

Caring for people, too

Megan's Lighten Up venture isn't the first humanitarian project she's undertaken this year. In March, she was inspired by author Mark Mathabane, who spoke to Sacred Heart students about his autobiography, "Kaffir Boy," a reflection on growing up in Johannesburg during the South African apartheid.

Mr. Mathabane's book and speech compelled Megan to begin a fundraising project: She decided to raise money for Bovet, a small school in Johannesburg that once gave Mr. Mathabane the opportunity to excel beyond his oppression.

Megan called that project "The Power of One" because she believes that every individual has the

potential to make a difference, she says.

She designed posters to advertise the cause around her high school campus and buttons to sell for fundraising. By the end of the school year she had raised several hundred dollars.

Megan hasn't stopped fundraising simply because summer has begun. This past weekend she collected donations at her dance recital, which she arranged to be dedicated to the cause of The Power of One.

Including her fundraising during the school year, Megan has now received \$1,800 in donations for the Bovet school.

"It's really important to help other people when you're the lucky one," Megan says.

A look to the future

Megan expects that Lighten Up and The Power of One will both

continue to flourish with time. Neither project is a static entity; she's constantly coming up with new ideas to improve both of them.

Even though Lighten Up was just initiated a few weeks ago, Megan is already receiving a healthy load of customers who want to get rid of their junk mail in an environmentally conscious way — she even has a customer or two from across the Bay.

"Megan has always been community-minded," her mother says. "She feels good when she thinks beyond her own world."

The beginning of Megan's "Power of One" poster reads: "The power of one. Find your passion. ... Own it, cultivate it, use it."

Clearly, she is heeding her own advice. ■

■ INFORMATION

For more information about Lighten Up: See Your Way to the End of Junk Mail, contact Megan at lighten_up_mail@yahoo.com.

Rain man: Menlo Park's annual rainfall off 66 percent

Just 8.2 inches of rain fell in Menlo Park since July 1, 2006, says Bill Russ, who maintains a rain gauge at his Cotton Street residence.

The total is 66 percent below the 24.14 inches Mr. Russ collected during the 2005-06 rainfall year (July 1-June 30) and the 24.35 inches

collected in the year before that.

The wettest month this year was February with 2.85 inches, followed by December with 1.85 inches, Mr. Russ said.

The National Weather Service reported an annual rainfall total of 8.93 inches in Palo Alto and 9.28

inches in San Jose.

Of the 11 droughts in California since 1850, the latest began in 1987 and ended in 1992, according to the state Department of Water Resources, which adds that droughts that last more than three years are rare in Northern California.

New city manager's pay level is justified, say council members

■ With benefits, compensation package totals about \$256,000 a year.

By Rory Brown
Almanac Staff Writer

Members of the Menlo Park City Council say Glen Rojas is the right person to be the new city manager, and he's worth the \$204,000 salary the city will pay him.

With benefits, Mr. Rojas' total compensation package is estimated to be \$256,400, according to a city staff report.

Among his benefits are \$8,160 a year in a deferred compensation plan, and \$2,000 a month for up to eight months to help the new city manager move to Northern California.

Also, he is eligible for a home loan from the city of up to \$1.1 million at a 5 percent interest rate if he resides within city limits.

Council members unanimously approved a three-year contract with Mr. Rojas at their June 27 meeting, ending the city's six-month search for a new city manager.

Mr. Rojas, 56, has been the city manager of Chino for 10 years, and is set to take Menlo Park's top post Aug. 2.

The announcement that Mr. Rojas would make \$204,000 a year — a 25 percent increase over the \$163,233 a year former manager David Boesch was making, and just slightly less than Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's \$212,000 annual salary — raised some eyebrows in the community, but council members said the pay is justified.

"It's fair compensation given his level of experience," said

■ MENLO PARK



Glen Rojas is eligible for a home loan from the city of up to \$1.1 million at a 5 percent interest rate if he resides within city limits.

Mayor Kelly Fergusson. She noted that Mr. Rojas currently makes the same amount as city manager of Chino, a town in

Southern California of 76,000 residents — about twice that of Menlo Park.

Councilman Heyward Robinson said Mr. Boesch, before leaving Menlo Park to become assistant manager of San Mateo County, was paid "significantly below" the average pay level for Bay Area city managers, and the city should offer compensation competitive with other cities.

City Attorney Bill McClure said Mr. Rojas' salary is "right in the ballpark" as far as what other city managers are paid, and noted that past councils delayed salary increases for Mr. Boesch due to budget cuts. ■

What other cities pay

When Glen Rojas starts as Menlo Park's next city manager on Aug. 2, he'll make \$206,000 a year — a 25 percent increase over the \$163,233 former manager David Boesch made in the city's top post. Here's how Mr. Rojas' salary compares to the city managers of other cities.

City	Annual salary	Population
Palo Alto	\$237,840	61,200
Cupertino	\$221,592	52,000
Redwood City	\$220,008	76,000
Menlo Park	\$204,000	30,648
Los Gatos	\$198,228	29,132
Los Altos	\$194,208	27,693
Foster City	\$190,812	28,866
San Bruno	\$190,428	29,500
Burlingame	\$189,228	28,000
Pacifica	\$185,552	38,869
San Carlos	\$176,748	27,000
Campbell	\$175,536	38,408
Saratoga	\$170,772	32,900
Belmont	\$163,680	26,000
Millbrae	\$153,000	20,718

Salaries as of October 2006. Information provided by city of Menlo Park personnel department. Population estimates courtesy of city Web sites.

