

MENLO PARK'S Francisco Lopez wins instant \$1 million lottery prize. Page 5

The Almanac

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

MARCH 5, 2008 | VOL. 43 NO. 27

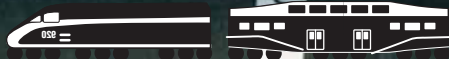
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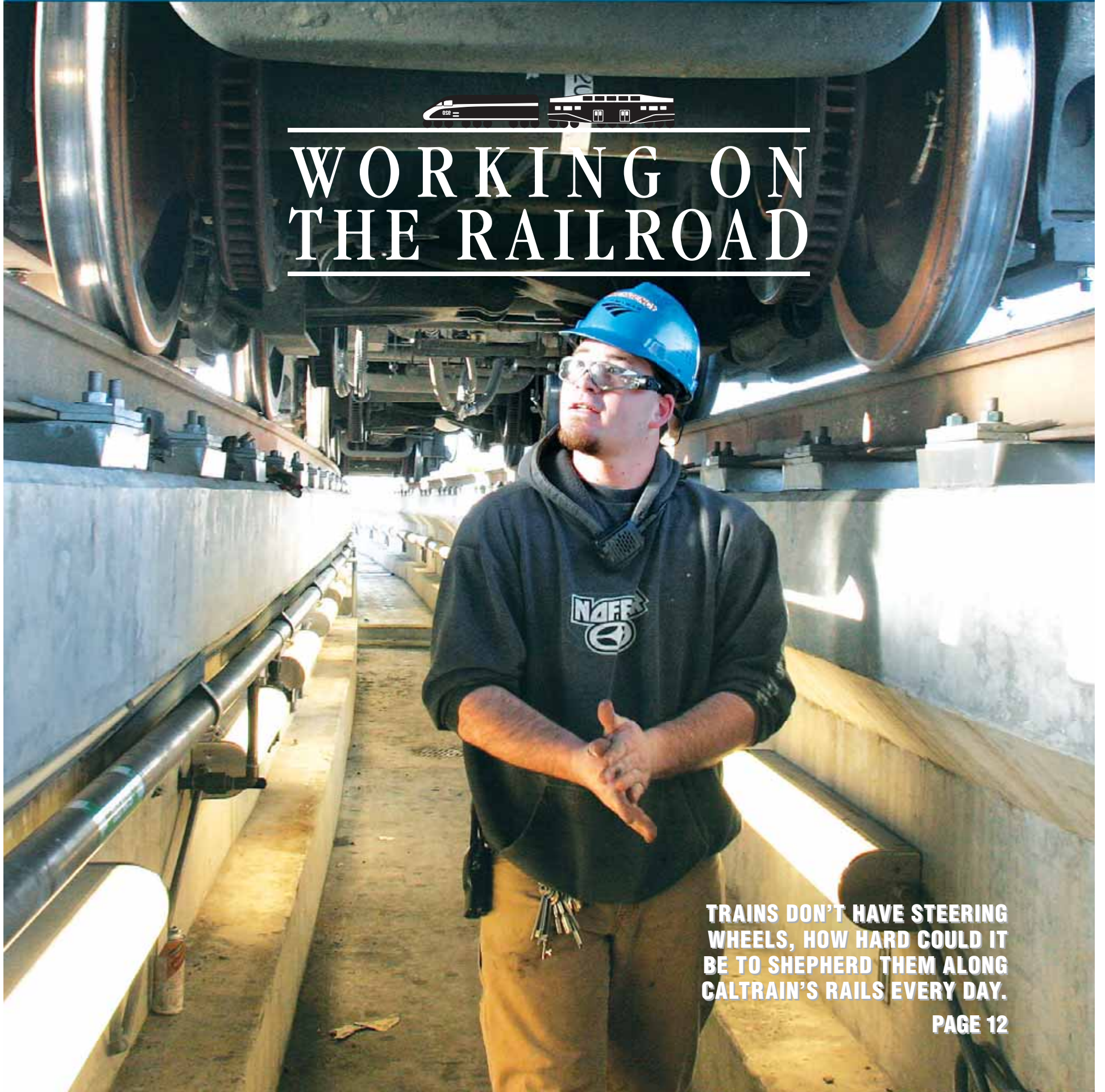
FOOD & DRINK

Local meal-assembly kitchen keeps up with the times.

See Section 2



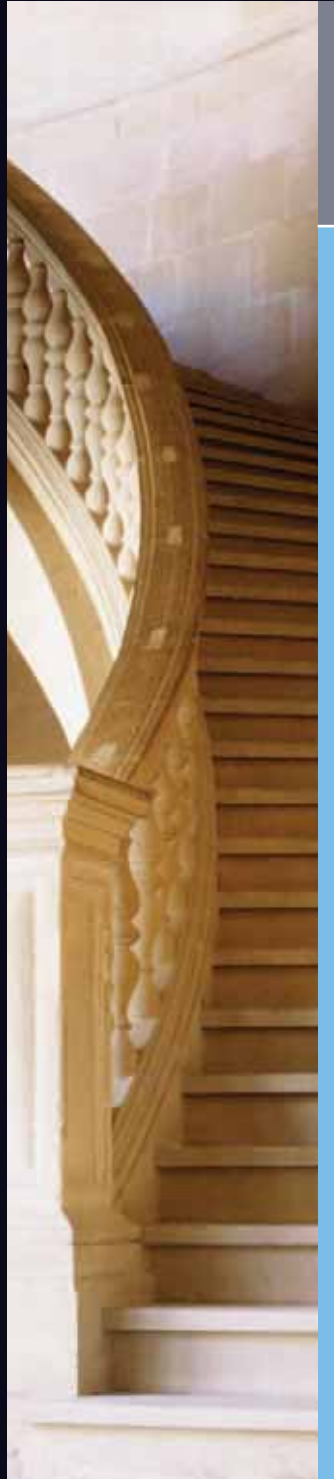
WORKING ON THE RAILROAD



TRAINS DON'T HAVE STEERING WHEELS, HOW HARD COULD IT BE TO SHEPHERD THEM ALONG CALTRAIN'S RAILS EVERY DAY.

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\$100,000. Yesterday and Today



Take \$100,000. If you wanted to maximize your return, where would you put it? With a cumulative 10-year appreciation of 175 percent, a Bay Area home can represent a return of far more than the same investment in a bull stock market.

1997 Investment	2007 Appreciated Value
\$100,000 in a normal* stock market	\$235,000
\$100,000 in a bull* stock market	\$351,000
\$100,000 down on a \$500,000 home**	\$975,000

* Based on 10% average appreciation in a normal market, and 15% average appreciation in a bull market

** Source: DataQuick 1997-2007

Some Bay Area communities performed even better than this. The fact is, all real estate markets are local, and the Bay Area is a highly desirable, thriving real estate market where home ownership has historically represented a positive investment.

If you're considering selling or buying a home, call us. Get the facts. And make your decision based on Bay Area market reality.

Historical performance and data provided is not necessarily an indication of future performance.

Inside

This week's news, features and community events.

FIRST SHOT



Imanac photo by Veronica Weber

Gotta dance

Student Alexis Bley, center, and fellow members of the Menlo-Atherton High School Dance Team rehearse for their upcoming fundraising show, set for 6:30 p.m. Friday, March 7, in the Menlo-Atherton gym. Coached by Nona Ybarra, the team will perform hip-hop, jazz and lyrical dance and ballet. Several members of the team have been accepted to dance programs at major universities. Tickets to the show are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students. They will be available at the door or by calling Captivating Dance Studio at 679-1603. See additional photo on **Page 30**.

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On the cover

Inspections ensuring that a train's wheels go around when they need to and also stop when they need to are an everyday routine for Andrew Eastes and his colleagues at Caltrain's new maintenance facility in San Jose. An Almanac reporter spent time with Caltrain employees to find out what it's like to work on the railroad. Almanac photo by Veronica Weber. Story begins on **Page 12**.

CALLING ON THE ALMANAC

The Almanac offices are at **3525 Alameda de las Pulgas, Menlo Park, CA 94025**.

For Classified ads, call **854-0858**
 For all other calls, phone **854-2626**
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To request free delivery, or stop delivery, of The Almanac in zip code 94025, 94027, 94028 and the Woodside portion of 94062, call **854-2626**.

