

**HOMEMADE EXPLOSIVES**  
turn up in Woodside. Page 5

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THE HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER FOR MENLO PARK, ATHERTON,

PORTOLA VALLEY AND WOODSIDE

JANUARY 9, 2008 | VOL. 43 NO. 19

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## **Election** marks course **correction** for schools

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# Inside

This week's news, features and community events.

## FIRST SHOT



Almanac photo by Veronica Weber

### A mighty wind (and rain)

A horizontal scarf and a grimace capture this man's effort to simply walk down the street in downtown Menlo Park on Friday, Jan. 4, during the first of two storms that dumped a welcome but pelting rain on the Bay Area.

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### On the cover

Wayne Reus, a Sequoia Union High School student, cuts away during a final exam in his woodworking shop class. More such classes could be coming to local public high schools if voters approve Measure J on Feb. 5. Photo by Veronica Weber. Story begins on **Page 10**.

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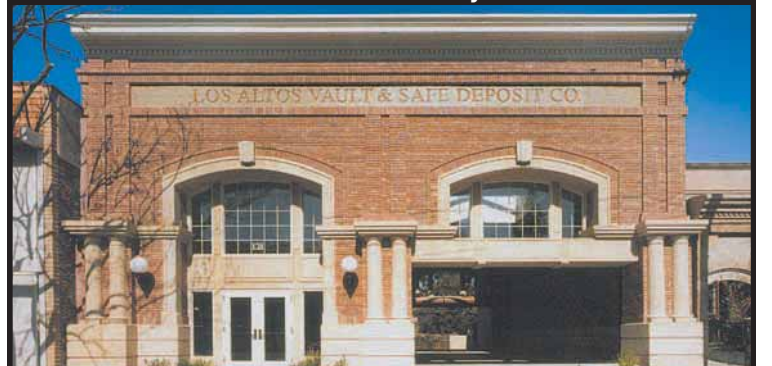
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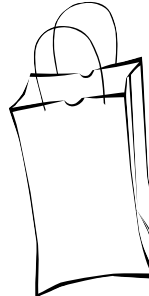


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# Local News

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## Homemade explosives turn up in Woodside

By Andrea Gemmet

Almanac Staff Writer

It's defined in the Urban Dictionary, it's all over YouTube.com and now it's turning up in Woodside — it's the Drano bomb.

Woodside officials are investigating three recent incidents involving homemade chemical explosives, including one similar to the acid-filled soda bottle that splattered a 10-year-old girl in Redwood City on Jan. 6, melting her clothes but leaving her unharmed.

On Dec. 15, a county ranger discovered

an unexploded Drano bomb along Dennis Martin Creek near Old La Honda Road, said Lt. Marc Alcantara of the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office. The sheriff's bomb squad and the county hazardous materials team responded to the incident, he said.

Recipes for creating explosive chemical reactions — along with apparently unheeded warnings about the serious danger of chemical burns — are all over the Internet. The combination of clog-busting drain cleaners and aluminum foil is more hazardous than, say, the exploding Mentos-and-Coke trick, another popular subject for home movies posted on the

Internet.

Two other recent incidents involved microwave ovens, rather than plastic soda bottles. On Dec. 29, sheriff's deputies responded to an explosion on Runnymede Road and found the remains of a microwave oven and two cans of Quick Start, an ether-containing product, Lt. Alcantara said. A day later, a charred microwave was found on Lawler Ranch Road, he said.

The investigation into the incidents is ongoing, although the Sheriff's Office is treating them as pranks because they occurred in relatively isolated areas and do not appear to have been intended to cause

injury or property damage, Lt. Alcantara said. Anyone who finds a suspicious-looking device, such as a plastic bottle containing metal and liquid, should stay away from it and report it to the authorities, he said.

Detectives do not believe there is any connection between the Woodside incidents and the one in Redwood City, which occurred outside Redeemer Lutheran Church, Lt. Alcantara said.

Anyone with information about the Woodside incidents is asked to call Detective Ben Hand at 363-4192. ■

## Much-needed rain welcomed here but not storm's fury that knocked out power

■ Peets and its customers enjoy natural light and cowboy coffee.

By David Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

Lightning crackled overhead Saturday in a brilliant — though far less violent — follow-up to the storm the day before that blew in raging winds and knocked out power throughout the Midpeninsula.

The two storms dumped 4.05 inches of rain on Menlo Park, said resident Bill Russ, who maintains a rain gauge in his Cotton Street yard.

Portola Valley and Woodside weathered the storms with scattered power outages but no major damage. Trees fell in Atherton and power went out in parts of Menlo Park. More rain is expected Tuesday.

The storms were the strongest to hit the area in years, dropping much-needed rain on the

greater Bay Area. The power outages affected some 1.3 million customers in total, about 26 percent of PG&E's Northern and Central California service areas, said company spokesman David Eisenhauer.

### Weathering the storm

The drinks at Peets Coffee & Tea in downtown Menlo Park may have lacked some of their usual spirit around 8 a.m. Friday morning after the storm knocked out power along parts of the southern side of Santa Cruz Avenue, but the patrons took up the slack.

"It was a good time for all," Brian, an assistant manager, told the Almanac. "Everyone was pretty high-spirited."

Indeed, when the power came back on for a brief few minutes later that morning, it was greeted with a chorus of boos, he said.

About 15 customers hung out to enjoy natural light, conversation, music from an iPod, and coffee made differently, Brian said. The Peets crew tapped what was left of the 190-degree water and brewed cowboy coffee: hot water poured over fresh grounds.

Customers paid for the first few cups, but it was on the house after that, he said. When the hot water ran out some two-and-a-half hours later, the conversations continued until about 1 p.m., he said. They closed the doors around 3.

"They were all very grateful that we stayed open, plus it was different," Brian said. "We have a very, very loyal customer base." Peets' upper management had directed the staff to keep the cafe open, he added.

Three o'clock is also when the

See **STORM**, page 8



Almanac photo by David Boyce

This fellow has sailed before, but this particular trip on Politzer Drive in Menlo Park may be a first for him and for the neighbors during the storm on Friday.

## Atherton needs more checks on finance director, Councilman Marsala says

By Andrea Gemmet

Almanac Staff Writer

Questionable expenses, moonlighting, doing favors for friends — Atherton Councilman Charles Marsala says he's collected a "dirty dozen" of procedural problems in the town's finance department, and he's issued five pages of findings and recommendations.

The problems that they aim to fix are directly related to alleged conduct by former finance director John Johns during his tenure.

By and large, Mr. Marsala's recommenda-

tions call for tighter controls over the finance director to prevent spending abuses and increase accountability.

The issues singled out by Mr. Marsala include Mr. Johns':

■ Hiring a computer forensics company to investigate two building department employees' computers for dubious reasons.

■ Avoiding City Council oversight by splitting up purchase orders to keep them below the town's \$15,000 threshold for requiring council approval.

■ Hiring or seeking employment for friends.

Mr. Marsala's 12-item list is the result of

his personal investigation of the department, supported by documents, including purchase orders and e-mails from Mr. Johns that he acquired through state Public Records Act requests, Mr. Marsala told the Almanac. He plans to present his information to the City Council at its January meeting, and said he would like to see the issues addressed at the February council meeting.


Mr. Johns was fired Oct. 29 after being suspended for two months during an investigation of hostile workplace allegations against him. The hostile workplace charge turned out to be unfounded, but the investigator reported finding plenty of other damaging

information that appears to have sealed his fate.

Mr. Johns has said that the report is inaccurate and attempts to discredit his work as a whistleblower investigating misdeeds in the building and other town departments. He has filed a \$500,000 wrongful termination claim against the town that is still pending.

As it turns out, last fall the town hired the same computer forensics company to investigate Mr. Johns' computers that Mr. Johns hired in 2006 to comb through data on building department computers.

See **MARSALA**, page 8



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Almost nine years later, Kaelyn is fully recovered, working on a bachelor's degree and building on her dreams of interior design. Her battle with Leukemia long behind her, Kaelyn is free to focus on the promise of her future.

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# Patricia Brown helped shape PV community

Patricia "Pat" Brown, who with her husband, the late Robert V. "Bob" Brown, helped shape the community of Portola Valley, died Dec. 26 at her home in Westridge. She was 78.

For more than 50 years, Pat and Bob Brown lived in Portola Valley, where they raised their four children. The couple was active in town affairs throughout the years. They were involved in the incorporation of Portola Valley in 1964 and local government for more than 25 years. Mr. Brown was a member of the first Town Council and mayor three times.

Ms. Brown was born on April 19, 1929, in Sedro-Woolley, Washington, where she spent her childhood. Her parents, Earl and Pearl Hegg, were members of a pioneer family in the community.

She graduated from Stanford University with a bachelor's degree in education in 1951. While at Stanford, she met her future husband, Bob Brown. They were married in 1952 and built their house in Westridge.