Woodside residents meet on global warming

Local residents are invited to a program, "Confronting Global Warming — In Our Homes," at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, July 17, at Woodside's Independence Hall, 2955 Woodside Road.

Learn what a "carbon footprint" is, how to maximize home energy savings, and what the benefits and costs of renewable energy sources are, said Woodside resident Jim Spar.

The program will feature short talks by two home-energy experts and comments from a few Woodside residents who have reduced their carbon footprints, Mr. Spar said.

The evening is hosted by Woodside Green, defined by resident Oliver Bock as "a growing

group of concerned Woodside residents intent on engaging the local community to reduce its use of fossil fuels and emission of greenhouse gases."

"We believe that through our choices, we can become part of the solution rather than continuing to be part of the problem," he said.

Woodside Green launched in May, Mr. Bock said. "A few residents met in a local home to discuss how they could help confront the enormous challenge of global warming through actions in their own homes and encouraging actions throughout the community."

Local residents interested in joining and assisting Woodside

Green can send an e-mail to woodsidegreen@gmail.com.

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

CITY OF MENLO PARK CITY COUNCIL

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the City Council of the City of Menlo Park, California is scheduled to review the following item:

Conditional Development Permit Revision and Tentative Map Revision/SummerHill Homes/75 Willow Road: Request for revisions to the conditional development permit and tentative subdivision map for modifications associated with the construction of 32 instead of 33 single-family residences, as outlined in the San Mateo County Superior Court Stipulated Judgment, and minor modifications associated with the architectural style of two residences and the dimensions of several lots.

NOTICE IS HEREBY FURTHER GIVEN that said City Council will hold a public hearing on this item in the Council Chambers of the City of Menlo Park, located at 701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park, on **Tuesday, July 17, 2007 at 7:00 p.m.** or as near as possible thereafter, at which time and place interested persons may appear and be heard thereon. If you challenge this item in court, you may be limited to raising only those issues you or someone else raised at the public hearing described in this notice, or in written correspondence delivered to the City of Menlo Park at, or prior to, the public hearing.

Documents related to this item may be inspected by the public on weekdays between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Friday, with alternate Fridays closed, at the Community Development Department, 701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park. **Please call Deanna Chow, Senior Planner**, at 650-330-6733 or email at dmchow@menlopark.org if there are any questions or comments on this item.

DATED: June 26, 2007

Silvia M. Vonderlinden
City Clerk

Visit our Web site for public hearing, agenda, and staff report information: <http://www.ci.menlo-park.ca.us>

Published in THE COUNTRY ALMANAC on July 4, 2007.

SOLAR FLARE-UP

As solar energy grows in popularity, it sparks concerns about firefighter safety



Woodside firefighters Don Bullard, left, and Dave Heckman stand in the 3-foot setback as they inspect a new rooftop photovoltaic system. Solar panels pose challenges and safety concerns to firefighters if a house fire occurs.

“(Solar) is one of the very, very best ways to reduce your carbon footprint. You’re just taking the sun and turning it into electricity. The more panels we can put on, the better everybody will be.”

WOODSIDE RESIDENT STEN MAWSON

Story By Andrea Gemmet
Photos By Veronica Weber

On a sunny June day, a pair of Woodside firefighters are up on a roof inspecting the new photovoltaic system on a remodeled house. They maneuver along the narrow strip of rooftop alongside the expanse of solar panels and do what firefighters do best — figure out how they would battle a blaze if the house ever caught fire.

It’s hard to say anything bad about solar energy — in recent years, it’s gotten more affordable, it’s become nicer to look at, and it’s been embraced by residents and

the governor alike as an environmentally sustainable way to fuel California’s growing electricity needs. As an alternative source of energy, it’s hard to beat the rooftop solar electricity-generating panels, called photovoltaic (PV) systems, that are becoming increasingly popular on Midpeninsula homes.

But while homeowners are tallying up their energy bills and taking into account their family’s carbon footprint, there’s one scenario that most people overlook when they consider switching to solar: What happens if the house catches on fire?

It’s not that solar panels increase the risk of fire — they don’t. The concern is that they create a risky

situation for firefighters, potentially putting live electric current in their path and requiring them to change how they attack a structure fire.

“Firefighters are a little scared of it,” said Woodside Fire Marshal Denise Enea. “Nobody wants to get electrocuted.”

The Woodside Fire Protection District recently created guidelines intended to keep firefighters safe, but solar installers and some green energy proponents are worried that the restrictions go too far, and will put solar energy out of reach for many homeowners.

The new rules mean homes in Woodside, Portola Valley and surrounding unincorporated areas served by the fire district will have to make sure their plans for

rooftop solar panels comply with the guidelines if they want to get them approved.

Menlo Park fire district officials are also considering rules for solar installations in Menlo Park, Atherton and East Palo Alto.

Woodside fire's rules boil down to three basic requirements, said Ms. Enea: signs warning firefighters that a photovoltaic system is present; a 3-foot setback along the perimeter of the solar panels; and an additional rooftop power shut-off switch.

Existing PV systems are exempt from the regulations.

With solar panels, if the sun is out, they will still hold electricity even if the power is shut off.

"The biggest fear is electrocution," said Ms. Enea. "If they're spraying water on a (panel) that's compromised but still live, the voltage comes back to the firefighters."

Another concern is venting, the practice of chopping a hole in the roof above a fire to let heat and gases escape and improve visibility inside the structure. Firefighters can't remove or chop through rooftop solar panels, so they would have to vent the roof through nearest panel-free high point on the roof.

"If there's a fire in the attic, we can vent the roof right above the fire and contain it to that spot. If we have to go 100 feet away to vent it on the other side (of solar panels), the fire is going to travel 100 feet," said Woodside firefighter Don Bullard.