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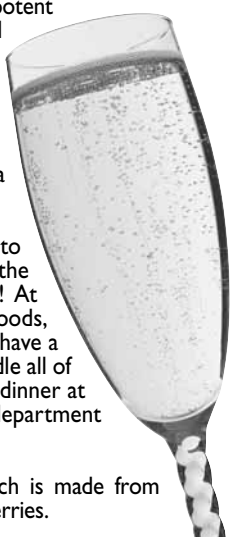
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WILL - MEAT DEPT.

THE WATER OF LIFE

If you want to enliven the mood of an after-dinner gathering, break out a bottle of any of the numerous, well-known "eau de vie." This term, which means "water of life," refers to the colorless, powerful spirits that are distilled from fermented fruit juice. Drinking these potent potables produces strong memories that are attached to the essence of pure, ripe fruit. It is as if you were transported by the drink to a late-summer evening. In the European tradition, eau de vie is savored at room temperature, while Americans generally favor a chilled drink after dinner. You can make a delightful dessert offering by combining eau de vie in a glass along with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.



It doesn't matter if you're looking for a fine carnation to give to your next date, or if you'd like to decorate the table at your child's next birthday party we can help! At ROBERTS MARKET, we are locally renowned for our foods, wines, and spirits. However, you should know that we have a high quality and upscale floral department that can handle all of your floral needs. So next time you're on your way to dinner at home don't forget fresh cut flowers from our floral department to grace your table.

HINT: Two very popular eaux-de-vie are Kirsch, which is made from cherries, and Framboise, which is produced from raspberries.

WINE

2005 Bordeaux

The 2005 Bordeaux vintage has been describes as "perfect" with all the elements of balance and harmony. Top producer's wines are already selling for hundreds of dollars a bottle. Here are a few great wines that offer fantastic values.

'05 Ch. De Cugat Bordeaux Superieur	Reg. \$11.99	Sale \$10.49
'05 Les Demoiselles de Falfas, Cotes de Bourg.	Reg. \$12.99	Sale \$11.49
'05 Ch. Le Grand Sigognac, Medoc.	Reg. \$15.99	Sale \$13.99
'05 Ch. Sainte-Marie Vieilles Vignes,	Reg. \$17.49	Sale \$15.49
Bordeaux Superieur		
'05 Ch. Petit Bosq, Saint Estephe.....	Reg. \$21.99	Sale \$19.99
'05 Ch. Sociando-Mallet, Haut Medoc.	Reg. \$54.99	Sale \$48.99

The above prices are net and do not qualify for further discounts.

GROCERY

SNAPPLE ANTIOXIDANT WATER **79¢**
 20 oz. - Plus Calif. Redeem Value

CELESTE FOUR CHEESE PIZZA **\$1.49**
 5 oz. - Also Pepperoni

YOPLAIT ORIGINAL YOGURT **55¢**
 6 oz.

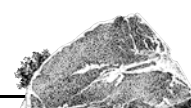
STAR EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL **\$7.29**
 25 oz. - Also Extra Light


NEAR EAST ORIGINAL RICE PILAF **\$1.69**
 6 oz. - Also Whole Grain - Sundried Tomato - Spanish

CLOROX LIQUID LEMON FRESH BLEACH **\$1.79**
 96 oz. - Also Regular


MEAT/SEAFOOD

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PORTERHOUSE STEAK  **\$13.98** lb.

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Local News

MENLO PARK | AHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

Portola Valley schools face \$1 million shortfall

■ District expects no growth in property tax revenue, and more students.

By Marjorie Mader

Almanac Staff Writer

Trustees of the Portola Valley School District face a \$1 million shortfall and more formidable challenges as they grapple with how to balance an \$11 million budget for the year starting July 1, while keeping cuts away from the classroom.

A budget proposal will be presented at the next school board meeting on Wednesday, March 5, starting at 7 p.m. in Room 1001 at Corte Madera School.

These are the challenges the dis-

trict faces:

■ Zero property tax revenue growth for the 2008-09 fiscal year, a trend that may continue for several years. About 87 percent of the district's revenue comes from local property taxes, parcel tax funds, foundation grants and contributions. The district needs a 6 percent annual growth in property tax revenues — about \$500,000 a year — to maintain the current program, said Tim Hanretty, the district's assistant superintendent and financial guru.

■ More new students will enter

the district in August. Enrollment is projected to grow from this year's 714 students to 750. They may need two new kindergarten classes (or one kindergarten and a combination primary grade) at Ormondale, a K-3 school. The cost would be \$102,000 for each class. There's no additional funding for the district if enrollment increases.

Another factor: More students from private schools are returning or entering Portola Valley's public schools in the mid and upper grades due to the downturn in the economy, Superintendent Anne

Campbell said.

If it becomes necessary to reduce the teaching staff, trustees must give teachers preliminary notice of layoffs by the March 15 state-imposed deadline.

State budget

A multitude of uncertainties stem from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's budget proposal. The estimated state deficit for the 2008-09 fiscal year has grown to \$16 billion. His proposed to cut state funding for schools by 10 percent may hit hardest the so-called "revenue limit districts" because they receive a bulk of their funding from the state.

Portola Valley is not a "revenue limit" district. Nor are the Las Lomas, Menlo Park and Woodside elementary school districts, nor the Sequoia Union High School District. They are called "basic aid districts" because the bulk of their revenue comes from local property taxes and parcel taxes rather than from the state. Their local revenue exceeds their state-calculated revenue limit.

Basic aid districts won't be immune from state budget cuts, according to many educators. They anticipate a "share the pain" plan will emerge in which state funding

See **BUDGET**, page 8

Workshop aims to tap public opinion on future of El Camino Real

By Rory Brown

Almanac Staff Writer

It seems as if there's something for everyone not to like about El Camino Real in Menlo Park.

For a lot of residents, it's the eyesores created by abandoned auto dealerships. For drivers, it's the headache-inducing, rush-hour traffic. For cyclists, it's the tricky road conditions.

The city is in the midst of a campaign to come up with solutions to these problems, and city officials say that campaign hits a critical point this week as the city hosts a workshop Thursday, March 6, devoted to revamping the city's main thoroughfare.

The workshop is scheduled to run from 6 to 8 p.m. in the Burgess Recreation Center at 700 Alma St.

Thomas Rogers, an associate planner with the city, said city staff is holding the workshop to hear the

public's views on what works on El Camino Real, and what doesn't, and that input will go toward a greater plan to revitalize the entire corridor.

"Regardless of where people live or work in Menlo Park, they feel El Camino Real and downtown are the heart of the city," Mr. Rogers told the Almanac. "So, we're trying to make this a really community-driven process."

How it's going

City staff have tried some out-of-the-ordinary techniques to try to get the public involved in the daunting task of re-imagining El Camino Real, and they say that, so far, their efforts are working.

The city mailed surveys to every Menlo Park home and business asking what type of housing, businesses, traffic measures and park-

See **EL CAMINO REAL**, page 6



Photo by Keith Peters/Palo Alto Weekly

Local teams take CCS titles

Menlo School captured its first Central Coast Section basketball title since 1991 by toppling top-seeded Palma, 49-39, in the Division IV finals on Friday in San Jose. Senior Max Frye holds the trophy. Meanwhile, in the CCS Division V finals, third-seeded Sacred Heart Prep (19-8) made 12 of 15 free throws, while top-seeded Woodside Priory (24-5) made just 4 of 16, as Sacred Heart Prep stunned Woodside Priory, 45-44, for the title. See stories, pictures and NorCal playoff updates on TheAlmanacOnline.com.

Menlo Park's Francisco Lopez wins instant \$1 million lottery prize

By Rory Brown

Almanac Staff Writer

Francisco Lopez, a 20-year resident of Menlo Park and the supervisor of a San Jose-based janitorial service, has won a \$1 million lottery prize from a \$5 California Millionaire Scratchers ticket, the California Lottery announced Feb. 29.

Mr. Lopez, 42, bought the ticket on Feb.

22 at a Pic N Pay Food and Liquor store in Glen Ellen, just north of Sonoma.

"I bought the ticket, scratched it, saw the numbers, and saw I was a winner. It felt great," Mr. Lopez told The Almanac during a short break from his job.

Mr. Lopez lives in Menlo Park with his wife and three children, who are 12, 4 and 2 years old.