An avid storyteller and puppeteer, Ms. Brown is remembered by many school children for her puppet shows and story hours at local schools and libraries. She was a member of the Palo Alto

## OBITUARY



Patricia "Pat" Brown

Storytellers Guild.

The Browns were supporters of the Friends of the Portola Valley Library and were among the major donors to the library's children's section in 1969. They took the lead in securing a home for the library in the restored classroom building of the former Portola Valley School.

Ms. Brown was president of the Friends of the Portola Valley Library from 1983 to 1989, and retired from the board in 1995.

Pat and Bob Brown traveled widely throughout Europe and to many corners of the world,

say family members. They were active and dedicated conservationists and environmentalists. Locally, they gave generously to the Peninsula Open Space Trust and Sempervirens Fund and joined and supported many other local organizations.

Elsewhere, they supported the Big Sur Land Trust (Monterey Peninsula), the Sierra Club, Yosemite Fund, as well as the Skagit Land Trust and Whatcom Land Trust in Ms. Brown's home state of Washington.

Ms. Brown enjoyed story-telling, reading, gardening, beach-combing, hiking and theater, especially on the Monterey Peninsula, where the couple had their second home after retirement. Her lifelong traits of generosity and kindness touched all who knew her, say family members.

Ms. Brown is survived by her children, Kristin Brown of San Diego, Loren Brown of Palo Alto, Susan Brown of Potsdam, Germany, and Brian Brown of Portola Valley; and five grandchildren. Her husband, Robert V. Brown, died in 2005.

No services will be held. The family prefers that memorials be made to the Sempervirens Fund, Drawer BE, Los Altos, CA 94023; phone 968-4509.

# Atherton police officer is suspended

By Andrea Gemmet  
Almanac Staff Writer

An Atherton police officer has recently been placed on paid leave, although police Chief Bob Brennan said he could not comment on who the officer is, or why he was suspended.

"It's a personnel matter, and it's not at the level of a department head, so it's all confidential," Chief Brennan said.

Recent court cases have affirmed that high-ranking public employees such as depart-

ment heads have less of a right to privacy than rank-and-file public employees, when it comes to personnel issues.

Speaking in general terms, Chief Brennan said that officers are routinely placed on leave for anything ranging from a criminal allegation to a citizen's complaint of rude behavior. The Atherton Police Department has 28 days to conduct an investigation and make a report of its findings to the person who lodged a complaint, Chief Brennan said.

The reports simply say whether a complaint against an officer is sustained, not sustained, unfounded or if the officer has been exonerated, Chief Brennan said.

Last year, only one complaint was lodged against an Atherton officer, he said.

The reports are not considered public information, and they would not contain any information about disciplinary action that might be taken against an officer, he said. However, the public is entitled to know the number, and disposition, of complaints made against officers, Chief Brennan said. ■

# REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman



## Real Estate in 2008

This is the time of year when predictions are made about what is likely to happen in the coming year. No one really knows for sure what will happen until it does, but trends are often apparent and predictions are thus made with some confidence. In residential real estate, markets can turn in the opposite direction one weekend, although there are usually signs of what is coming. For example, the stock market decline in spring of 2000 happened six months before real estate began its descent but agents knew the descent was probable.

The real estate market has seasons and we are about to begin what is typically the most active season of the year: the spring market. Everyone looks at the first transactions of January for signs of what is ahead and it is still too early to do this. But based on other input, including activ-

ity during the last weeks of 2007, here are some predictions of what is likely going to happen in the first half of 2008.

The Mid-Peninsula area has much going for it: demand for housing remains high; the job market is strong; and foreclosures are a rarity. We can still be impacted by what is happening elsewhere but chances are good that the market will be stable here for the next several months. Prices are likely to remain strong but will probably not rise for at least the next quarter. If you are thinking of selling your property this year, inventory is very low and you should begin the process now. If you are in the market to buy a home, stay active and be in a position to act quickly if you see the right property. The signs are there that it will be a good real estate year. Don't hesitate to be part of it.

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



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## INVITES APPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING COMMISSION Districts 1, 5 and 7

The Planning Commission participates in the administration of the planning laws and policies of the Town. It is responsible for recommending to the Town Council ordinances and resolutions necessary to implement the General Plan and adopted development policy. The Commission also conducts necessary public hearings to administer the planning laws and policies of the Town and acts upon applications for zoning amendments, conditional use permits, variances, subdivisions and other related functions as may be assigned by the Council.

The Planning Commission meets on the first and third Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.; Commissioners are appointed for a four-year term; one member is appointed from each Council district. A listing of district addresses is provided on the Town's web site at [www.woodsidetown.org](http://www.woodsidetown.org). Employment and Volunteer Opportunities.

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, at the Town's web site, [www.woodsidetown.org](http://www.woodsidetown.org), or telephone the Town Clerk at (650) 851-6790. Deadline for applications is Friday, January 19, 2008, 5:00 p.m.

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# Petition challenges move to limit size of basements in Portola Valley

By David Boyce  
Almanac Staff Writer

While the second and final vote on a new ordinance that limits the size of basements in Portola Valley is set for a Town Council meeting on Wednesday night, a petition is gathering steam to demand that the council reverse its unanimous December vote in support of the ordinance.

The ordinance, devised by the Planning Commission over three years, would restrict the size of basements to 20 percent of the square footage of the above-ground floor area. Homeowners could build larger basements, but at a cost of less square footage above ground.

Among the petition's complaints: the ordinance erodes property rights, it would be among the most restrictive on the Peninsula, and the square-footage formula encourages two-story homes instead of one story with a "generous basement." Resident and stock portfolio manager Paul Seipp wrote the petition.

The Planning Commission's goals, said Town Planner George Mader, include reducing a basement's impact on vegetation from extra grading, reducing the intensity of home use, being consistent

with efforts to reduce the town's greenhouse gas footprint, and discouraging homes larger than what is in the town's rural character.

The Jan. 9 vote is likely to include Councilman Richard Merk, who was absent from the Dec. 12 meeting. The council meets at 8 p.m. in the Historic Schoolhouse.

Mr. Seipp said in an interview that he acknowledges the importance of zoning laws in maintaining a town's character. But he argued that a basement seldom affects the appearance of the house above it and that a house's perimeter is the common way to delineate a basement's dimensions.

A basement is also ideal — as above-ground floors are not — for water heaters, wine cellars and media rooms, he added.

All of that is possible under the new ordinance, but perhaps at the cost of a somewhat smaller single-story home above ground, Mr. Mader said in an interview.

The petition had gathered 145 signatures as of Monday, Jan. 7, most of them from residents.

"I didn't realize (the petition) was going to get this many signatures," Mr. Seipp told the Almanac.

To gauge how many signers had a stake in the law's fate, Mr. Seipp said he added a question to his

petition asking the signer if there would be an "immediate effect" should the council enact the ordinance. Fourteen signers answered "yes" to that question.

## Being greener?

The ordinance reflects a council directive last fall to the Planning Commission to prepare a plan for gradually introducing regulations that mandate green practices in the design, review and construction of new and remodeled homes. The steps could help reduce the town's greenhouse gas footprint.

The town has plans to hire a "resource efficiency coordinator" who might look at issues such as coordinating delivery schedules for construction materials so as to avoid half-empty gravel trucks following each other into town.

Asked to comment on the council's green sentiments and plans, Mr. Seipp replied: "I think that everybody should be environmentally conscious and environmentally minded. I don't know that it is our government's responsibility to mandate that."

"I think that we, as a people out here (in Portola Valley), are all encouraged to be good stewards of our planet," he added. "I don't see that basements really impact global warming." ■

## MARSALA

continued from page 5

Mr. Johns directed Winston Krone of SafirRosetti to search employee computers not only for information pertaining to his audit of the building department, but also for:

- Communication about former building official Mike Hood's June 29, 2006, retirement party at Charles Marsala's house.

- Signs of involvement in the recall campaign against Councilwoman Kathy McKeithen.

- Anything about public works director Duncan Jones, Ms. McKeithen, Mr. Johns himself, and other town employees "who are the subjects of harassment allegations."

The computer examination was paid for with a \$14,000 purchase order signed by Mr. Johns. Mr. Marsala said he didn't understand how such a broad investigation could be justified as part of the third phase of Mr. Johns' audit of the building department. The audit and the budget to conduct it were authorized by the council.

"His presentation (to the council) was for staff time to look at files in the building department, to look into improving policies and procedures. It wasn't for trying to

find misdoings with regards to a retirement party," Mr. Marsala said. "How could this be justified as being part of that phase-three (audit) budget? How is it that our finance department operates (in such a way) that it could issue a purchase order like this?"

When reached for comment about Mr. Marsala's charges, Mr. Johns responded via e-mail, saying: "Charles Marsala's allegations have no merit. The fact that he conducted what he refers to as an investigation would, however, appear to discredit the claim of another member of the City Council that the City Council itself had 'nothing to do' with the finance director's termination."