Ms. Enea said the 3-foot setback will give firefighters on the roof room to maneuver, and is similar

to San Francisco's regulation.

Requiring a rooftop shut-off adds an extra measure of safety, she said.

"Some contractors are OK with a roof disconnect, and others are worried about the looks," Ms. Enea said.

Woodside fire officials are very much in favor of solar power, and they're not trying to discourage people from installing it, she said. Her goal is to educate people about the need to keep firefighters safe, she said.

Peter Rive, the founder and COO of SolarCity, a Foster City-based solar system provider, said he appreciates the importance of firefighter safety. However, he said he'd prefer that Woodside follow guidelines in the national electrical code, rather than make up their own rules.

"They are two kinds of objections people typically have to installing PV," Mr. Rive said. "Sometimes it's money, and sometimes it's the aesthetics. Adding a (rooftop) disconnect will make it look a lot less good, and that will definitely affect the rate at which (solar) will be accepted."

Solar energy is gaining a lot of momentum in the community, and his company wants to work with Woodside fire to make sure that its regulations don't slow down the rate of adoption, he said. SolarCity recently completed successful group-discount solar installation programs in Woodside and Portola Valley, and they are in the midst of a Go Solar Initiative in Menlo Park and Atherton.

"Whatever the rules are, we will work with them, but we will

definitely represent the other side of the argument," Mr. Rive said.

No need for more rules?

Rodney Slaughter, a training consultant with 30 years of firefighting experience, put together the first training program for firefighters responding to emergencies involving photovoltaic systems. He said Woodside fire district's concerns mirror his own when he was first researching the issue.

"Even a small amount (of electricity) can produce enough shock to make you jump back a few steps, and potentially fall off the roof," Mr. Slaughter said.

However, he said he's not in favor of communities creating their own solar design regulations.

"There are enough safety features built into the systems," Mr. Slaughter said. "For the technology to work, you can't limit the design of the system."

The 3-foot setback takes away a lot of prime roof-area, he said. Most solar panels are installed on south-facing roof slopes, leaving the rest of the roof free should firefighters need to cut vents.

"From a design perspective, you obviously want as many panels on the roof as possible to maximize the electrical needs of the customer," Mr. Slaughter said.

He produced the PV training program to provide local fire departments with the same level of confidence that he has in solar technology, said Mr. Slaughter, who recently installed a 5-kilowatt system on his home near Sacramento.

Sten Mawson, a Woodside resi-

See **SOLAR**, page 12



Amid the charred grass of the 128-acre wildfire at the Stanford Dish on June 25 are, from left, Ryan Healy, Brian Ham and Keith Tooker of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Wildfire scare: Safeguarding your home

Wildfire season is off to a ferocious start in California. The Angora wildfire in South Lake Tahoe has consumed hundreds of structures, and closer to home, a 128-acre blaze blackened the Stanford Dish hiking trail last week.

It's a painful reminder that everyone is at risk during wildfire season, but there are things you can do to make your property less vulnerable.

The best way to protect your home against a wildfire is to create a 100-foot perimeter of "defensible space" around it, say firefighters.

Defensible space doesn't have to be paved. It can be landscaped with irrigated lawns or fire-resistant and drought-tolerant native plants — the key is to create a fire break around your home. Trimming back tree branches, cleaning your roof of fallen leaves and debris, and keeping dry brush away from your house can make the difference between a house that can be saved, and one that goes up in flames.

The Woodside Fire Protection District offers a free booklet on the best landscaping plants for fire-safe gardens.

Information about identifying and eliminating fire hazards around your home are online at www.WoodsideFire.org; click on "Fire prevention" in the left-hand menu or call 851-1594. ■

MORE RESOURCES FOR FIRE PREVENTION INFORMATION

- The California Department of Forestry has fire season updates, including Flash movies about creating 100 feet of defensible space around your home, at www.fire.ca.gov.
- The U.S. Fire Administration's site at www.usfa.fema.gov; click on "Citizens."
- The Fire Safe Council has a checklist for homeowners at www.FireSafeCouncil.org.
- The Menlo Park Fire Detection District's Website includes children's links to sites with information about fire safety at www.menlofire.org or call the Menlo Park district's fire prevention office at 688-8425.
- The Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition offers independent information at www.Homefiresprinkler.org.



Woodside Fire Marshal Denise Enea points out the location of the solar panels' electrical conduit to firefighters Don Bullard, left, and Dave Heckman.

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COVER STORY



Fire Marshal Denise Enea watches the PG&E electrical meter spin backward, as excess electricity from the home's solar panels is fed back into the power grid.

SOLAR

continued from page 11

dent and member of fledgling environmental group Woodside Green, said he's opposed to the setback requirement.

"If the fire district takes away from that one area you could use, you drop homes out of being able to do (solar)," Mr. Mawson said. "This is one of the very, very best ways to reduce your carbon footprint. You're just taking the sun and turning it into electricity. The more panels we can put on, the better everybody will be."

Mr. Mawson said he thinks Woodside fire officials should have had a public process before putting the solar guidelines in place.

Woodside planning director Hope Sullivan said the town routes all of its permit applications for solar panels to the fire district, and won't sign off on a project without the fire district's approval. In essence, whatever the fire district says goes, she said.

Menlo fire weighs solar rules

The Menlo Park Fire Protection District is taking a different approach. Chief Harold Schapelhouman said his department is working on a model ordinance that he can bring to the district's city councils — Menlo Park, Atherton and East Palo Alto. Any regulations would have to be approved by the city councils before taking effect, he said.