The odds of getting a \$1 million ticket are 1.2 million to one, according to Cali-

fornia Lottery spokesperson Al Lundeen. He said Mr. Lopez will receive \$1 million upfront, and how much he keeps "will depend on his tax situation."

Mr. Lopez said he plans to pay off his family's bills and will maybe consider buying his own business, but for the time being, he said, he won't change his daily routine.

"I'll keep working, and keep living my usual life," he said. "In the future I may

take some days off, but not right now."

The California Millionaire Scratchers game is designed to award 15 instant \$1 million prizes, and five second-chance draws for \$1 million prizes, lottery officials said.

Mr. Lopez is the fifth player to claim one of the \$1 million prizes in the game and the seventh California Lottery player this year to land a prize of at least \$1 million, officials said. ■

John Johns loses round in legal fight

By Andrea Gemmet

Almanac Staff Writer

ATHERTON

The saga of Atherton's ex-finance director added some new twists last week, as a judge told John Johns he had to decide between suing the town and avoiding incriminating himself in a criminal investigation.

In addition, Councilwoman Kathy McKeithen, who had been Mr. Johns' staunchest supporter on the council, repudiated a statement the former finance director made under oath.

Mr. Johns was in court on Friday, Feb. 29, trying to block the town from questioning him as part of its defense against his lawsuit for wrongful termination.

A Superior Court judge disagreed with Mr. Johns' argument, clearing the way for Atherton attorneys to take his deposition.

Mr. Johns was fired in October after being put on administrative leave for two months while a private attorney hired by the town conducted an investigation into complaints against him. The investigator's report painted Mr. Johns as a bully who may

have improperly done outside work while on the town's time.

Mr. Johns maintains that he was targeted for blowing the whistle on fiscal improprieties in Atherton's building and other departments. He has called the report from the investigation flawed and inaccurate.

The San Mateo County District Attorney's Office is currently investigating whether Mr. Johns used town equipment or town time while doing outside consulting work, said Chief Deputy District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe.

Mr. Johns argued that he didn't know there was a criminal investigation going on, citing a November phone conversation with Councilwoman McKeithen. He said Ms. McKeithen told him the criminal complaint was going nowhere, according to a declaration filed with the court.

Ms. McKeithen, however, filed her own declaration on Feb. 27, saying she didn't tell Mr. Johns anything about a criminal complaint against him. "The state-

ment Mr. Johns attributed to me under penalty of perjury in his declaration ... is not accurate," she said.

Mr. Johns' attorney, George Camerlengo, argued that his client's Fifth Amendment right to avoid incriminating himself in the criminal investigation would make it impossible for Mr. Johns to be questioned as part of the civil lawsuit for wrongful termination. He asked for a 60-day delay so the criminal investigation could wrap up.

Judge Marie Weiner displayed little patience for that argument during Friday's brief hearing, saying that the case law concerns only defendants in civil cases who were also facing criminal charges. Since Mr. Johns is the plaintiff who brought the civil lawsuit, the situation is different, she said.

"I'm not going against case law," she told Mr. Camerlengo. "If you want to make a new law, go ahead."

In her decision, Judge Weiner said, "A plaintiff is entitled to stand on his or her Fifth Amendment rights or to proceed with the civil suit — but a choice must be made." ■

Workshop on El Camino's future

EL CAMINO REAL

continued from page 5

ing changes are needed on El Camino Real and the downtown area. In less than two weeks, the city has received more than 1,600 mailed responses, Mr. Rogers said.

He also noted that some 50 people attended each of the city's recent walking tours of El Camino Real and the downtown area to talk about what changes could be made to improve the vitality of the area.

"I am really excited about the level of community involvement," said Councilman John Boyle, who has worked with Richard Cline as a subcommittee of council members coordinating the El Camino Real visioning effort. "I'm thrilled to see the level of dialogue and discussion."

Council members Boyle and Cline also applauded the efforts of the 18-person El Camino Real Visioning Outreach and Oversight Committee, a group of developers, members of the business community, commissioners and residents helping to guide the city in the efforts to revamp the roadway.

Mr. Rogers said the March 6 workshop is the next step in moving things forward. A city-hired

consultant will discuss the survey results, and have traffic and economic experts on hand to answer questions about what impacts certain types of development would have on Menlo Park, he said.

Removing politics

Menlo Park has tried revitalizing El Camino Real before, and previous efforts, such as the trendy "Smart Growth" studies of the late 1990s, have crumbled when one of the city's traditional political parties didn't like where the plan was headed.

Councilman Cline said it's up to everyone involved to keep politics out of the picture.

"There's going to be debate about the hard decisions," Mr. Cline said, referring to questions about what housing densities, traffic measures, and types of commercial development are appropriate for El Camino Real. "But this process is only as good as the input we get ... and it's up to us to keep this above the typical political drumbeat."

"We've got to get both sides on board with this, or it will get derailed," said Lorie Sinnott, a member of the visioning committee. "It's the only way we can actually have something to show for our efforts." ■

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.



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Courtesy of JuneBug Films

An image from the short film "Crickets," shot in Bayfront Park in Menlo Park.

Local filmmaker's work screens at Cinequest Film Festival

By Renee Batti
Almanac News Editor

It's her shortest narrative film yet — only four and a half minutes long — but Kari Nevil put a lot of her heart and soul into "Crickets," which was filmed entirely at Bayfront Park in Menlo Park.

The film, written and directed by Ms. Nevil, will be screened at 9:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 5, and noon Saturday, March 8, at the Cinequest Film Festival in San Jose. Both screenings will be at the Camera 12 theater at 201 South Second St.

Ms. Nevil wrote "Crickets" as a response to the deaths of two people close to her — sister-in-law Yvonne Brown, who died of ovarian cancer, and journalist Steven Vincent, who was kidnapped and killed a year later in Iraq while covering the war.

"I was trying to come up with a story to help me make sense of losing these two young people," she said last week. They were people "the world needed," she said, adding that she struggled to answer the question: Why would they be taken from us?



"I was trying to come up with a story to help me make sense of losing these two young people," says filmmaker Kari Nevil.

Describing the film as "allegorical, metaphysical and dreamlike," she said it also embraces hope. "In this time of war, it's important for us to latch on to hope," she said.

In a written statement, Ms. Nevil said, "This film is my hope that Yvonne and Steven may have encountered each other again ... on the painless side of horrific deaths."

Ms. Nevil's company, JuneBug Films, was located in Menlo Park for years before moving recently to Princeton-by-the-Sea, just north of Half Moon Bay.

"Crickets" is the fourth film Ms. Nevil has directed, and the fourth to be screened at Cinequest; the others are feature films "Your Guardian" and "Planting Melvin," and a feature documentary, "Car Stories."

"Crickets" premiered on Feb. 1 at the Through Women's Eyes International Film Festival in Sarasota, Florida. Next month, it will be screened at the California Independent Film Festival in Livermore.

Ms. Nevil is in the pre-production stages of JuneBug Films' next narrative feature film, "Jonathan's Wedding," and has just begun shooting a feature documentary called "Infidelity: The Movie," according to a press release.

For more information about the Cinequest Film Festival, call 408-295-3378, or log on at cinequest.org.

Menlo Park's Denise Barnett honored

Denise Barnett of Menlo Park, owner of Blossoms Flower Shop at Hillsdale Shopping Center, is the recipient of the Mayor's Award sponsored by the San Mateo Area Chamber of Com-

merce and the city of San Mateo.

The award was presented at the Peninsula Golf and Country Club in San Mateo.

Ms. Barnett has been with Blossoms for 25 years and has

donated her time and flowers to local events. She has been a volunteer for the Menlo Park City Schools and Menlo-Atherton High School for 15 years.

REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman



Underground Wires

Q: I want to bury the utility wires that run through my property underground and want to know what is involved in this process. Is it expensive to do this?

A: Undergrounding the utility wires on your property is an excellent way to upgrade what can be an unsightly and even hazardous condition. It is not inexpensive to do, however, and many homeowners are reluctant to make this improvement because of the time and cost involved.

To begin the process call your local utility company or go to their website and find out what the steps are. You will probably need to submit a drawing prepared by an

architect, engineer, or contractor, to both the utility company and your local building department, showing where the lines would be buried. The utility company and the building department will charge an application fee to review the plan. The process may take a few months before you get a response.