## Expenses questioned

While Mr. Johns signed off on other employees' expenses, no one supervised Mr. Johns' own expenses, according to Mr. Marsala. The town needs a system of checks on senior management expenses, he said.

He cites purchases of a printer, a camera and an iPod, as well as e-mails saying Mr. Johns failed to follow up on more than \$2,300 in fraudulent charges on the town credit card. So many of the credit card statements are missing, it's impossible to tell whether the town

ended up paying for the fraudulent charges, Mr. Marsala said.

The Almanac has not been able to verify whether the credit card statements are missing.

Mr. Marsala also points to e-mails showing that then-city manager Jim Robinson was unaware that Mr. Johns had hired a new payroll clerk on a contract basis in his department. Mr. Marsala said it appears Mr. Johns paid the new clerk — a friend of his — with two separate purchase orders, in order to avoid the \$15,000 threshold that would require council approval.

Mr. Marsala also cites a March 28, 2007, e-mail in which Mr. Johns asks Building Official Mike Wasmann to extend the contract and increase the hours of one of the town's contract plan-checkers. "I owe (him) a favor because of the hard work he did for me on the phase 3 (audit)," the e-mail says.

Mr. Marsala also took issue with Mr. Johns' outside consulting work. He said that the town should require its finance director to be in the office during normal business hours, and that doing consulting work for other state agencies should be prohibited.



Almanac photo by Veronica Weber

Last Friday's storm didn't stop these two pedestrians on Santa Cruz Avenue in downtown Menlo Park.

## STORM

continued from page 5

day ended for The Runner's High athletic store down the block, where staff resorted to hand-written receipts and met for the routine daily conferences under a skylight, said store owner Adam Kemist.

At the jZ Cool Eatery & Wine Bar, where the power outage abruptly halted daily food preparation, staff were dismissed at 10 a.m., said kitchen manager Talia Vardi. Friday night jazz was also canceled, she said.

## Other towns

In Woodside and Portola Valley, the weekend passed without major incidents, according to the towns' public works directors.

There were scattered power outages and some minor flooding, said Woodside's Paul Nagengast.

In Atherton, 14 trees fell, according to police logs, and there were seven instances of flooding.

## Ahead of last year

At Moffett Field in Moun-

tain View, 2.79 inches fell between Thursday, Jan. 3, when the first storm hit, and Monday morning, said meteorology technician Diana Henderson at the National Weather Service's Monterey office. The total since July 1 at Moffett Field is 5.75 inches.

Meanwhile in central Menlo Park, last week's rainfall total was 4.05 inches, Mr. Russ told the Almanac. He said the total so far, as measured in his backyard gauge, is 8.3 inches, compared with 3.7 inches last year at this time. Normal rainfall between July 1 and June 30 is 16 to 18 inches, he said.

Asked about different readings in rain gauges separated by just 12 miles, Ms. Henderson said that Moffett Field, unlike Menlo Park, is a gusty open plain where wind tends to blow rain over the gauge rather than into it.

The five-day forecast from the weather service shows a damp week ahead, including a 70 percent chance of rain on Tuesday.

To report a power outage to PG&E and find out more on when power might be restored, call (800) 743-5002. ■

See MARSALA, next page

## Pharmaca plans store in Menlo Park

■ Store may occupy old Dal Baffo site.

By Rory Brown  
Almanac Staff Writer

Pharmaca, a growing chain of pharmacies that offers both prescription medication and natural remedies, is taking steps to set up shop on Santa Cruz Avenue in Menlo Park.

The pharmacy chain, based in Boulder, Colorado, plans to remodel the former Dal Baffo restaurant site at 878 Santa Cruz Ave. to set up shop here, according to permit requests filed with the city's planning department in December.

Steve Preston, senior director of marketing with Pharmaca, confirmed the company is "looking at" the Dal Baffo site, but said the company has yet to commit to opening a Menlo Park site.

Pharmaca labels itself an "integrative pharmacy," as the store offers traditional synthetic prescription medication offered by most pharmacies, as well as naturopathic remedies, such as unprocessed herbs and foods.



Almanac photo by Veronica Weber

Pharmaca a chain based in Colorado, has several Bay Area locations, including this store on Cole Street in San Francisco.

The company regularly invites doctors to give talks about health and wellness at various store locations.

The integrative pharmacy model is also used by the Berkeley-based Elephant Pharmacy, which operates a store in Los Altos.

There are 19 Pharmaca locations, 11 of which are in California. Stores have recently opened in Napa and Los Gatos, and a store in Monterey is under construction.

Barring any drastic construction plans at the Dal Baffo site, all Pharmaca would need to move in is a business license and a building permit — both of which can be obtained from the planning department without Planning Commission or City Council approval.

Pharmaca would be the third pharmacy on Santa Cruz Avenue, joining Preuss Pharmacy and Walgreens. ■

## Office project: Neighbors raise traffic fears

By Rory Brown  
Almanac Staff Writer

Neighbors' concerns about traffic hazards near a proposed medical office complex in Menlo Park will be discussed at the City Council's meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 8.

Council members will consider plans to demolish the old Acorn restaurant to make way for a two-story, 9,825-square-foot office complex at 1906 El Camino Real. The site is between Spruce Avenue and Watkins Avenue.

The meeting starts at 7 p.m. in the council chambers at the Civic Center, between Laurel and Alma streets.

Neighbors say building a medical complex would increase traffic to the already dangerous intersection of El Camino Real and Watkins Avenue.

On July 14 — just three days before the council last considered this project — a 28-year-old woman from Alameda was seriously injured as she was struck by a van as she apparently attempted to turn left onto southbound El Camino Real from Watkins Avenue.

There was also an accident at the intersection at 3:50 p.m. on Jan. 3, according to police reports. No injuries were reported.

To mitigate the increased traffic, city staff has recommended that cars be prohibited from turn-

ing left out of the parking lot onto Watkins Avenue toward El Camino Real. Prohibiting left turns would instead direct traffic through Atherton and Menlo Park neighborhoods.

Neighbors have called for increased safety measures, such as restricting street parking to increase visibility. Some people have requested a traffic light on El Camino Real.

More drastic safety measures may have complications. Although the Acorn site is in Menlo Park, that segment of El Camino Real is under the jurisdiction of Atherton and Caltrans, and would require their approval. ■

### MARSALA

continued from previous page

Other Atherton council members' reaction to Mr. Marsala's "dirty dozen" is mixed. The Almanac made copies available to council members so they could comment on it.

Mayor Jim Janz said he hadn't seen it, and would respond to it "in due course" once Mr. Marsala presented it to him.

Ms. McKeithen issued a brief written statement:

"The interim finance director, together with the finance committee, has been working for several months on addressing any and all necessary improvements in the

town's finance department. This is not an appropriate subject for a press release but rather addresses matters within the purview of the city manager, our capable interim finance director, and council. Let us move on and stop re-exhibiting perceived dirty linen in the press," she wrote.

Councilman Jerry Carlson said that, while he is pleased with Mr. Marsala's concern, procedural changes should be addressed by the newly chosen city manager, Jerry Gruber. Mr. Carlson said that most of the problems the town is currently wrestling with should have been nipped in the bud by former city manager Jim Robinson, who retired at the end of July.

The Almanac's repeated attempts to contact Mr. Robinson have been unsuccessful.

"You ought to be aware that somebody has a consulting business on the outside. It's a small staff, there are not that many layers of management," Mr. Carlson said. "If you're signing the checks, then you ought to be asking questions about the credit cards."

He called Mr. Marsala's recommendations "common-sense things."

"Department heads and city managers ought to look at what they're doing for the town as a full-time job," he said. "I don't think we need a lot more rules, but more oversight." ■



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### Planning Commission Recruitment Application Submittal Date Extended

The Town Council is seeking an individual to serve on the Town's Planning Commission. The objectives of the Commission are to continually advise the Town Council regarding the comprehensive planning of the Town and to administer the planning regulations. The duties and functions include review of the General Plan for development within the Town, recommend ordinance and resolutions to the Council as necessary to implement the General Plan, supervise the land use within the Town by conducting necessary public hearings and acting upon applications for: zoning amendments, conditional use permits, variances, subdivisions, site development permits and building permits.

The Planning Commission consists of 5 members appointed by the Town Council appointed for a 4-year term. The Commission meetings are held on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month at 8:00 p.m. in the Town Council Chambers (Historic Schoolhouse).

If you are interested in serving on the Planning Commission, please submit a letter of interest to the Town Council by Friday, January 11, 2008. The Town Council will conduct Interviews for the Planning Commission position at their regular meeting on Wednesday, January 23, 2008 at 8:00 p.m.

Published in THE ALMANAC on January 9, 2008.

# Election marks course correction for schools

FEB. 5 BOND MEASURE ELECTION PUTS CAREER EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES IN THE BALANCE

STORY BY DAVID BOYCE • PHOTOGRAPHS BY VERONICA WEBER



**‘Career-education occupations are the glue of society that makes stuff work.’**

ED LAVIGNE  
ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT  
SEQUOIA DISTRICT

Setting up a classroom for an economics or history class isn't complicated. Find a room with good lighting and ventilation and a door that closes, bring in some chairs and writing surfaces for the students and a board for the teacher to write on and you're ready to go.