While he's a big proponent of solar power — "I'd like to get off the grid, myself," he said — Chief Schapelhouman does think that firefighter safety is a concern.

"With solar panels, we need some level of safety regulation," he said. "California is really a leader. The opportunity is ripe for us to build in standards."

Solar technology has been advancing quickly, and firefighters have to scramble to keep up with it, he said. It was the same way with other safety innovations, such as airbags. Paramedics treating car accident victims have been knocked out when airbags suddenly deployed, he said.

"What happens if there's an accident or a fire?" he said. "Those questions aren't getting asked at the front end, typically."

One of the problems is that firefighters don't have much experience in dealing with fires at structures that have solar panels.

"I haven't seen any yet, but it's a matter of time," said Chief Schapelhouman. ■

Midpeninsula is going solar in a big way

There may not be a solar power array on every rooftop — yet— but Midpeninsulans increasingly are embracing the alternative energy source.

In November, Foster City-based SolarCity chose Portola Valley to launch its first big solar incentive program — a group discount on photovoltaic systems. Woodside soon followed, and both programs were very successful, said SolarCity spokesman Bruce Karney.

Currently, the company is running a Go Solar Initiative in Menlo Park and Atherton that ends July 31. If enough households sign up to meet the goal of 175 kilowatts — the total amount of electricity generating capacity — participants get discounts of 25 to 30 percent off the going competitive rate, said Mr. Karney.

For a typical residential 3 kilowatt system, the discount and state and federal incentives bring the price down from \$23,700 to \$14,700, he said.

These days, most solar power systems are grid-tied photovoltaic (PV), meaning that solar energy is converted to electricity that flows directly to a home when the sun is shining, and that draws electricity from PG&E power lines when the sun is down.

Grid-tied systems feed excess electricity back into the power grid, "selling" it back to PG&E. At the end of the year, the utility company settles up with customers who can essentially zero-out their electric bill if they produced as much, or more, electricity than they used. They don't get paid for the excess electricity, however.

SolarCity will need about 50 households in Menlo Park and Atherton to sign up in order to meet the 175-kilowatt goal, Mr. Karney said, although the number of participants will depend on the size of their PV systems.

Woodside, on average, chose big 10 kilowatt systems. As a result of that town's recent Go Solar campaign, Woodside participants can produce 213 kilowatts of electricity from only 21 homes; earlier this year, Portola Valley signed up 77 households with systems producing a total of 355 kilowatts, according to Mr. Karney.

Information about SolarCity is online at SolarCity.com. For information about state and federal solar incentive programs, and other PV system installers, go to San Mateo County's site, RecycleWorks.org and click on "Solar Power" under the "Sustainability" menu. ■

MEETING

An informational meeting explaining the economic advantages of solar power and SolarCity's Go Solar Initiative is set for 7 p.m. on Tuesday, July 10, at the Pavilion in Holbrook-Palmer Park, 150 Watkins Ave., Atherton. Details are online at AthertonGreen.net.

Foundation gives \$1.9 million to Woodside School

■ School board approves \$7.4 million budget.

By David Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

With a gift of \$1.9 million from the Woodside School Foundation, up 15 percent, and property tax revenues of \$4.4 million, up 7 percent, the budget of the Woodside Elementary School District looks to be in good shape for the 2007-08 fiscal year, which started July 1.

At its June 5 meeting, the school board of the one-school K-8 district unanimously approved the budget, which projects both revenues and expenses at \$7.4 million, an increase of 7 percent on each side of the ledger.

One interesting item shows the cost of lawn care headed sharply down. Grass will need watering and mowing on the baseball field,

but new artificial turf on the two soccer fields should slash maintenance costs by 67 percent, down to \$12,000 from \$37,000, according to the budget.

Overall, the budget shows a tiny surplus of \$23,000 for the district, which enrolls about 450 students.

The surplus would be enough to keep the reserve at 17 percent, well above the state-required 4 percent.

Among expenses, teachers and staff compensation will rise 5 percent. At \$5.9 million, this category represents about 80

percent of district spending.

Other spending includes a \$40,000 grant for a full-time art teacher. The teacher taught part-time last year and the grant is for up to five years, said Assistant Superintendent Tim Hanretty.

The district is planning a one-time outlay of \$128,000 to upgrade K-8 science classes with new materials and teacher training.

Bond spending

New construction on campus — paid for with voter-approved bond funds of \$12 million and up to \$1.2 million from the foundation — is currently under budget, Mr. Hanretty said.

The campus renovation project will remove 17 portable

The campus renovation project will remove 17 portable classrooms and add 14 classrooms, a band room, a computer lab, a new administration building and a community room.

classrooms and add 20,650 square feet in new one-story structures, including 14 classrooms, a band room, a computer lab, a new administration building and a community room.

The playing fields will be ready by September, with classrooms opening periodically over the fall and the administration building in October, Mr. Hanretty said.

Asked if artificial turf, essentially an outdoor carpet, represents a toxic-gas danger to kids low to the ground, Mr. Hanretty said off-gassing falls to “negligible” levels three weeks after installation.

The field upgrades will total \$950,000, which includes a \$400,000 gift from the foundation. ■



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Mid Peninsula Futbol Club's girls under 13 soccer team members. See names in story.



Strikers take division title

The girls under-13 team of the Mid Peninsula Strikers Futbol Club, named: MP Strikers FC 93G-WHITE, recently took first place in the CYSA District II Spring League highest Class-3 division, with a record of: 8 wins, 1 loss, 0 ties.

The District II region extends from Monterey up to San Francisco.