Once the plan is approved you should arrange for inspections by all necessary jurisdictions after you have finished construction. If you have to dig up your driveway or engineer a pathway around tree roots, this may add to the expense of the project. But when it is done, you will no doubt be very glad you did it.

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

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE OF DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

MENLO PARK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT ENCINAL SCHOOL – MODERNIZATION, EXPANSION AND TEACHER EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Menlo Park City School District has prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the proposed Encinal School Modernization, Expansion and Teacher Education Resource Center to evaluate its environmental effects. The document will be available for public review at the Menlo Park City School District Office, located at 181 Encinal Avenue in Atherton, California, for a period of 45 days from Tuesday, March 11, 2008, to Thursday, April 24, 2008. Copies of the document will also be available at the Menlo Park City Library and the Atherton Town Library. It will also be posted on the internet at www.mpcsd.org/facilities. A Public Hearing to take verbal comments has also been scheduled for Tuesday, April 15, 2008, during the regular meeting of the Board of Education at the District Office at 7:00 p.m.

Upon review of the document comments regarding any or all parts of its content may be made, in writing, to the Menlo Park City School District. Comments should be addressed to Ahmad Sheikholeslami, P.E., Facility Planner/Program Manager, Menlo Park City School District, 181 Encinal Avenue, Atherton, CA 94027, before the end of the 45-day review period. For further information, please contact 650-321-7140, Option 6, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Published in THE ALMANAC on March 5, 2008.

Short
takes

Santa Bob

Bob Brennan, Atherton's affable police chief, busied himself at the Feb. 20 City Council meeting by bestowing gifts upon lucky members of the public. He returned a newspaper reporter's lost water bottle, which he kindly refilled with cold water, and he bestowed a sticker and a decorative blanket (emblazoned with the words "to protect and serve") upon a chilly Boy Scout doing hard time at the meeting in pursuit of a badge.

Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale

The United States Coast Guard Auxiliary is attempting to drum up public interest in nautical safety by using a long-cancelled sitcom as an object lesson.

Spokesman Anthony Turner issued a press release entitled "Minnow skipper failed to take simple steps before getting underway," displaying either an attempt at humor or a potentially serious addiction to TVLand reruns.

Apparently, Gilligan and his shipmates (the skipper, the millionaire and his wife, the movie star, the professor and Mary Anne) could have avoided the whole stranded-on-a-deserted-island catastrophe by filing a "float plan" of their itinerary and stowing a position indicator aboard the boat.

The Almanac is eagerly anticipating the next informative dispatch from the Coast Guard Auxiliary. Maybe Cruise Director Julie didn't follow sexual harassment guidelines when she encouraged shipboard romances on the Love Boat?

Journalism in action

The San Francisco Chronicle's ChronicleWatch column is taking credit for getting the historic Atherton train station repaired following damage caused by an arsonist in April. New windows, fresh paint and a new ticket machine spruced up the depot building. Of course, if any passengers want to use the station to hop on a Caltrain, they'll have to do it on a weekend. Trains don't stop in Atherton on weekdays.

Neighbors, sports groups, seniors have different ideas for how to change Kelly Park

By Rory Brown

Almanac Staff Writer

Enthusiastic Menlo Park residents and sports groups all have their priorities for a redesigned Kelly Park.

Local soccer and baseball organizations want state-of-the-art adult-sized fields. Neighbors want a circular running track and picnic areas for the community. Seniors want to make sure sports groups don't take their parking spaces away.

But as city staff, parks and recreation commissioners, and a city-hired consultant go back to the drawing board to try to accommodate these ideas, it's clear that making everyone happy could prove to be a complicated and expensive feat.

"We're trying to put Texas in California—it will not work," said resident Rose Bickerstaff, referring to the number of features sports groups and residents want to cram on the grounds of the oddly shaped 8.3-acre park.

Ms. Bickerstaff was one of about 15 people who attended the Feb. 27 Parks and Recreation Commission meeting to weigh in on plans to redesign the park, located behind the Onetta Harris Community Center in the city's Belle Haven neighborhood.

Those in attendance liked plans to add lights to the park and replace the traditional grass and dirt soccer and baseball fields with artificial turf, but Larry Johmann, the city engineer heading the project, said fitting everything else on the tri-

angular shaped property will be difficult, if not impossible.

"Something has got to give. We simply can't have everything for everyone," Mr. Johmann said.

He noted that the costs associated with building and maintaining lighted, artificial-turf sports fields at the park could cost the city about \$4.2 million.

At the direction of the City Council, parks commissioners and city staff are leading a community outreach effort to redesign Kelly Park. The park was built in 2002 for about \$1 million, but the triangular-shaped baseball field is too shallow for sports groups to use, and the undersized soccer field is significantly slanted.

Commissioner Andy Kirkpatrick, who is on a subcommittee

of commissioners working with city staff and San Francisco-based consultant Callander Associates to come up with a Kelly Field design, was optimistic after the meeting.

"I'm really encouraged," he said. "There was this 'let's do as much as we can' tone in the public's comments, and that's what we're going to try and do, and bring back some new ideas."

Parks commissioners are expected to eventually approve a design for Kelly Park, which would then go before the City Council for further study and approval.

Mr. Johmann said major changes to the park could require an environmental impact report, meaning that even if the planning process goes smoothly, actual construction would not start for at least 12 to 18 months. ■

BUDGET

continued from page 5

for some 25 categorical programs could be reduced or eliminated. Among the programs: class-size reduction, staff development days, school improvement plans, and "gifted and talented."

Estimates are that Portola Valley could lose \$245,000 in state revenues in the year that starts July 1.

Proposed solution

Superintendent Campbell and Mr. Hanretty proposed a two-part solution to the budget problem during a study session Feb. 27. The goal is to continue to offer students a well-rounded education and to implement the district's strategic plan while cutting costs.

This proposal would look at "economies and efficiencies" that could carve about \$215,000 from the budget by making reductions away from the classroom, drawing down the district's "rainy day" reserves by \$333,000 over the next three years, and looking at ways to enhance revenues.

The economies and efficiencies approach would eliminate the \$5,600 annual teacher stipends for Corte Madera School's noon sports league, as well as money for character education and service learning programs at both schools. Other cuts could be made in costs for staff recognition and refreshments, and special custodial projects and extra custodial help during the summer.

Principals Jennifer Warren at Ormondale and Joel Willen at Corte Madera agreed they could reduce their school operations costs by 5 percent.

Making personnel reductions—laying off a half-time teacher and reducing the non-teaching staff by



Almanac photo by Veronica Weber

Family ties

New Menlo Park Police officer Braden Chalmers gets a hug from his father, East Palo Alto Police Sergeant John Chalmers, after being one of six officers sworn in at a Feb. 27 ceremony in the Menlo Park council chambers. Standing beside Braden is his brother, Bryce Chalmers of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

3.45 full-time-equivalent positions—would trim the budget by about \$286,000.

Options for increasing revenue include exploring more joint powers agreements, such as the ones with the Woodside district for business services and special education, and considering accepting "targeted gifts"—where the donor specifies how the money would be spent—in such areas as technology.

A new parcel tax is another option. The current \$290 parcel tax will generate an estimated \$640,000 a year through 2014.

The proposed budget reductions "could turn out to be a worse case scenario," said Superintendent

Campbell, who noted that there are so many uncertainties.

Trustees react

Trustees used words such as "appropriate," "responsible," and "fiscally conservative" in reaction to the proposals discussed at the Feb. 27 study session. They said they liked the idea of looking at a multi-year action plan. That, they said, would give the district time to do more planning and make structural changes.

The trustee approved drawing down the district reserves to \$1 million over a three-year period, looking at ways to enhance revenues, and approaching the Portola Valley Schools Foundation

and endowment fund for financial help.

Trustee Judy Mendelsohn said she was wearing "the black hat" because she was concerned the first-year proposal didn't give enough flexibility to deal with the unknowns.

Board President Ray Villarreal expressed his concerns about sending out layoff notices if they aren't necessary because of the "substantial anxiety" created several years ago when these notices were sent out in March and later rescinded.