Results may vary if that same classroom is used to teach biotechnology or how to work a piece of sheet metal or build a kitchen cabinet. Without a well-equipped shop, it's missing the vital hands-on experience that students expect and need.

Shop classes have faded in importance in high schools, but a new proposal by administrators in the Sequoia Union High School District could reinvigorate career training in high school—and open it up to any interested students, including kids headed to college.

A \$165 million bond measure, in which a major priority would be facilities for a renewed career technical education program in district high schools, goes before voters on Feb. 5 as Measure J. The measure requires a 55 percent majority to pass.

The driving issues are the looming retirement of baby boomers now in the trades and preparing students for a broadly competitive global economy, said Ed LaVigne, the Sequoia district's assistant superintendent for administrative services. "What we're trying to do is cover the waterfront that allows our kids to become fully engaged in their learning."

The shop class, with its emphasis on manual skills in a three-dimensional world, seems of another era, an artifact of the decades after World War II when the United States was a manufacturing powerhouse and a high school graduate could find a job in skilled labor that

would earn a middle-class income.

Industrial labor in the United States has been pummeled over the last 20 years as a service economy arose and manufacturers automated and moved their operations to low-wage regions such as Asia and Latin America.

Such trends may have been the force behind a public high school push to encourage all students to go to college. The statistics have been notably stubborn. In 1993, 33 percent of graduates statewide were eligible for admission to California public universities, according to state Department of Education data. In 2006, 35 percent were eligible.

(At Woodside High School over that same period, the eligibility numbers were 45 percent and 44 percent, and at Menlo-Atherton High, 60 percent and 53 percent.)

What's been happening to those high

school graduates not headed for college? Many California counties, through their offices of education, offer so-called Regional Occupational Programs, where training can be found for positions in business offices, the health care industry, information technology, and the trade and service unions.

San Mateo County's ROP program would increase its collaboration with the Sequoia district if voters approve the bond measure.

As required by state law, a citizens committee would ensure that funds are spent on the projects listed in the ballot measure. Among the other priorities for the money: a 10-year, \$10 million fund to upgrade technology in the district; improvements to energy and physical infrastructures; and a new building for East Palo Alto Academy High School, a four-year charter school operated by Stanford University.





It's final-exam time for Daniel Kynenberg as he cuts a piece of wood on a band saw in his woodworking shop class at Sequoia High School. Such classes could become more common at local public high schools if voters approve Measure J.

The school building might run \$12.5 million, plus \$2 million to \$5 million to prepare the site, including entry and exit roads, a parking lot and sewer, water and utility connections, Mr. LaVigne said.

### Poll shows support

A summer sampling of local voters seemed agreeable to a career-oriented program. In a district-funded telephone poll of 600 randomly chosen likely voters, the San Carlos-based Center for Community Opinion found majorities in support of new classrooms for career-oriented courses.

In the August poll, 57 percent of parents of middle- and high-school students said they were either very likely or somewhat likely to enroll a child in career-and-technical-education courses if they were offered. Among non-parents, 78 percent favored building

facilities for such courses.

This “very explicit” local support reflects statewide and nationwide trends to address trade occupations, now held by baby-boomers, that are “the glue of society that makes stuff work,” Mr. LaVigne said, adding: “When they retire, what’s going to happen?”

“It’s a huge bubble,” said M-A shop and mechanical drawing teacher Mark Leeper in referring to coming retirements in home and commercial construction, energy infrastructure, and civil engineering work such as bridge retrofits.

“I think that’s where we are really lacking in our system: preparing people for those kinds of jobs,” he said.

The district’s new career program could include one central facility and branch classrooms in all four comprehensive high schools, including Woodside and Menlo-Atherton, Mr. LaVigne said.

The 10-year fund for school technology upgrades won support from 76 percent of those polled, while 59 percent favored a new high school in East Palo Alto. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus four percentage points.

Measure J would add about \$10 per \$100,000 of assessed value to the annual tax paid by residential and commercial properties in the district, Superintendent Pat Gemma said.

When pollsters informed the voters of that tax impact, support for Measure J as a whole rose to 65 percent from 56 percent. Support dropped to 58 percent upon learning that this is the fourth bond measure in the Sequoia district since 1996.

The three previous measures — in 1996, 2001 and 2004 — totaled \$203 million. Property owners now pay about \$20 per \$100,000 of assessed value to service that debt, Mr. LaVigne said.

Most tax increases in California require approval by two-thirds of voters. School bond measures like this one need only a 55 percent majority but require a citizens committee to oversee the spending and a list of proposed projects on the ballot measure.

The 55 percent threshold became law in 2001, but all three previous bond measures have passed by majorities greater than two-thirds.

The district’s current bond indebtedness — excluding interest, which typically doubles the debt — is about \$199 million, Mr. LaVigne said. The district, which is home to \$51 billion in total assessed property value, is using about one third of its borrowing capacity and has a favorable AAA bond rating, he said.

Measure J’s most vocal opponents — members of the local Libertarian party who signed a ballot argument in opposition — argue that the Sequoia district does not have to borrow more and that it could find the money were it not spending it on “ancillary staff.”

Opponents complain that this fourth bond measure makes the same one-note pitch to voters as the previous three: to modernize facilities. They advocate a “pay-as-you-go

discipline” rather than putting the district into more debt.

### Local impacts

The project list accompanying Measure J has 58 bulleted items that include specific projects for each school plus general projects — and \$165 million won’t cover it all, Mr. LaVigne said in an interview.

Why \$165 million? The desire to keep the tax increase to less than \$10 per \$100,000 of assessed value drove the calculations, he said.

The ballot language leaves maneuvering room. “Until all project costs and funding sources are known, the Board of Trustees cannot determine the amount of bond proceeds available to be spent on each project, nor guarantee that the bonds will provide sufficient funds to allow completion of all listed projects.”

The Board of Trustees approved the list. To see it and arguments for and against Measure J, go to [shapethefuture.org](http://shapethefuture.org) and click on “San Mateo County Ballot Measures.”

At Woodside High, bond funds would repair and reconfigure the perimeter road — fractured and punctuated with ancient speed bumps — that runs behind the school.

The Churchill Road entrance has adjacent driveways to the school and the student parking lot. Redesigning that entrance is a priority to reduce the number of close calls between pedestrians and cars, Mr. LaVigne said.

Woodside would also get more semi-sheltered spaces for informal get-togethers, and new concession stands and restrooms at the football field, Mr. LaVigne said, adding: “The restrooms there are absolutely atrocious.”

Menlo-Atherton High, too, is in need of more covered spaces for winter get-togethers, Mr. LaVigne said. Measure J would likely mean removing some walls adjacent to green spaces along the school’s main artery, Pride Hall. The resulting atrium-like passages would extend outward and bring in natural light from clerestory windows, Mr. LaVigne said.

Pride Hall today is cramped, dark and unwelcome as a place to sit around and talk, he said. When the topic came up during project planning, Mr. LaVigne said his thought process went along the lines of “What’s the opposite of dark and cramped?”

The bond money would also buy a new floor for M-A’s main gym. The existing boards have been cupped by moisture, he said.

While the district has the funding to complete the new performing arts center, any shortfall would be covered by Measure J funding, he added.

### Attending to careers

If voters approve Measure J, preparing the career-training element may take 12 to 18 months of planning, Mr. LaVigne said.

Interested teachers new to career classes would probably require training, perhaps under the guidance of trade unions, said

See **BOND MEASURE**, next page

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## COVER STORY



**Desks are superfluous** at this final exam, where industrial arts teacher Ethan Sanford, center, guides Wayne Reus, left, and Jose Tapia in their woodworking shop class at Sequoia High School.

## A 'more global way' of preparing students

### BOND MEASURE

*continued from previous page*

Francisca Miranda, the deputy superintendent for educational services. The district is in contact with local unions, she said.

"It could be really good if there's a good solid partnership," M-A shop teacher Mark Leeper remarked. "If the district could take a lead with that, it could be really awesome."

Computers have changed everything, Ms. Miranda said. Kitchen cabinets today are designed on a computer before any wood cutting takes place, she noted, while today's automotive diagnostic technology was unheard of 20 years ago, and what was around 20 years ago is unheard of today.

Asked how a career-oriented program might change the schools, Ms. Miranda suggested that computers would become ubiquitous, perhaps allowing a shop class or any other kind of class at Woodside or M-A to connect via video link with a similar class with different facilities in Anchorage, or wherever.

"Let's not do pen pals anymore," she continued. "Why can't students from Afghanistan or Iraq (have) an online, live, up-to-the-moment experience" with Sequoia district students. "I would think there would be more of that."

Isn't there a danger of losing the benefits of a

general education in pursuit of specialized career paths? "We're looking at a much more global way of preparing students," she said. "Why can't (experience in the world of work) not be done while they're in high school?"