The Mid Peninsula Strikers Futbol Club is based in Menlo Park and currently has girls and boys teams in the age range of 8 to 18 years old.

The Strikers 93G-White team has been playing CYSA soccer since the spring of 2004. Eight of the current 18 players have been with the team since it's first season.

Players are seventh- and

eighth-graders who attend La Entrada Middle, Hillview Middle, Menlo School, Corte Madera Middle, and St. Raymond.

Team members are (see picture): front row, from left, Lauren Dunn, Alex Tom, Lindsey Garagozzo and Kimmie Pavela; second row, Jennifer Kirst, Katie Kelley, Kathryn Jagers, Selin Kutlu, Fiona McAuley and Naomi Pacalin; third row, Savannah McKinnon, Marjory Marquardt, Karin Hiltbrand, Lindsay Keare, Sarah Daschbach, Megan Hinshaw, Sara Orton and Coach Jason Luce. Not pictured: Kaitlyn Bonfiglio.

Report by team manager Leslie Wambach

Seawell signs pro baseball contract

■ Former Menlo School standout joins Detroit Tigers' organization.

By Keith Peters
Palo Alto Weekly

Recent Stanford graduate Ryan Seawell of Menlo Park has signed a professional baseball contract with the Detroit Tigers.

Seawell, a graduate of Menlo School, received a call from the Detroit Tigers on June 26, caught a flight early the next morning to the Tigers' spring training facility in

Lakeland, Florida, and signed a contract the following morning.

Seawell will be assigned either to the Oneonta Tigers in the New York-Penn League or to the Lakeland Tigers of the Gulf Coast League.

Seawell batted .290 for the Cardinal during an up-and-down 28-28 season in 2007. He had 36 hits, five home runs and a .435 slugging percentage. ■



Ryan Seawell

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- Tuesdays, July 17 & 24
- ✱ **NEWBORN CARE 101**
Often touted as our "most fun" class, this interactive program teaches the specifics of newborn care, including bathing, temperature-taking, changing diapers, swaddling, soothing techniques and more. Infant doll models are used to allow for hands-on practice.
- Saturday, July 21
- ✱ **INFANT AND CHILD CPR**
Parents and other childcare providers will learn the techniques of infant and child CPR and how to avoid choking hazards. Mannequins are used to provide hands-on training.
- Monday, July 23
- ✱ **HEART TO HEART SEMINAR ON GROWING UP**
Informative, humorous and lively discussions between parents and their pre-teens on puberty, the opposite sex and growing up. Girls attend these two-part sessions with their moms and boys attend with their dads.
- For Boys: Wednesdays, August 8 & 15
- For Girls: Thursdays, August 9 & 16

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Boys soccer team wins Club title

Posted in the Sports category of Town Square (www.Almanac News.com) by Suzanne Brownstein, a member of the Menlo-Atherton High School community.

The Juventus Strikers 90 U16 Boys team won the U.S. Club Soccer 2007 National Cup VI Region H championships in Modesto on June 19 after a weekend of hard-fought matches, including a win in the semifinals due to penalty kicks in overtime.

The boys have now earned a trip to the 2007 National Cup VI Finals in July in North Carolina, where they will meet the winners of the seven other regional championships held across the U.S.

The team is made up of players from various ethnic and economic backgrounds. Several of the boys attend Menlo-Atherton High School, Woodside High School and Sequoia High School. All aspire to play Division I college soccer.

Many of the boys will be the first in their family to attend college. Over 250 college coaches will be in attendance at the finals.

The cost of the trip is beyond the means for many of the players and they have fewer than four weeks to raise funds. The Juventus Sport Club, a nonprofit based out of Redwood City, is looking for sponsors. E-mail bethjimison@yahoo.com for sponsor information.

The players are Adam Brownstein, Nicholas Carrara, Juan Espinoza, Leonel Gutierrez, Brady Jimison, Cole Kelly, Josh Leandro, Kian Malek, Ignacio Martinez, Ulysis Milanes, Alfonso Molina, Cesar Molina, Jose Nava, Carlos Ramirez, Jesus Resendiz, Julian Soto, Christian Valdez, Neil Watters and Oscar Yniguez.

Coaches are Jaime Frias, Apolonio Perez and John Carrara.

Villareal's crew places second

Carly Villareal of Portola Valley, who just graduated from Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, has returned from the Women's Henley Regatta in England where she was on the Phillips Academy crew that placed second in its division on June 24.

Carly will be attending Stanford next year, reports her mother, Kelly Villareal. For more on the crew races, go to www.Andover.edu.



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11:30 A.M.
The community is invited to bring their decorated bike, tricycle, golf cart, wagon, or float and participate in the parade down Santa Cruz Ave to Burgess Park. Assembly point is at the Wells Fargo parking lot on the corner of Santa Cruz Ave. and Chestnut Street at 11:15 a.m!

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Buck's fundraiser for injured child

A breakfast fundraiser will be held July 12 at Buck's restaurant in Woodside to collect donations for Sara Portz, the seriously injured 6-year-old daughter of Buck's employees Myshel and Marcos Portz.

On June 15, Sara was struck by a vehicle in Redwood City after she broke free of her mother's grasp and ran into the street.

Sara is recovering at Stanford hospital but still needs medical attention, said Buck's owner Jamis MacNiven.

As her parents juggle between spending time at her bedside and taking care of their other young child, their financial bur-

den grows, says a flier promoting the fundraiser, sponsored by the Redwood City Fire Fighters Association's Create a Smile foundation.

The Portz family will receive 100 percent of the donations, the flier says.