Trustees Don Collat and Steve Humphreys asked for more information about specific funding proposals for the strategic plan. ■

MP bottler pays for hazmat spill

By **Rory Brown**
Almanac Staff Writer

Worldwide alcoholic beverage distributor Diageo North America Inc. has agreed to pay \$39,250 in costs and penalties associated with two ethanol spills that took place at the company's Menlo Park bottling facility last summer, according to a Feb. 29 settlement agreement released by the San Mateo County District Attorney's Office.

The two spills — one that took place in June, and another in July — occurred at the bottling facility at 151 Commonwealth

Drive, near U.S. 101 in the city's industrial district.

There was no environmental damage caused by the spills, and under the settlement agreement, the company admits no wrongdoing.

Diageo officials took action to contain both spills, and alerted some county agencies, but the county's office of emergency services didn't receive immediate notification, resulting in the lawsuit, said Deputy District Attorney Elizabeth Hill.

Ms. Hill said some ethanol trickled into nearby storm drains, but there was no environmental damage. She noted that ethanol

is considered a hazardous material because it is flammable, and there is concern that its vapors can ignite.

As part of the settlement, Diageo will have to upgrade equipment at the Menlo Park facility "to enhance spill prevention, detection and containment," and employees will have to undergo training about how to handle hazardous material spills, according to the district attorney's office.

Diageo, headquartered in London, bottles various brands of alcoholic beverages, including Guinness, Crown Royal, and Jose Cuervo. ■

MP council may create climate action plan

The ongoing effort to cut greenhouse gas emissions in Menlo Park is back on the City Council's agenda, with council members set to consider creating the city's own climate action plan at their March 4 meeting.

The purpose of the plan is to identify specific policies the city could implement over the next 10 years to reduce greenhouse gas

emissions produced by Menlo Park residents and businesses, said Environmental Programs Coordinator Dianne Dryer in a staff report. The plan would return for council approval in December, she said.

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

Among the preliminary steps city

staff is recommending the city take on March 4:

- Form a "core team" of one council member, one environmental quality commissioner, city staff, and residents to lead the task of creating the climate action plan.

- Pay the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) \$30,600 to help create the plan.

Portola Valley meets on creek 'daylighting'

For decades, Sausal Creek has passed under the Portola Valley Town Center, entering a buried culvert at the south end of the 11.2-acre site and exiting at the north end, near Christ Episcopal Church.

Should part of that creek be unburied and wind past the new library, Town Hall and community hall going up at Town Center, spanned by a couple of bridges for foot and vehicle traffic?

The Town Council is set to discuss and possibly act on a detailed cost estimate of the creek daylight-

ing project at a special meeting at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 4, in the Historic Schoolhouse at 765 Portola Road.

The proposed daylighting project is designed to be done in two phases and was initially expected to cost \$800,000, but the latest estimate is \$1.2 million to \$1.4 million.

The creek wasn't included in the original funding plan for the new \$20 million Town Center, but since September volunteers have raised \$425,000 in donations and pledges.

Separate bid packages for the final phase of the overall project are set to go out March 12. The bids are due to return to the council for a decision in mid-April.

With \$1 million yet to be raised for the creek through donations or grants, the council on March 4 will look at the question of how much of the creek project should be included in the bid packages.

For more information, go to www.portolavalley.net, click on the Town Government link and follow the directions to the Town Council agenda for March 4.

Atherton to hold public workshop on zoning code

Floor area ratios, retaining walls and light wells are the hot topics on tap at the public workshop on Atherton's update of its zoning codes. The meeting starts at 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 5, at Holbrook-Palmer Park in the Jennings Pavilion,

150 Watkins Ave.

This workshop is the second in a series of three to educate and discuss the zoning code, a group of regulations for building locations and size. Floor area ratios determine how much can be built on a parcel, and light wells

are sunken patios outside of basement windows that provide emergency escape routes as well as natural light.

Information about the workshop is available on the town's Web site, www.Ci.Atherton.Ca.Gov.

Pulling weeds in Portola Valley

The target in Portola Valley this weekend is an invasive weed called French Broom.

The rendezvous point for volunteers interested in participating in the fifth annual broom-pull is 9 a.m. Saturday, March 8, at the Historic Schoolhouse at

765 Portola Road.

Bring work gloves and plan to be pulling weeds until about noon; the town will bring the weed wrenches needed to extract larger plants. Watch out for poison oak and ticks.

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ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR



Steve Lewis is President of Lewis & Mathews Investment Management, Inc., which is a personal financial advisory firm in Menlo Park. He teaches investment courses for various colleges and institutions in the area. He is a financial author and has appeared on national radio and television. He is a past officer and has served as a board member of the S. C. International Association of Financial Planners. He has served on the National Academy Advisory Board of IAFP and is a member of the Palo Alto Financial Planning Forum. Among others, he has written for *Money Magazine* and *Dow Jones' Barron's*.

Other instructors include Deborah Peri and Jim Curran. The instructors have taught over 30,000 Northern Californians their money managing techniques.

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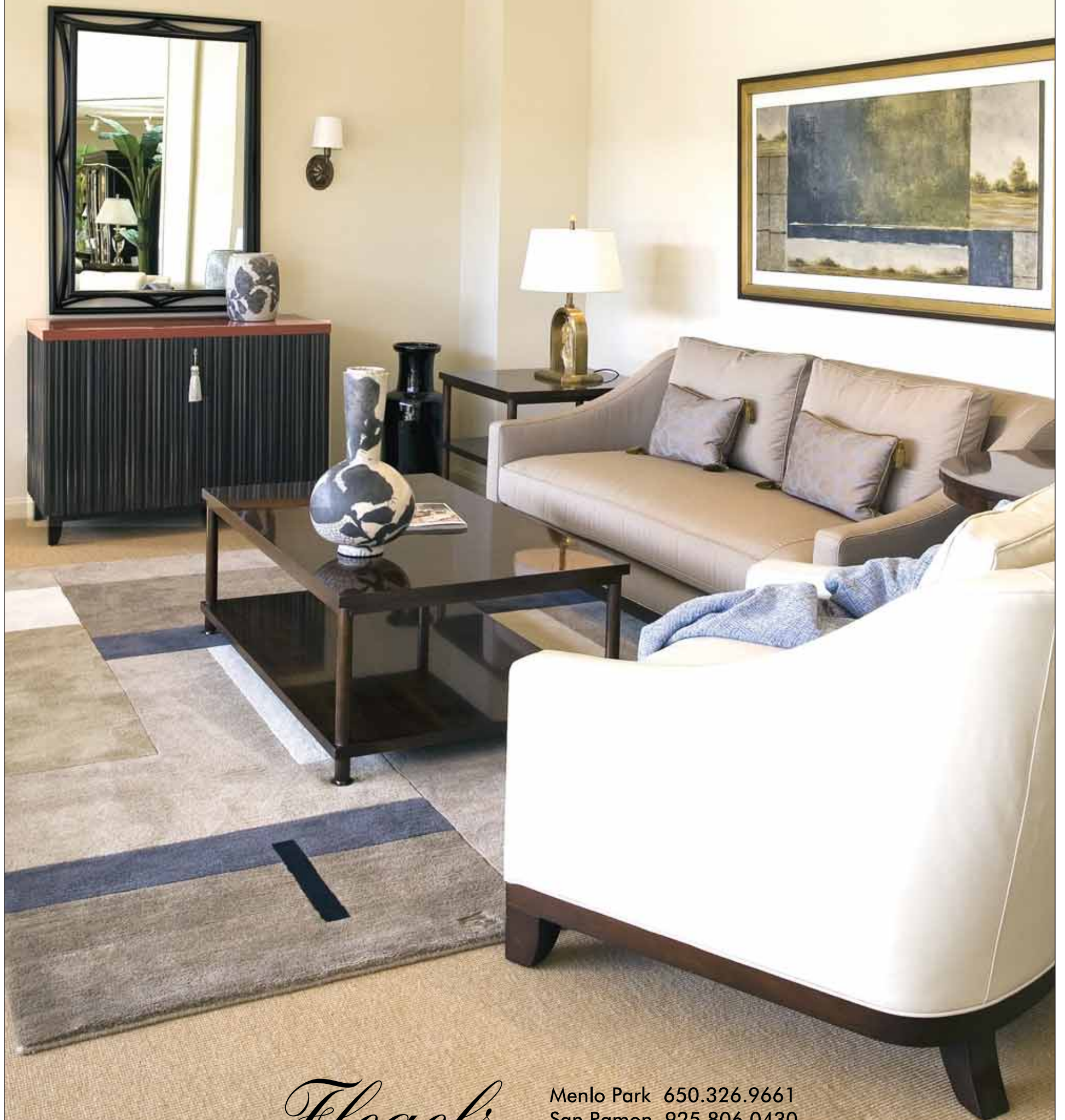
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Public invited to help plan new Burgess Gym in MP

Members of the public interested in plans to build a new Menlo Park Burgess Gym should mark their calendars for Wednesday, March 12.