The college-bound, including so-called gifted and talented education (GATE) students, also need to know how to use a hammer and understand the principles of a car's locomotion, she added. "Why does that have to be relegated to kids who are not going to college?"

Others school districts have been down this path and Sequoia district administrators are seeking them out. Administrators and trustees have traveled to Southern California and to Santa Clara County to talk and walk about.

Careers in the building trades, automotive technology electrical work, computer-aided design, computer animation and health care are some of what's available in Santa Clara County's Metropolitan Education District (MetroED) career education program.

Students in the program make ample use of reading, writing and math, Ms. Miranda noted. "They see the relevance of all those courses."

On a trip there recently, she and others from the Sequoia district watched events unfold at a mock hospital put on by the MetroED health care division. "I was just mesmerized," she said. ■

### POSSIBLE IMPACTS IF MEASURE J PASSES ON FEBRUARY 5 ...

- A reinvigorated career-training program open to all students in the Sequoia Union High School District, including Woodside and Menlo-Atherton students.
- A 10-year, \$10-million fund that would reserve \$1 million each year for upgrading technology in the schools and the district.

- Repaving and redesign of perimeter road and entrance at Woodside High plus new outdoor spaces protected against winter weather for informal gatherings.
- New wooden floor in M-A's main gym and airy atriums that would bring natural light to Pride Hall.

*For more information on Measure J, go to [shapethefuture.org](http://shapethefuture.org) or [smartvoter.org](http://smartvoter.org).*

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# Mars rovers find clues to water and, maybe, life

Mike Carr of Woodside describes discoveries from almost 40 years of Mars studies

By Marion Softky

Almanac Staff Writer

## ■ PEOPLE

If machines could be heroes, the two little rovers crawling the hills and craters of Mars, would earn Olympic gold. The robot geologists Spirit and Opportunity landed on Mars — 100 million miles away — four years ago in January 2004. They were designed to work for three months on the dry rocky surface of the red planet, where average temperatures run lower than 60 degrees Fahrenheit below zero.

Four years later, in January 2008, Spirit and Opportunity are still roving. They are a bit rickety — Opportunity has a stiff arm and a broken drill. Spirit has a broken front wheel and has to drive backwards; its solar panels are layered with orange dust and are losing power. It's now parked on a north-facing slope to try to recharge its batteries over the long Martian winter.

But for four years the golf-cart-

sized rovers have been sending back masses of information on the surface of another world. Most exciting to earthlings is the extensive chemical evidence for water, which is essential to life.

And recently, Spirit, dragging its broken wheel behind it, exposed tantalizing signs of ancient hot springs that may have once supported living microbes.

"It's absolutely fascinating," says Mars geologist Mike Carr of Woodside. "You can't have life without water; you need a medium where chemical reactions can take place."

Dr. Carr, who has retired from the U.S. Geological Survey in Menlo Park, has been studying Mars for almost 40 years. The office he still keeps at the Survey is crammed with models and books of Mars; the walls show spectacular photos of barren surfaces marked by craters,

huge channels carved by ancient floods, and Olympus Mons, an extinct volcano almost three times the height of Mt. Everest.

Dr. Carr helped plan the rover mission and worked with the team for its first six months at the Jet Propulsion Lab at Cal Tech in Pasadena. He would coordinate teams of some 80 scientists to decide what to tell the rover to do the next day on Mars — whether it should travel, or dig, or look at a rock, or sniff the atmosphere. "My job was to have a plan at the end of that meeting," he says.

While Dr. Carr is no longer involved in the day-to-day explorations of the rovers, he is staying in touch. He still serves on an advisory committee for the mission, and he is winding up a new edition of his large, dramatically illustrated book, "The Surface of Mars," just published last year. "The field is moving so fast it can get out of date very quickly," he says.

Dr. Carr takes time out of a busy schedule to give a travelogue for Spirit and Opportunity over their four years of discoveries.

When he's not working on Mars, Dr. Carr is a notable horseman. He's been head of the Mounted Patrol, received the Horseman of the Year Award in 2003, and is enjoying a new quarter horse named Leo.

### A-roving

Opportunity set off waves of excitement as soon as it landed on the Meridiani plain four years ago, says Dr. Carr. It landed on top of a sequence of sediments rich in sulfates — which are formed by evaporation, at least on earth. And evaporation means water.

Later, Opportunity teetered down a rugged crater called Endurance. There it observed more evidence of water, Dr. Carr says: more layers of sulfates, which were formed by evaporation more than 3.5 billion years ago, when Mars was warm and moist, like earth.

"I think of an environment similar to the playas of Nevada," Dr. Carr says. It would have dunes and lakebeds that occasionally filled. "You could see the water table had moved up and down."

After exploring Endurance,



Photo by Marion Softky

Retired Mars geologist Mike Carr of Woodside at his office at the U.S. Geological Survey in Menlo Park, where the walls show spectacular photos of Mars' surface.

Opportunity set out for another crater, called Victoria. It was a long drive over tough terrain of dunes on top of sulfates. "It got stuck," Dr. Carr says. "On a good day it can go 10 meters."

Now, according to the Web site, [marsrovers.nasa.gov](http://marsrovers.nasa.gov), Opportunity has already investigated the second band of iron-bearing rocks in Victoria Crater and is heading for the third band.

"Spirit is a very, very different story," says Dr. Carr.

On Jan. 3, 2004, Spirit landed in the Gusev Crater, which Dr. Carr and other scientists had hoped was an ancient lakebed fed by a huge river. They were disappointed to discover a flat volcanic formation of basalt.

Four years later, Spirit has traveled 2 1/2 kilometers to explore the Columbia Hills, which are full of volcanic rocks highly altered by water, Dr. Carr says. Some are so changed they are soft, like chalk. "There's no question these chemical changes involved water," he adds.

The most exciting discovery came just last year when Spirit's dragging wheel dug up a patch of nearly pure silica, the main ingredient of window glass. "It is very hard to produce silica that pure," Dr. Carr says.

He suggests two possibilities, both involving hot springs. One involves sulfuric acid-rich waters similar to fumaroles observed in Hawaii; the other is more similar to hot springs at Yellowstone, where silica-rich water deposits silica into sinter cones.

Dr. Carr clearly hopes for the

Yellowstone model. "What's exciting about sinters in Yellowstone is they preserve fossils really well.

"If we go there with tools and bring stuff back, these sinters would be a good target."

### What next?

Dr. Carr shares the awe at the accomplishments of the scientists who designed and launched Spirit and Opportunity. "We thought they would only last 90 days. We expected the machines to break down," he reflects. "JPL is a national treasure."

Meanwhile, Mars explorations continue. Satellites are orbiting Mars, taking millions of pictures; several missions are in the planning stages. And a Phoenix Mars rover will land on May 24 at a higher latitude, closer to the polar ice cap — water ice, that is — to continue doing on-the-ground geology.

But any answer to the driving question of whether there was ever life on Mars will probably require a mission that will collect samples and return them to earth. Dr. Carr hopes the current review of Mars programs will include such a mission, even though it is far more expensive.

He suggests deleting other missions and enlisting international support. "Everybody wants sample return," he says. ■

### INFORMATION

There's a huge amount of Mars information available on the Web. For starters try [marsrovers.nasa.gov](http://marsrovers.nasa.gov).