The event will take place from 7 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at Buck's, 3062 Woodside Road in Woodside. For more information, go to www.createasmilefoundation.org.



Sara Portz

St. Raymond pastor departs after 12 years

By Natalie Jabbar
Special to the Almanac

After serving 12 years as the pastor of St. Raymond Catholic Church in Menlo Park, Father Patrick Michaels, 52, transferred to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Marin County on July 2.

Father Pat, as he is known, grew up in San Bernardino and came to St. Raymond after serving as an associate pastor at St. Timothy Church in San Mateo.

Members of St. Raymond parish gathered at a barbecue after services on Sunday to bid him farewell.

Father Pat's role at St. Raymond will soon be filled by Father William Myers, who transferred on July 1 from St. Brendan Church in San Francisco, where he was a parochial

vicar. He will serve as administrator of St. Raymond for a year before becoming a pastor.

Pastors must relocate after spending 12 years at a parish, according to policies of the San

Francisco Archdiocese, which includes parishes in Marin, San Francisco and San Mateo counties.

Francisco Archdiocese, which includes parishes in Marin, San Francisco and San Mateo counties.

Although he expresses positive thoughts about the change, he said he has a strong regard for the 12 years he spent at St. Raymond.

"It's only by spending time with people that you can have any effect," he said. "I think that I brought about an appreciation of our liturgy to the congregation and helped them recognize what it means to be a community."

During his years as pastor, Father Pat emphasized to his congregation that "being part of a community is not about uniformity. It's about unity." ■

'Growth happens with change,' says Father Patrick Michaels, who is leaving St. Raymond Catholic Church



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Photo by Doss Welsh

Round peg, round hole

A burly Scottish man might have relished replacing this utility pole with a simple caber toss, but PG&E had dibs on the Menlo Park job. Because the pole's location was inaccessible, workers parked a 170-foot crane in front of the East Creek Place home of Doss Welsh on June 26 and replaced the pole from there, said Mr. Welsh, who took this photo.

■ POLICE CALLS

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

ATHERTON

Theft report: Girl's bike worth \$600 stolen, 500 block of Middlefield Road, June 26.

MENLO PARK

Auto theft Report: Gray 1990 Toyota Camry stolen, 700 block of Pierce Road, June 25.

Auto burglary report: 1200 block of Chrysler Drive, June 27.

WOODSIDE

Residential burglary Fixtures worth \$3,847 stolen, 300 block of Glenwood

Avenue, June 25.

Accident report: Elderly man with Alzheimer's and dementia rescued after being found floating face down in backyard pool, 3000 block of Tripp Road, June 20.

■ BIRTHS

Menlo Park

■ Antoinette Masiee and Giang Do, a daughter, June 10, at Sequoia Hospital.

■ Gretchen Griepenstroh and Leonard Murray, a daughter, June 21, at Sequoia Hospital.

■ Erin Cano and Francisco Cano Rosas, a son, June 22, at Sequoia Hospital.

■ COLLEGE GRADS

■ **Phillip W. Arscott** received a bachelor of arts degree in economics from Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. Phillip is the son of David and Martha Arscott of Atherton.

■ **Michael M. Berube**, son of Michael and Katrina Berube of Portola Valley, received a bachelor of arts degree in philosophy from Hamilton College in Clinton, New York.

■ Atherton residents, **Kathleen Ferris and Maren McMullan**, have graduated from Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. Ms. Ferris was awarded a bachelor of arts in communication. Ms. McMullan received a bachelor of arts in human development.

■ OBITUARY

Judith E. Lee

Ladera Resident

Judith E. Lee died on June 12 in her Ladera home after battling a long illness. She was 70.

A native of Minnesota, Judy Phillips graduated from Menlo-Atherton High School with the class of 1954. She went on to graduate from the University of Colorado, where she was a member of the Delta Gamma sorority. She lived in Ladera for more than 40 years.

Ms. Lee worked as a credit analyst for Tyco for 15 years before retiring in 2003.

Family member say Ms. Lee was a skilled tennis player who also enjoyed bridge, golf and traveling. "She was a wonderful mother and friend to all," daughter Allison said.

Ms. Lee is survived by her daughters, Karen Grant of Jack, Alabama, Allison Lee of Fremont

and Kasey Lee of Portola Valley; and three grandchildren.

Funeral services were held Saturday, June 16, at Christ Episcopal Church in Portola Valley. The family prefers memorials to be made to the American Cancer Society at www.cancer.org.

TOWN OF WOODSIDE INVITES APPLICATIONS FOR ARCHITECTURAL AND SITE REVIEW BOARD

The Architectural and Site Review Board reviews and makes recommendations to the Director of Community Design and Development on residential, site design and commercial applications.

Meetings are held on the first and third Monday of each month, 4:30 p.m. Appointment is for a term expiring in February 2009.

Interested residents may request information and applications Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 12 noon and 1:00-5:00 p.m. at Town Hall, 2955 Woodside Road, by telephone at (650) 851-6790, or through the Town's web site at www.woodsidetown.org. Deadline for applications is Monday, July 16, 2007, 5:00 p.m.

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Voluntary subscriptions are available for delivery to homes in Menlo Park, Atherton, Portola Valley and Woodside at \$30 per year or \$50 for 2 years. Subscriptions by businesses or residents outside the area are \$50 for one year and \$80 for two years.



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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Move Dumbarton Rail forward

It was 1914 when the first freight train puffed across the Dumbarton railroad bridge and across the woods and fields of what is now East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, North Fair Oaks, and Redwood City.