That night, the Parks and Recreation Commission is scheduled to discuss the pros and cons of four conceptual plans for the gym:

- Building a new gym for gymnastics, basketball, volleyball, other sports groups and drop-in users at the site of the existing gym, as originally envisioned.

- Renovating the existing gym into a gymnastics facility, and

building a separate gym for other users near the Burgess Recreation Center.

- Renovating the existing gym and building a separate gymnastics facility near the recreation center.

- Building a new gym, as well as a new recreation center, both of which could house facilities for gym users and gymnastics programs.

Senior Civil Engineer Larry Johmann said planning for all four options is preliminary, and the costs are unknown.

The meeting is scheduled to start at 6 p.m. in the Burgess Recreation Center at 700 Alma St.

County warns of higher bacteria levels

The San Mateo County Health Department is warning swimmers and others to avoid near-shore ocean and Bay waters for about 72 hours after a major storm due to heightened bacteria levels.


The flushing action of large volume of water racing down hillsides and through parched stream beds to the Bay and ocean is likely to raise bacteria counts to unsafe levels in near-shore ocean and Bay waters.

Swimmers should especially avoid

ocean and Bay near-shore waters within 300 feet of urban streams, lagoons, river mouths and storm drain outlets, says Beverly Thames, a health department spokeswoman.



Also, heavy rainfall overwhelms the sewer systems, causing possible seepage of raw sewage that makes its way into the ocean or Bay, she says.

A list of contaminated beaches and creeks is available by calling 599-1266 or going to smhealth.org/enviro/ beaches.



EYE CARE NEWS

Presented by
Mark Schmidt
Licensed Optician

COLOR COMMENTARY

When it comes to sports, athletes can improve their performance by making sure they have sharp vision. At least one study has shown that the ability to see a ball with crisp vision is more important than the brain's ability to follow the ball's trajectory. If an athlete's vision is blurred, performance is sure to suffer. Another way that athletes can help themselves is to wear color-enhancing sports sunglasses. These glasses enhance particular colors while filtering others. For instance, tennis players can benefit greatly from color enhancing sport glasses that help them pick out yellow tennis balls from the visual background. Color-enhancing sport glasses can also be beneficial to baseball/softball players, hunters, skiers and other sports enthusiasts.

Good vision is important to everyone, but it is particularly important for people who play sports. Not seeing well on the field can compromise a player's performance and safety. At MENLO OPTICAL, we prescribe athletic, occupational, and computer eye wear. Call us at 322-3900, or bring us your prescription at 1166 University Drive, on the corner of Oak Grove Avenue and University Drive. The goal of our office is to provide patients with the very best service and well-crafted frames and lenses.

P.S. One of the ways an eye specialist can help an athlete is to test his or her focus flexibility, which is the ability to change focus from far to near, and vice versa.

Mark Schmidt is an American Board of Opticianry and National Contact Lens Examiners Certified Optician licensed by the Medical Board of California. He can be easily reached at Menlo Optical, 1166 University Drive, Menlo Park. 650-322-3900.



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Francisco Espinoza, 19, wasn't always as lucky as Giovanni. Once a boy of streets and gangs, Francisco heard about the safety, friendship, and the life-building academic and arts programs of the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula. The club's mentors and peers moved him. Now he's on staff, helping kids beat the Opportunity Gap that defeats so many in his low-income neighborhoods. Francisco is a role model: with club coaching, he graduated from high school, made Foothill College, is a good musician, and created an inspiring video shown at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival.

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WORKING ON THE RAILROAD



Almanac photos by Veronica Weber

Above: A Caltrain assistant conductor radios a dispatcher in the control center as she prepares an evening departure from San Jose. **Right, top:** Standing watch in the locomotive at the rear of a northbound train. **Right, below:** Hard hat, gloves and safety glasses are essential at Caltrain's new \$140 million train maintenance facility in San Jose.

TRAINS DON'T HAVE STEERING WHEELS, SO HOW HARD COULD IT BE TO SHEPHERD THEM ALONG CALTRAIN'S RAILS EVERY DAY?

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

Bells and flashing red lights suddenly pulse with life. White crossing arms begin their deliberate descent to block traffic. Soon enough, three headlights, brighter than bright, roll into view, accompanied by blasts of an air horn. And there is the insistent thrum of a big diesel as the train approaches a Caltrain station on its way to San Jose.

(North to San Francisco, the locomotive's diesel brings up the rear as it pushes the train.)

These sights and sounds are nothing new to local drivers and maybe, by this point in time, unremarkable. After all, trains have been making this 47-mile trip since 1864, when there were four trips each weekday.

That number is now 98, spread among 20 separate trains, says Robert, a Caltrain foreman. That's a lot of trips. Many of us know what it's like to ride Caltrain. What's it like from the other side, from the view of the engineer operating a train or the conductors who check for tickets and maintain order?

Recently I rode a baby-bullet train north from San Jose and back, and spent time with engineers, and later, dispatchers, conductors and the maintenance crew to talk about what it's like to work on the railroad.

Move that train

Life can get a little lonely for a Caltrain engineer out on the

job. There is a second chair in the locomotive — and in the “cab car” on northbound trips — but it's empty on most runs.

That seat used to belong to the fireman, a title that recalls the days of the steam locomotive. By the late 20th century, the fireman's title referred not to a tender of fires, but to an assistant engineer who learned from and kept company with engineers. Amtrak, which employs the workers on contract with Caltrain, eliminated the position in 1992; one person controlling a train is legal provided the shift doesn't exceed six hours, Robert says.

“(A fireman) was a nice thing to have out there” to talk over the stresses of the day, particularly after an accident, says Caltrain engineer Alex, who has been with Caltrain since 1972. “Now we kind of sit over here and ‘mmp, mmp, mmp,’ and kind of hold it in.”

“There is a lot of responsibility and a lot of potential for really screwing up if you're not focused on what you're doing,” says Caltrain engineer Leonard, who formerly

piloted Amtrak's “Coast Starlight” train that makes daily runs between Seattle and Los Angeles.

Workplace stress, a common malady. In this case, the workplace is a moving train with hundreds of passengers, and the worker is a lone engineer in an isolated space. What if he or she — five of Caltrain's 60 engineers are women — were to suffer a stroke or other sudden illness?

That scenario's been accounted for, Alex says. Inactivity on the part of the engineer triggers an alarm which, if not responded to by the engineer, automatically brings the train to a controlled stop. The system echoes the “dead man” pedal in the days before electronic controls, he says: If the engineer became incapacitated and his foot came off the floor-mounted throttle, the train would slow and stop.

An engineer's health is a topic of interest to Caltrain. Staying qualified requires a yearly physical exam that tests eyesight, hearing and heart health, Robert says.

While operating trains, engi-

neers constantly scan their field of vision for anything out of the ordinary. They radio the conductors every few minutes to keep them apprised of track-side signal lights, which indicate the state of the system. There may be traffic ahead and conductors are kept up to date on changes in a train's speed.

The placement of signal lights, spaced to match a railroad's unique combination of curves and straight sections, must be as second nature to the engineer, Alex says. Green allows the maximum permissible speed. The train must slow to 50 mph on a flashing yellow, to 35 mph on a steady yellow, and to a stop on red. Passing a red light, he says, leads to a “30-day unpaid vacation.”

Caltrain signals change color at the click of a mouse. In a darkened San Jose control room, two shift dispatchers and a chief dispatcher have before them arrays of computer screens that show the location and status of every train, switch and signal in the system.

Back on the train, one signal

ticket used to be in a train conductor's repertoire, though perhaps not consciously. As a passenger, I could read while tracking the sound of the ticket punch as it moved toward me. I knew when to look up and pay the fare, and get my ticket punched.