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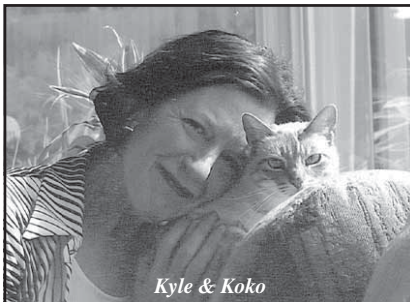
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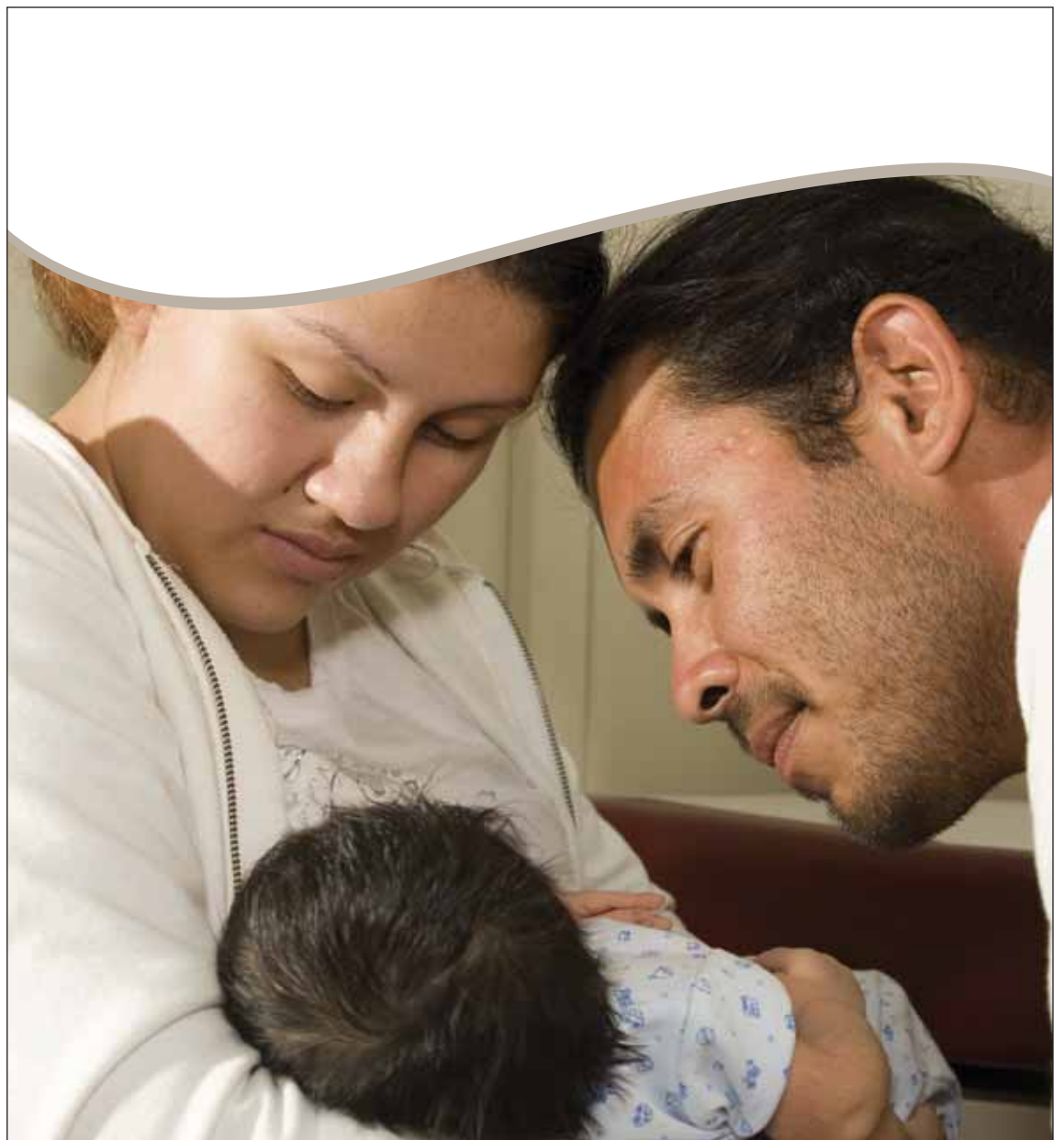
Anonymous for Jim & Joan McBain  
 Alan & Marlene Anderson for  
 Kay & Irv Beltrame  
 Janada & Tom Clark for  
 Jack Berghouse  
 Christy Cowan for  
 Mar and Popo Ross  
 Adam Creeger for  
 his teachers at La Entrada  
 Anne & Stephen Galli for  
 Wayne & Louise Daltin  
 Joan & Dan Gray for  
 Service League of San Mateo  
 County volunteers  
 The Reiter Family for  
 the volunteers of the Palo Alto  
 Food Closet  
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 Nancy Stevens  
 Margaret Taylor for Luisa Buada  
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## In memory of

William Alfano for  
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 John Barbour for Richard Barbour  
 Ed Baron for Dorothy Baron  
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 Catherine Eastham for  
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**TOTALS: As of Jan. 3, a total of 216 donors have given \$127,720 to the Almanac's Holiday Fund.**

\* The asterisk designates that the donor did not want to publish the amount of the gift.



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## Kindergarten preview at Ormondale

Parents whose children will attend kindergarten at Portola Valley's Ormondale School in the fall of 2008 are invited to come to the school's Parent Visitation Day on Thursday, Jan. 17.

Principal Jennifer Warren will give a short orientation to parents at 8:30 a.m. in the school's multi-use room before they visit the four kindergartens in session.

This annual event is for parents only. Future kindergartners will have a time later in the spring to visit kindergarten.

Registration forms for kindergarten will be available in the school office after the classroom visits. Early registration helps the administration plan for the 2008-09 school year.

Incoming kindergartners must be 5-years-old on or before Dec. 2, 2008. Parents are asked to bring verification of the child's birth date (birth certificate or passport), immunization records, and proof of residency (copy of current property tax statement, deed or current rental/lease agreement) to the office when registering their students.

Ormondale School, the grade K-3 school in the Portola Valley School District, is located at 200 Shawnee Pass Road, at the inter-

### SCHOOLS

section of Iroquois, in Portola Valley. For answers to questions or for more information, call the school office at 851-1777, ext. 1151.

### Peninsula Teen Opera

A condensed version of Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro," as well as vignettes from other famous operas and operettas, will be presented by Peninsula Teen Opera at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 11, and Saturday, Jan. 12, in the Eagle Theater at Los Altos High School, 201 Almond Ave. in Los Altos.

Founded in 1998 by professional opera singer Allen Cathcart, Peninsula Teen Opera is an opera training program for Bay Area students, ages 13 to 19. The students study privately with local teachers and are accepted into the PTO program through auditions and individual interviews.

The students enter a 10-week training program. The culmination is two final performances, staged and costumed.

Tickets to the Jan. 11 and 12 concerts cost \$15 for general admission and \$10 for students and seniors. For ticket information, call Debra Strunk at 408-842-0994.

### OBITUARIES

#### William H. Barnes

Financial firm founder

William Henry "Bill" Barnes, a former longtime Menlo Park resident, died Dec. 26 of a brain tumor. Mr. Barnes, who was living in Ashland, Oregon, at the time of his death, was 75.

Mr. Barnes served as a deacon and elder at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church for almost 40 years. He also served for 25 years on the investment committee of the Church of the Pioneers Foundation, a charitable organization connected with Menlo Park Presbyterian Church.

A native of Winnetka, Illinois, Mr. Barnes attended Duke University, where he met his future wife, Dorie Sherbano, and graduated from Northwestern University with a degree in mechanical engineering.

After serving 21 months at Edwards Air Force Base, he received a master's degree from the Stanford University School of Business in 1960.

For much of his life, he operated his own financial firm, Barnes, Stork & Associates, in Menlo Park with his son Jeffrey.

Mr. Barnes joined the Menlo Park Kiwanis Club in 1973 and served as its president and vice president.

He is survived by his wife, Dorie; children Patricia Hecht, Jeffrey Barnes and Elizabeth Barnes; and three grandchildren.

Memorials may be made to the Church of the Pioneers Foundation or a charity of choice.

#### John Lawrence "Larry" Cassingham

Expert in nuclear materials

Services for John Lawrence "Larry" Cassingham of Ladera will be held at 2 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 12, at Valley Presbyterian Church, 945 Portola Road in Portola Valley.

Mr. Cassingham died Dec. 21 at The Sequoias in Portola Valley after a long illness. He was 89.

The son of a high school principal and colleague of Dr. Lewis Terman of Stanford, Larry grew up on the Peninsula and was a guinea pig for some of Dr. Terman's famous intelligence tests that were used to track geniuses, according to his wife, Marjorie Cassingham.

When the family moved to Southern California, Mr. Cassingham studied business at Glendale College and UCLA. He worked as a newspaperman before joining the Army Air Corps as a meteorologist during World War II.

After the war, he became an entrepreneur specializing in equipment that detected radiation. With a partner he started a business called Detectron that manufactured and marketed the first practical, portable Geiger

counter. Later, a larger instrument, a nucleometer, capitalized on the uranium boom.

As one of the few businessmen in North Hollywood who were expert in nuclear materials, Mr. Cassingham was often recruited as a technical adviser to some of the atomic bomb-related movies and adventure TV shows of the 1950s.

During those years, Mr. Cassingham amassed a large collection of rare forms of uranium ore that he donated to Stanford in 2005.

After retiring in 1960, Mr. Cassingham relocated his family to Ladera. He embarked on a second career consulting with chip fabrication plants to reduce the number of circuits damaged by static electricity — a major problem at the time.

Family and friends remember Mr. Cassingham for his curiosity and love of science and astronomy. He was an amateur astronomer who traveled widely; he took in total solar eclipses in Kenya and Baja California, and Halley's Comet in Peru.

Mr. Cassingham is survived by his wife, Marjorie; a daughter, Carol Swanson of Portland, Oregon; three sons, Curt of Portland, Brian of Costa Mesa, California, and Randy of Ridgeway, Colorado; five grandchildren; and two great grandchildren.

The family suggests donations to the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford, or a favorite charity.

Introducing our newest...

## Village Doctor!

**Dr. Sangani** is a Board Certified Internist who comes to **The Village Doctor** after five years of thriving private practice in the Pacific Heights area of San Francisco. Her health care philosophy integrates physical, social, and mental health and she strives to provide individualized care for her patients' unique lifestyles.