That route across the waist of San Francisco Bay made sense then, as it makes sense now. It's the shortest, cheapest connection between the East and West Bay. Then, the railroad carried mostly freight; now passengers need to get from rapidly developing subdivisions across the Bay to jobs on the Peninsula.

From a regional perspective, the project to revive the railroad, estimated to cost about \$600 million, makes even more sense now. The tracks and right of way are still there, even though the bridge needs to be replaced and tracks upgraded. And the need is increasing, as ever more cars choke the new Dumbarton Bridge and clog Peninsula highways.

It's no surprise that residents in homes along the rail line are fighting the project that could have trains rumbling behind their homes and through their neighborhoods by 2012.

The Menlo Park City Council is caught in the middle. Its members are committed to a greener future, which includes more transit, using less energy and causing less pollution than the ever-increasing number of automobiles produce. At the same time, they listen to their constituents who have valid concerns and some creative ideas.

Key issues with residents on this side of the Bay include noise and vibration, possibilities for electrification, lowered property values, possible increase in freight trains, and possible grade crossings.

We encourage council members to support the regional project to restore trains along the Dumbarton Corridor, while working to meet the concerns of local residents and supporting longer-range improvements in the rail system, such as electrification and smaller, lighter rail cars.

There's still a good deal of time; this is not a short or simple process.

As envisioned by planners, the Dumbarton Rail Corridor Project would start out with six trains a day running from Union City to Redwood City in the morning, and back in the afternoon. In Redwood City, alternate trains would go

north to San Francisco, and south to San Jose, allowing commuters access to stations along the whole Caltrain Peninsula line. Initial ridership is estimated to be about 3,650 round trips a day by 2012 if trains run as far east as Union City, or 2,100 round trips a day if trains go only as far as Newark, according to Caltrain figures.

A new station near Willow Road in Menlo Park would serve commuters coming to work in the Menlo Park and East Palo Alto business areas. Commuters could connect in the East Bay from cars, buses, BART (if and when the rail is extended to Union City), the Altamont Commuter Express to the Central Valley, and Amtrak's Capitol Corridor line that runs between San Jose and Sacramento.

The formal process is proceeding slowly, with a draft environmental impact report (EIR) due out in fall 2008. This report, which will be subject to another round of hearings, will consider the environmental concerns of neighbors and establish some measures to mitigate them. Final environmental clearance is set for 2009.

Meanwhile, problems abound, not least of which is the increase of projected costs from \$300 million to \$595 million. These are also being addressed by the Dumbarton Policy Committee advising Caltrain; this is made up of representatives of participating public agencies.

Here are some suggestions as the project rolls forward:

- Electrification may not happen overnight, but Caltrain needs to show it's serious about transitioning from diesel to electric trains sooner rather than later. Instead of vague promises, Caltrain officials should set a firm timeline to get electric trains up and running along the Dumbarton corridor.

- Officials should be upfront about the likelihood of freight trains running on the Dumbarton tracks, and seek limits on the hours such trains could run.

- Everyone involved with the project needs to consider the \$300 million question: Where is the rest of the funding going to come from? Whatever the cost, funds need to be put aside to mitigate impacts on homes near the rail line.

- Menlo Park residents and council members need to recognize that the city will have to make some sacrifices for the Bay Area region and the environment. This train fits the city's goal to address global warming at the local level, and residents must look beyond their own backyards.

LETTERS

Our readers write

Community-VA hospital meeting suggested

Editor:

There has been much in the news about VA hospitals over the last couple of years, and much of it disturbing. A lot of it is focused on Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.; my thoughts, however, usually (turn) to the VA Palo Alto Health Care System here, which includes the Menlo Park division.

I note that there is no reason for me to suspect there are problems that exist at the Palo Alto Health Care System. But much of the

disturbing revelations pertain to neurological problems being found in soldiers and veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan (and other earlier theaters). And, the Menlo Park Division is reportedly a major provider in this type of treatment.

I am told that local governments (cities, counties and California) in which the hospitals are located have no oversight responsibilities for these federal entities. Nevertheless, given the national anxiety about the adequacy of treatment, it might be prudent for the appropriate federal entity to provide a peninsula town

hall meeting. Interested citizens — and neighbors of these facilities — could be briefed on the general state of affairs.

Although I am not a supporter of the aggression in Iraq, I do feel some responsibility toward those who served.

Henry Organ
Euclid Avenue, Menlo Park

When water levels rise, will businesses be ready?

Editor:

With global warming and rising sea and bay levels, I am curious about plans for several

proposed Menlo Park projects:

1. How will the railroad cross the bay when the tracks are under water?

2. Does Mr. Bohannon's hotel have contingency plans for abandoning lower floors and providing boat service?

3. Has GM considered building its auto mall buildings on pontoons and switching to boat sales?

Just wondering.

John Beverley Butcher
Hedge Road, Menlo Park

See **LETTERS**, next page

LETTERS

Continued from previous page

Challenging prevailing ideas on global warming causes

Editor:

I write in response to Mark Murphy's letter dated 20 June. I am a certified consulting meteorologist and an oceanographer, with over 25 years of experience, and a member of both the American Meteorological Society and American Geophysical Union.

I am also one of the many meteorologists who do not believe that the recent global warming is mostly anthropogenic. In fact, most of my peers agree with the view that we cannot prove one way or the other whether this warming is part of a natural cycle, particularly since the models being used in these predictions cannot reproduce the historical temperature patterns. A similar view was expressed by the American Association of State Climatologists, some of whom were either fired or threatened with dismissal because of their scientific views.