That grace note is gone, having been consigned since September 2003 to Caltrain's past, where buying a ticket on board now keeps company with the requirement for formal conductor uniforms. Today's riders buy tickets from vending machines at the station; ride without one and you can be fined as much as \$270. Dress uniforms are optional for conductors.

Sukie, a conductor, holds a privileged position in the Caltrain maintenance yard after eight years on the main line and she misses the old days.

“When you're going through the train and selling tickets, yes it's more work, but you had one-on-one interactions with every customer,” she says. “(That) is great customer service.”

Just a year on the job is Sue, a former fundraiser for “a large nonprofit” who was semi-retired. She's an assistant conductor and says she enjoys punching a ticket once in a while as well as wearing her dress uniform and/or short-brimmed hat.

“It's a very dignified profession and it's a very old profession,” she says. And it's a profession in direct contact with the masses of humanity, such as they are on the Peninsula. “If you like the study of mankind, this is the place to be,” Sue says.

Among mankind's representatives on Caltrain are many abiders of the law as well as some who eschew tickets, and sometimes for good reason. They may be trying to make it through the day without a car or a job. Some are recently out of jail or simply broke. Others are homeless and live on local trains and buses.

“We're reasonable people,” Sue says. “You have to remember that it's public transportation.”

Conductors do have their limits, though. Sarah calls it the “Don't annoy me” rule, meaning be honest with her and don't cause trouble.

Someone can make a case for a lost purse, for example, but “it helps if you're not carrying a purse,” says Sarah to laughter from other Caltrain employees in the crew room in San Jose. “It helps if I've not kicked you off three times in the last week.”

Riders have claimed that other

A study of mankind

A bit of panache in punching a

See **RAILROAD**, next page

SHARP SHOOTING

A new hire's effort to manipulate the benefits system so as to increase the frequency of days off.

HOG HEAD

An engineer. The hog is the locomotive, a vestige of the days of steam power and the tendency of an idling locomotive to moan and groan like an anxious hog might do.

CRUMMY

The caboose, eliminated from freight trains in the late 1980s. They were never on passenger trains.

Railroading Terms

TIE UP

Securing a train at day's end by setting brakes in the locomotive and cars. Caltrain employees think of the 47-mile line between San Francisco and San Jose as being slightly bowl-shaped and theorize that if hand brakes weren't set, parked trains at either end would roll towards each other.

HIGH BALL

Clear track ahead. Before track-side signals became colored lights, railroad workers raised and lowered a ball on a pole to indicate conditions ahead.

GANDY DANCER

A rail worker skilled at re-aligning rails with a lever.

A line of gandy dancers, working in synchrony, could be seen as dancing to the job's rhythm.

Source: Caltrain employees
Almanac infographic by Joanne Lee

CALTRAIN FACTS

Almanac infographic by Joanne Lee

One 47-mile trip from San Jose to San Francisco uses 150 gallons of diesel fuel from a locomotive's 1,500-gallon tank. Federal law prohibits any Caltrain locomotive from speeds in excess of 79 mph.

Caltrain locomotives are actually rolling electrical generators that run on diesel fuel. Each of a locomotive's four sets of drive wheels is powered by a 300-amp electric motor.

A Caltrain commuter train carries one engineer, one conductor, one assistant conductor and typically 300 passengers.

Caltrain employs 60 engineers, of whom five are women, and 108 conductors and assistant conductors, of whom 20 are women.

Caltrain employees are responsible for being familiar with 800 safety rules. To encourage that familiarity, there is a rule of the day intended to be a topic of discussion.

PUBLIC NOTICE

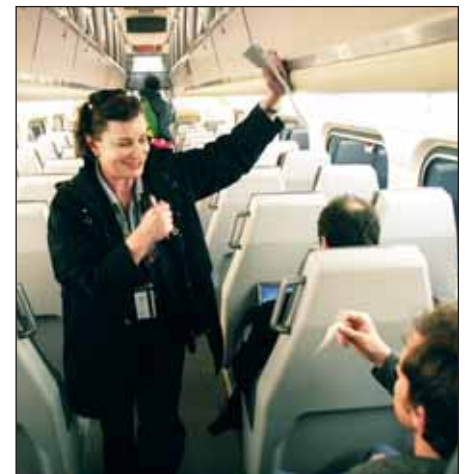
NOTICE OF INTENT TO ADOPT A
NEGATIVE DECLARATIONMENLO PARK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
OAK KNOLL SCHOOL – MODERNIZATION,
RENOVATION AND NEW FACILITIES

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Menlo Park City School District intends to adopt a Negative Declaration for the proposed Oak Knoll School Modernization, Renovation and New Facilities. The Negative Declaration and its accompanying Initial Study will be available for public review at the Menlo Park City School District Office for a period of 30 days from Tuesday, March 11, 2008, to Wednesday, April 9, 2008. Copies of the document will also be available at the Menlo Park City Library, the Atherton Town Library and posted on the District web site at www.mpcsd.org/facilities.

Upon review of the document, comments regarding any or all parts of the proposal to adopt a Negative Declaration for the project may be made, in writing, to the Menlo Park City School District. Comments should be addressed to: Ahmad Sheikholeslami, P.E., Facility Planner/Program Manager, Menlo Park City School District, 181 Encinal Avenue, Atherton, CA 94027, before the end of the 30-day review period. For further information, please call 650-321-7140, Option 6, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Published in THE ALMANAC on March 5, 2008.

‘THE WORK NEVER STOPS’



Almanac photos by Veronica Weber

Top: Evan, who works in Caltrain's San Jose maintenance facility, prepares to add oil to a locomotive engine. Brakes, wheels and engines on every active train are inspected every day. **Left:** Sarah, as part of her conducting duties, tries to keep trains on schedule by encouraging prompt passenger boarding and detraining. **Right:** Sue, an assistant conductor, checks passengers' tickets on a northbound train. Riding Caltrain without a ticket can result in a fine of up to \$270, though conductors say they have made exceptions for people down on their luck.



TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY
765 Portola Road
Portola Valley, CA 94028

NOTICE OF A PUBLIC HEARING ON
AMENDMENTS TO THE ZONING ORDINANCE
REGARDING FENCE PROVISIONS

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Town Council of the Town of Portola Valley will hold a public hearing on proposed amendments to the Town's Zoning Ordinance on Wednesday, March 26, 2008 at 8:00 p.m., in the Town Council Chambers (Historic Schoolhouse), 765 Portola Road, Portola Valley, California. The zoning ordinance amendment provides for technical corrections to the recently adopted fence regulations of the zoning ordinance. When the fence provisions of the zoning ordinance were amended, the text of the amendment did not include the existing provisions for fences in other than residential and open-area (O-A) zoning districts. Since no changes were proposed for these remaining districts, the existing language should have been retained. The Town Council will consider all evidence, written and oral communications pertaining to the proposed amendment. All interested persons are invited to appear before the town Council to be heard at the time and place herein above mentioned.

CEQA: The amendment is not subject to CEQA since it does not have the potential to cause a significant effect on the environment.

Dated: February 26, 2008
Signed: Leslie Lambert, Planning Manager

Published in THE ALMANAC on March 5, 2008.

RAILROAD

continued from previous page

conductors are more lenient and have tried using old tickets, including a person who bit off the top of an old ticket hoping the remnant would pass muster, Sarah says. In a case that did involve a citation, she recalls a customer who bemoaned her own sorry state: "Look at me. I'm crying. How can you write me a citation when I'm crying."

Clever riders have figured out how to regularly get thrown off the train without being cited, then repeat the performance, if necessary, on the next train, Robert says. "They'll do the one-stop shuffle until they get to where they need to go."

Then there's alcohol. "What I

have found, working out on the main, is that alcohol plays a very large role in the difficulties that a passenger can bring to a conductor," Sukie says.

The baseball trains to San Francisco Giants games "are terrible," Robert says. On one such occasion, an intoxicated fan vomited on other passengers then passed out. Over the next 12 minutes, Caltrain prepared a new train, re-boarded everyone and resumed the trip, he says.

Train-washing

Cleaning up after a drunken passenger is all in a day's work for the maintenance crew, as is cleaning the train's outside. That job, however, is automated.

A new taxpayer-funded \$140

million maintenance and operations facility opened in San Jose in 2007. Included on the 20-acre site is a giant car wash that scrubs the trains clean every other day.