Dr. Sangani has a strong background in preventive medicine and promoting **wellness** and education among her patients. In addition, she has extensive experience in **women's health** and chronic disease management.

With her years of practice, Dr. Sangani has cultivated strong relationships among the physician and patient community in the Bay Area. She was also named one of "America's Top Physicians" in 2006 by the Consumers Research Council of America. Please give The Village Doctor a call to schedule your introductory meeting: 650.851.4747.



Concierge Family Healthcare  
www.villagedoctor.com

### POLICE CALLS

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

#### ATHERTON

**Grand theft report:** Trailer used to tow stump grinder stolen, first block of Jennings Lane, Dec. 27.

**Burglary report:** Computer and keyboard stolen after lock pried and window smashed, Middlefield Road, Dec. 28.

**Stolen vehicle report:** Watkins Ave., Dec. 28.

**Arson report:** Extinguished pile of papers found near multipurpose room, Laurel School at 95 Edge Road, Jan. 1.

**Fraud report:** Unauthorized use of credit card, 200 block of Atherton Ave., Jan. 3.

#### MENLO PARK

**Stolen vehicle reports:**

■ Two vehicles stolen, 100 block of Constitution Ave., Dec. 28.

■ 300 block of Terminal Ave., Dec. 28.

### BIRTHS

#### Menlo Park

■ Lydia Lee and Edward Vail, a daughter, Dec. 10, at Sequoia Hospital.

■ Krista and Ted Peterson, a son, Dec. 11, at Sequoia Hospital.

#### Atherton

■ Elizabeth and Paul Hammack, a son, Dec. 18, at Sequoia Hospital.

■ 1995 blue Saturn, first block of Lorelei Lane, Dec. 29.

■ 300 block of Terminal Ave., Dec. 30.

■ 1100 block of Willow Road, Dec. 30.

■ 1990 gray Toyota Camry, 1100 block of Willow Road, Dec. 30.

**Fraud report:** Airline ticket purchased over Internet from private party later canceled and money not refunded, 1000 block of Creek Drive, Dec. 31.

**Grand theft report:** Two Redwood City men arrested, Jan. 2.

#### WOODSIDE

**Domestic violence report:** Victim suffered bruised neck and lacerated lip and suspect kicked and damaged rear windows while handcuffed inside police car, Dec. 30.

#### PORTOLA VALLEY

**Theft report:** Surveillance camera intended to capture record of trail-sign vandals stolen, Arroyo Trail, Dec. 28.

**Burglary report:** Purse and Christmas gifts stolen from car after window smashed, Windy Hill Open Space parking lot, Dec. 30.

### IN THE SERVICE

■ Coast Guard Seaman Jacob P. Luras, a 2007 graduate of Woodside High School, recently graduated from the U.S. Coast Guard Recruit Training Center in Cape May, New Jersey. The eight-week training program included water safety and survival, firefighting and marksmanship. He will join 36,000 others in the Coast Guard.

## School boundary meetings set for this week and next

Wondering where your Menlo Park kindergartner will go to school next year? A meeting to discuss the proposed changes to school boundaries for Oak Knoll, Laurel and Encinal elementary schools is set for Wednesday, Jan. 9, at 7 p.m.

The decision on the boundary changes is expected at a meeting the following week, set for 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 15. Both meetings will be held at the Menlo Park City School District office at 181 Encinal Ave. in Atherton.

However, if the crowd is large enough, the meetings may move to the nearby multi-use room at Encinal school.

The school district corrected the second meeting's date — originally, it was reported to the Almanac that the meeting on the attendance boundaries would be held on Wednesday, Jan. 16.

Meeting agendas and information are available online at [www.mpcsd.org](http://www.mpcsd.org) by clicking on "agenda online" and then "calendar" to select the meeting date.

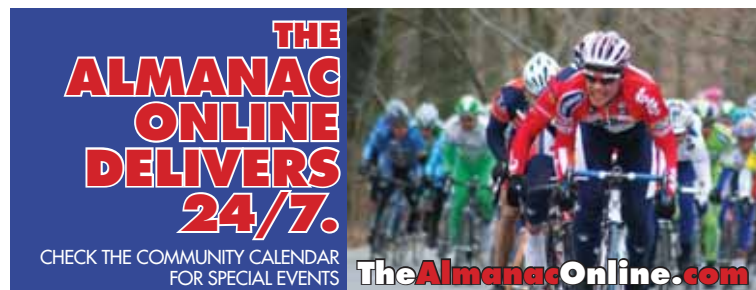
## Alpine Little League seeks sponsors

Jim Schott of Menlo Park posted this at [TheAlmanacOnline.com](http://TheAlmanacOnline.com).

The West Menlo-Alpine Little League is looking for sponsors. Opening day is just around the corner and 80 teams are getting ready for the 2008 season. Nearly 1,000 players ages 5-16, 250 managers and coaches, 50 youth umpires and countless fans from West Menlo, Woodside and Portola Valley are making plans for Little League ball.


Sponsor benefits include: your name on a team's jersey; sponsor's plaque; promotion and Web link to your business through the League's Web site; support for our community (in most cases contributions are tax-deductible). For a sponsor form, contact Jim Schott at [jim@schottmail.com](mailto:jim@schottmail.com) or download a form at <http://eteamz.active.com/alpine>.

Player registration is open and the league is looking for youth umpires.



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## JAMES FRANCIS NACEY



On December 29, 2007, James Francis Nacey, of San Carlos, died of pneumonia during his battle with lung cancer. Born in Liverpool, England on May 11, 1933, he was a graduate of Liverpool University, a Sergeant in the British Army, and an avid soccer fan. He immigrated to California in 1970 to work at Stanford. For many years, Jim was a Radiation Physicist in the Radiation Oncology Department at Stanford Medical Center, helping treat cancer patients. Retired in 1998, he spent much of his time with his wife, Mary, caring for orphaned wildlife. Jim also taught English and Citizenship to immigrants at The San Mateo Adult School and Current Events at the San Carlos Adult Center and Belmont Vista Convalescent Home. As a long-time member of the Palo Alto community, he coached and refereed for the youth soccer league AYSO, was a board member for Bobby Sox Softball, and played in the Palo Alto Adult Soccer League. He was an active community member in several Catholic churches on the Peninsula. Jim is survived by his beloved wife, Mary Ellen Nacey; his daughters Anne Nacey Maggioncalda and Aileen Nacey Schmoller; and his five granddaughters — Alison Nacey Maggioncalda, Julia Nacey Maggioncalda, Lindsay Nacey Maggioncalda, Catherine Nacey Schmoller, and Bridget Nacey Schmoller. To his friends and colleagues, Jim Nacey was a witty, energetic and kind man. To his family, he was a devoted, adoring and selfless husband, father, and grandfather. In lieu of flowers, please send donations in his honor to the Peninsula Humane Society, 12 Airport Boulevard, San Mateo, CA 94401.

**PAID OBITUARY**

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Tom Gibboney

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e-mail letters to:

letters@AlmanacNews.com

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.

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 web site, www.TheAlmanacOnline.com, and occasionally on the Town Square forum.

### TOWN SQUARE FORUM

POST your views on the Town Square forum at www.TheAlmanacOnline.com

**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.

**CALL** the Viewpoint desk at 854-2626, ext. 222.

# Hung up on housing

The housing quota assigned to Menlo Park last fall will be a true test of whether the city can meet its obligation to provide its workers a reasonably priced place to live.

Meeting the quota assigned by the Association of Bay Area Governments (through a state law) will be a challenge for the city, which has a large contingent of homeowners who believe responsibility for housing local workers belongs elsewhere. This "not in my back yard" contingent often claimed that development of dense housing would lower property values, which was often reason enough to reject such projects.

But in October, that argument seems to have evaporated in the recent run-up in real estate values, and now some developers are seeking approval for large housing projects rather than commercial or office space.

Nevertheless, it will be difficult for Menlo Park to find space to build nearly 1,000 new homes over the next seven years. And to be sure the state and regional governments have no authority to force the city to make housing a top priority.

So far, the now 108-unit Derry housing project on Oak Grove Avenue is by far the largest project to seek city approval in many years. And it did not come without a major clash between the devel-

oper and Menlo Park Tomorrow, the homeowners' group that led a successful referendum drive against the project. After long and tense negotiations, the developer agreed to pay the city \$2 million and slightly reduce the size of the project, which still must be approved by the Planning Commission and the City Council.

One or more similar projects could be a part of the current effort to redesign the city's downtown, especially along the El Camino Real corridor where vacant car dealerships have blighted the area. With Caltrain nearby, it makes sense to consider attractive designs for housing that can take advantage of local transit options.

Regardless of whether the city ever reaches its goal of space zoned for up to 993 new homes, it makes sense for ABAG to issue the challenge.