There is a wealth of peer-reviewed scientific evidence, albeit unreported in most media circles, to counter the hype generated by such propaganda as "An Inconvenient Truth." However, I certainly agree that we need to reduce our fossil fuel consumption, not only as an environmental issue, but also for security. We should not be paying billions of dollars to those states who use that money

Not opposed to Dumbarton Rail — but do it right

By Henry Riggs

The \$600 million Dumbarton Rail effort (Almanac, June 20) doesn't pencil out as designed, but this shouldn't be a "take it or leave it" plan. The renewed debate is in fact a huge opportunity to "do transit right," and with active citizen input it can happen.

There is understandable and formidable resistance from the old line heavy rail advocates. It is true that diesel Caltrain is the greenest transit on the peninsula, and we owe Caltrain our support, but even there we can and should do better.

Heavy rail has a heavy downside: It is partnered by federal law with freight — the reason the trains are more than twice as heavy as needed is the requirement to survive freight collisions — and this weight has to be accelerated from rest, stopped, and accelerated again at every stop from San Jose to San Francisco.

The massive wasted energy is simple physics.

A modern rapid transit Dumbarton is a challenge to Caltrain, and rumor is some staff members are enthusiastic. But when voices like Steve Schmidt and Sue Lempert try to paint those calling for lower energy use and quieter operations (and the lower "footprint" of the entire system) as "opponents to transit," they miss the very real opportunity to leverage public sentiment to finally get us up to date. In ecology, the difference between 40 tons and 100 tons is not "splitting hairs."

For the hundreds of affected neighbors, neither is the (federally mandated) opportunity for Union Pacific to run freight midnight to 5 a.m. past Menlo Park, Redwood City and East Palo Alto homes, versus lower-impact trains and no freight.

Caltrain staff have made clear that

Dumbarton cannot be electrified in their proposal, freight wouldn't be anyway, and there is no money even for a low berm along the tracks to deflect sound, let alone window replacements to address the diesel proposal. And the EIR process does not create new funds; it merely evaluates the proposed project. These are facts, and we have to work with them, not editorialize in wishful thinking.

Do we need to support a Dumbarton right of way project? Yes. Give us a clean, green, modern system and the neighbors themselves will back it — and use it! But it cannot be "Caltrain or no train."

There already exist both light rail and rapid transit systems that provide the speed we need: Europe, Asia and even Canada are already there. It's time to get with a modern, green system, and we can start with the clean slate before us and do it right. Please, let us on board.

Henry Riggs is a Menlo Park planning commissioner and a resident of Lorelei Manor.



to kill us.

The earth has warmed (and cooled) similarly in the past and will continue to do so in the future, without any input from man. Our policy should be to plan for this eventuality, rather than try to change something that can't be changed.

Bob Cohen
Menlo Park

Trains are not the answer to our transit needs

Editor:

I was a regular on the old

Southern Pacific through my high school years in the 1970s, and in the 1980s frequently rode Caltrain to work in San Francisco, usually walking the 1.2 miles from the station to my office in the financial district. In the 1990s I began driving to Colma and taking BART downtown, a practice I still follow regularly.

What I cannot understand is why the Peninsula continues to reject BART in favor of 19th century technology.

I've heard all the objections: BART is too expensive; BART is mismanaged; BART is outdated;

BART is an East Bay institution. Well let's stop a minute and think about the proposal for the Dumbarton rail service — a roughly \$500 million investment in train service that terminates in Hayward. Add to that figure the cost of electrification, grade separations up and down the Peninsula and continued operating deficits and I wonder if BART really is more costly.

The advantages are clear: a true regional solution that ties together the entire Bay Area. BART could be elevated above the Caltrain right of way and bicycle trails could be constructed on the old roadbed providing a safe commute corridor separated from El Camino traffic.

I know that the train buffs won't like my saying so, but the train is inferior. It is dangerous to pedestrians, with roughly one fatality per month on average, noisy, smelly, and slow. It doesn't reach downtown San Francisco and it has limited service after 6 p.m.

Let's dump this dinosaur and get serious about providing some real alternatives to single-occupant driving.

Mark Gilles
Hermosa Way, Menlo Park

'Atrocious' rate increase for Fair Oaks sewers

Editor:

Did you read the notice that came in the mail this month from our sewer district? How gullible do they think we are? "Balanced Budget" indeed! That means they have free rein to increase spending at will and their only obligation is to increase fees to cover it. C'mon! Do you know that our county Board of Supervisors is allowing the Fair Oaks Sewer Mainte-

nance District to increase our rates 50 percent this year and then 75 percent in the next four years? Has your income gone up that much? This translates to several hundred dollars per household per year. What happened to fair "cost of living" increases? Where is this money going? Into whose pockets?

The only thing that will allow the county Board of Supervisors to get away with this atrocious increase is for the residents of the Fair Oaks Sewer District to sit by idly and not protest.

We do have the power to easily stop these greedy types; the law provides it. Listen up, you all! A simple letter of protest, it need be only one sentence long, which includes your name, address and parcel number, must be mailed to the clerk of the board at 400 County Center in Redwood City, 94063 now! A majority protest by the residents of this sewer district will cause the rate increase **not** to be imposed. Simple. That's the law. We have the power! Send them the message that we will not allow them to bully us this way. Get it there by July 15. Sensible increase, of course. Unfair increases, no. Join your fellow citizens to stop this unfair money grab now.

Diane Braun
Woodland Ave, Menlo Park



Portola Valley Archives

Our Regional Heritage

In 1964, teenagers from Valley Presbyterian Church prepare to help move Kirk House, their Sunday School and church office building, to the rear of the property to make way for a new sanctuary. The building was originally the home of Thomas Kelly, a pioneer strawberry farmer in Portola Valley.

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