The council voted 3-2 back in October to pursue the ABAG housing goal, over the objections of now Mayor Andy Cohen and Rich Cline, who opposed an outside agency's setting housing goals for Menlo Park. We suggest that responsible city leaders would take it upon themselves to look for good housing options, whether they come from ABAG or not. Council members have to admit that there are plenty of workers — including many employed by the city — whose income falls short of the \$168,000 a year needed to purchase a single-family home. It only makes sense to add some affordable housing units to the mix.

## EDITORIAL

The opinion of The Almanac

## LETTERS

Our readers write

### Property owners lose in basement squeeze

Editor:

Across the peninsula, planning departments are focusing on how much basement area they are willing to allow in their zoning regulations.

Every property is allowed a certain number of square feet for cumulative living space. The current and common basement policy is to allow as much basement as will fit under the immediate footprint of a house; and that such basement space will not count in the tally against a home's square footage allotment.

The Portola Valley Planning Commission has proposed an ordinance which will restrict basement sizes to a maximum of 20 percent of the total living space, or owners must accept less total living space if they want larger sized basements. Full basements will be a thing of the past.

The Portola Valley Town Council will vote on this matter Jan. 9. On the whole, I believe our council is to be applauded for the great work and service they provide to our town. But on this basement matter, I fear that the council may lose its way by approving the new basement ordinance.

This ordinance is a poorly based, restrictive erosion of property owners' free right to use their



Atherton Heritage Association

### Our Regional Heritage

Everyone was invited to the annual Christmas party hosted by the family of inventor Leon Douglass at Victoria Manor (also known as Douglass Hall), their home on the land that is now the Menlo School campus. There was a good turnout on the sunny day depicted in this photograph, taken between 1922 and 1934.

land as they please. Generally, zoning rules exist to preserve the flavor of our neighborhoods. For our town, these rules keep building concepts within a basic sense of Portola Valley decorum. But basements are not contrary to that rural flavor. They are largely unseen and unnoticed.

On the rare occasion that someone tries to exploit current basement zoning rules, the Planning Commission can, in concert with ASCC, realign the errant project and bring it into reasonable conformity.

Broad legislation against basements is not necessary. This

ordinance, further denying existing property rights, should be opposed.

Question: How much do we value our rights to use our land as we please? When will our property rights become so eroded that

See **LETTERS**, next page

## Here's what they're saying on Town Square

### Another accident at Watkins and El Camino

Posted by Joe, a resident of the Menlo Park, Park Forest neighborhood

There was another two vehicle accident at Watkins and El Camino Real last Thursday at 4 p.m. What kind of traffic

mitigation has Menlo Park come up with for the Acorn project discussion this Tuesday, Jan. 8 at the City Council meeting?

Posted by Sally, a resident of the Menlo Park: Downtown neighborhood

I sure hope, at a minimum, that

the parking be made adequate (not reduced from the regular requirement). I also hope there will be consideration of a traffic light at the corner.

Apparently, the environmental report attempts to justify lower parking requirements because other business areas have lower requirements, but that's like making apples into oranges just because they're both fruits. The conditions along El Camino matter, and the conditions around this location matter.

## TownSquare

Join the conversation on [www.TheAlmanacOnline.com](http://www.TheAlmanacOnline.com). Click on links under the TownSquare banner.

## LETTERS

Continued from previous page

we finally say "enough"?

Please visit the petition site <http://www.petitiononline.com/basepv/petition.html> and further review the issue. If you choose to stand in opposition to this basement ordinance, please sign the online petition. Better yet, come to the meeting and speak up.

**Paul Seipp**  
Grove Drive, Portola Valley

### Former student finds fault with Woodside story

Editor:

As a former student, I am appalled by the portrayal of Woodside High School and public schools in general in the Jan. 2 issue of the Almanac.

The reporter thinly veils his degrading, elitist and borderline racist tone as a celebration of Linda Common's tenure as principal (who, I might add, truly was a great leader for the school).

The story states that public schools "can hardly avoid" being a "magnet for diversity," referring to the spectrum of students' socio-economic backgrounds. This phrase carries a negative connotation and implies that students of lower income backgrounds cause the majority of problems at Woodside (from "substance abuse" to

"fights") that would deter parents who could afford "private school tuition" from sending their children to Woodside.

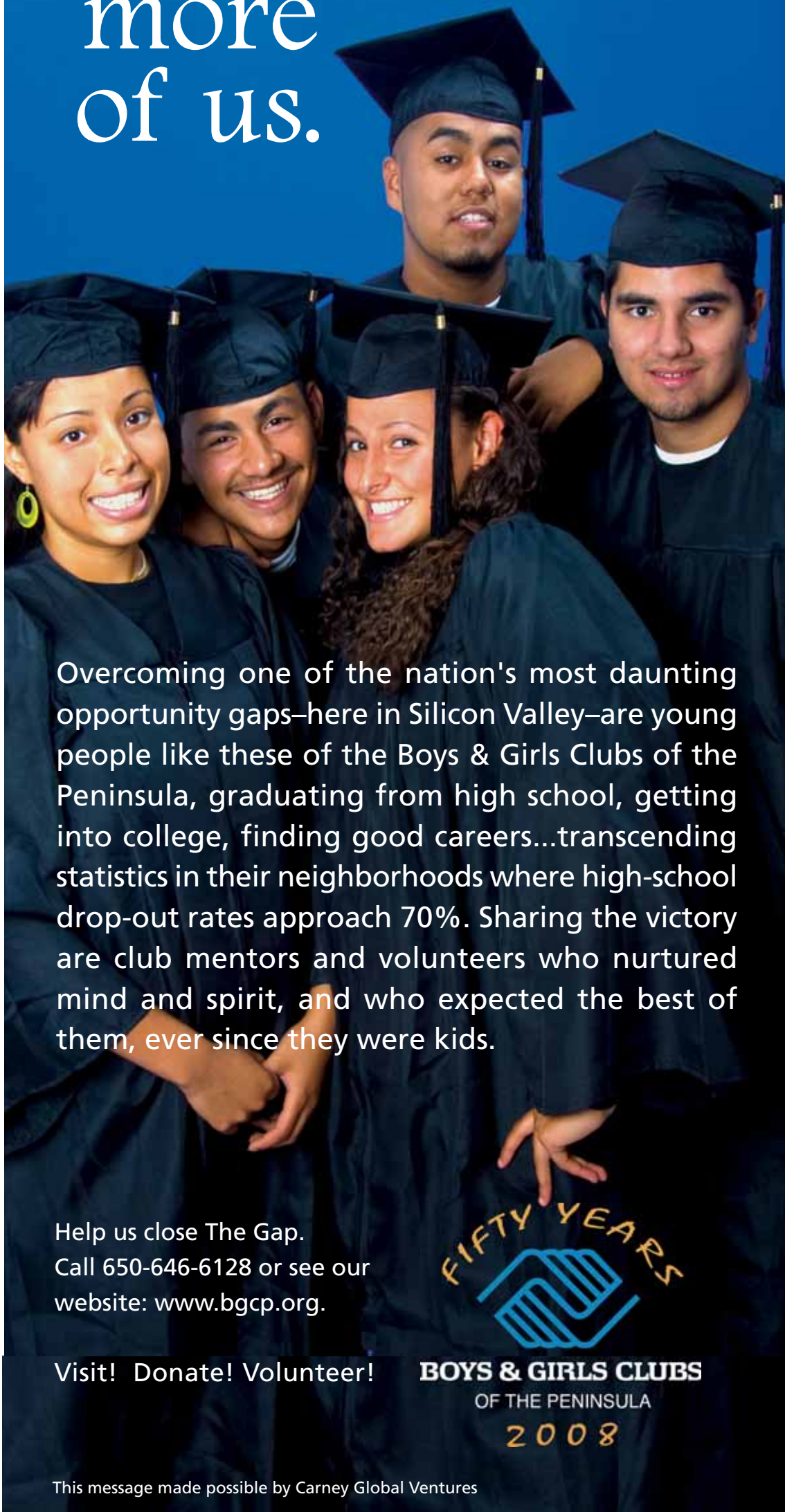
The story slightly touches on the academic and extracurricular opportunities Woodside has to offer, but undermines the good by incorrectly finding fault in Woodside's inability to exclude students.

While of course gang problems exist, and fights did occur during my time at Woodside, the story fails to recognize that an equal number of issues stem from wealthy students from Portola Valley, Woodside and Redwood City. These are the students who brought confederate flags to Cinco de Mayo festivities. These are the students who can afford to buy large quantities of alcohol (and harder drugs).

The story pins all of public education's negative attributes on "diversity," which is an incorrect, elitist and misinformed assumption. Perhaps the writer should reflect on his own attitude which holds him and others back from appreciating our local schools, both public and private, for what they are and also from making progress towards peaceful and equal (I will not go into the faults of the No Child Left Behind Act) education for all.

**Emily Marie Beugelmans**  
Classical Civilization and Italian  
UCLA 2010  
Woodside High School 2006

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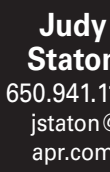
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