Recycled water from two 35,000-gallon tanks blasts the trains from the side as they pass through at 1 mph, Robert says.

A new lathe-like wheel-truing device ensures the roundness of train wheels and brought to an end the practice of sending them out of state for truing.

The 24-hour-a-day facility includes a crane designed to pick up rail cars and two 800-foot service pits for train inspection — which happens every day for every train — and maintenance. "The work never stops," says Billy, an assistant superintendent. ■

Safety measures approved for Oak Avenue area

■ Raised crosswalks in store for Vine Street, Oak Knoll Lane intersections.

By **Rory Brown**
Almanac Staff Writer

Neighbors' testimony trumped traffic statistics at the Menlo Park City Council's Feb. 26 meeting, as council members approved a set of safety measures intended to slow traffic on an 1,100-foot-long stretch of Oak Avenue in the city's west Menlo Park neighborhood.

The council voted 4-1, with John Boyle opposed, to spend \$22,000 on a neighborhood traffic plan aimed to slow traffic on Oak Avenue between Vine Street and Oak Knoll Lane.

The plan includes the following changes for the segment of the street adjacent to Oak Knoll School:

■ Build two raised crosswalks — one at the intersection of Vine Street, and the other at Oak Knoll Lane.

■ Resurface three existing crosswalks with a red "tire grip" material so they are more visible to drivers.

■ Post a "School Area" sign on the street.

The speed limit is 25 mph on Oak Avenue, a common route for drivers traveling from West Menlo Park to Sand Hill Road and back. Though the street has three speed bumps, neighbors say conditions are unsafe for children who walk and bike in the area.

"I ask you to protect and promote pedestrian and bicycle safety," said Kristin Duriseti, one of four residents to speak in favor of increased safety measures on Oak Avenue.

Statistics

Recent city traffic studies suggested the intersection isn't any more dangerous than other residential streets.

A three-day study by staff



The safety measures will be installed on Oak Avenue between Vine Street and Oak Knoll Lane in west Menlo Park.

showed that out of 9,600 drivers who traveled in either direction on the street, only 34 (less than 0.04 percent) hit speeds higher than 30 mph.

Councilman Boyle pointed to the statistics in opposing the vote, and said that by installing raised crosswalks, which essentially act as speed bumps, the city runs the risk of pushing traffic to other neighborhood streets.

"Every car we take off this road is going to go somewhere else," he said.

But neighbors said the city's studies didn't take into account the number of drivers who roll through Oak Avenue stop signs, and drastically accelerate between existing speed bumps — a message that resonated with the other council members

"I do put great weight on neighbors who live with this 24/7," said Councilman Heyward Robinson. "Because we have a population of people that do not really respect neighborhoods they drive through, [more safety measures] are necessary." ■

Touching third rail: talk on Proposition 13

Economist Stephen Levy will tackle the politically charged topic of California's Proposition 13 in a talk in Redwood City on Thursday, March 6, sponsored by the League of Women Voters of South San Mateo County.

Mr. Levy, director and senior economist of the Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy in Palo Alto, will discuss the true costs and benefits of the measure that was

adopted by voters in 1978 and put a cap on property tax rates. He will explore whether its time to seriously revisit the issue.

His talk — entitled "Making California a great place to live and work: Is that possible with Prop 13?" — starts at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 6, in the community room of the Redwood City public library, located at the intersection of Middlefield Road and Jefferson

Avenue. Admission is free.

Mr. Levy has done extensive work on the relationships between the state budget and the economy as part of his work for the Center for the Continuing Study of the California Economy, a private research organization that provides assessments of economic, demographic and growth trends in California.

For more information, call 325-5780.



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Muddled quartet of elections for Tom Lantos' seat

■ Atherton Republican is one of five candidates.

By **Andrea Gemmet**

Almanac Staff Writer

When Congressman Tom Lantos died last month, in the midst of his 14th term in the U.S. House of Representatives, local politicians lined up to pay their respects to the Holocaust survivor and champion of human rights.

And now, they're lining up to replace him in Congress. The big name in the race is former Democratic state senator Jackie Speier of Hillsborough, whose state Senate district included Woodside and Portola Valley. She was termed out of the state Senate in 2006.

There will be other candidates for the 12th Congressional District seat, including Republican Greg Conlon, a resident of Atherton.

The question is whether voters can make sense of the series of elections for the post. Candidates will be facing as many as four elections in the next eight months.

Ms. Speier and Mr. Conlon, a Republican, are among five candidates running for the remainder of Mr. Lantos' term

that ends January 2009. If you want to vote for either of them, you'll have a chance to do it in April, and also in June. And maybe in November.

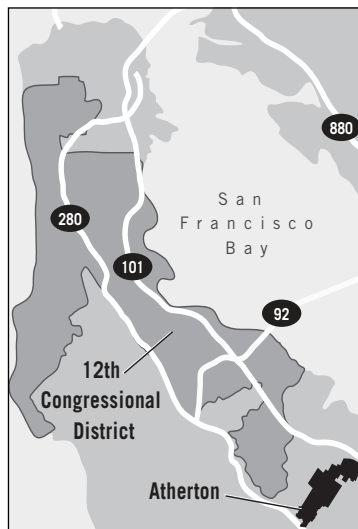
April 8 is the date of the special congressional open primary, where voters can choose any candidate from any party. If none of the five contenders wins a majority of the voters, then the leading candidate from each political party will appear on the ballot of the June 3 special congressional general election.

Of course, if that happens, voters are going to have to be careful, because June 3 is also the primary for the full two-year term beginning in January 2009.

Most of the candidates who are running for the remainder of Mr. Lantos' term in office are also running for the full, two-year term for the seat.

If, however, a decisive winner emerges in the April election, the June 3 run-off will be cancelled. But the June 3 primary will go on as scheduled.

It's a bit perplexing. Attempts to explain it on San Mateo County's



The Almanac/Gail Thoreson

Atherton is outside the 12th Congressional District, yet a resident of Atherton, Greg Conlon, is running for that district's seat in Congress. It's legal. Members of Congress don't have to live in the district they represent. The 12th district encompasses part of San Francisco and a large swath of San Mateo County, including a bit of Woodside.

web site, ShapeTheFuture.org, were somewhat unsuccessful, said Elections Manager David Tom.

Let's take the case of Ms. Speier, the front-runner to represent California's 12th Congressional District in both elections. She'll be on the ballot in April, and if she doesn't win a majority of votes (50 percent plus one vote), she'll be back on the ballot in June. Twice.

Ms. Speier would appear as the Democratic Party's candidate for the unexpired term that ends in January 2009, but she'll also be running in the primary to be the Democratic candidate in the November election for the two-year term beginning in January.

A little weird

If you're asking how Mr. Conlon, a resident of Atherton, can run for the seat when Atherton is not in the 12th Congressional District, the answer is that members of Congress don't have to live in the district they represent.

According to Mr. Tom, candidates for this federal office need only be California residents at the time they are elected.

So, if you live in Eureka, you may run for Congress as the representative of District 53 in San Diego County, free from any worries of unpleasantness over the

whereabouts of your residence.

In fact, according to Mr. Tom, you can live in New York and run for office in California, as long as you move to the Golden State by Election Day. It seems a little weird, but it's right there in the U.S. Constitution, said Mr. Tom.

As for Mr. Conlon, a Republican, he last ran for state office in 2002, when he made an unsuccessful bid to become California's next state treasurer.

"It's a long shot," he told the Almanac on Monday. He said he's relying on the fact that he got a lot of votes in the district when he ran in 2002, and on the many decline-to-state voters in the county who are unaffiliated with a political party.

"I think most of them are closet Republicans," Mr. Conlon said. "I've got to, or I don't have a chance," he adds, laughing.

Mr. Conlon spent 30 years as a partner and certified public accountant with the Andersen accounting firm and was a Pete Wilson appointee to the California Public Utilities Commission, where he served as its president

See **CONGRESS**, page 21

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Photo by Aaron Campbell



Woodside to meet with college on housing complex

Some new design ideas may be ahead for faculty and staff housing planned for a prominent hilltop on the campus of Canada College. The Woodside Town Council has offered to talk with the college and possibly resolve a dispute over the scale of the apartment complex.

Woodside Mayor Ron Romines appointed himself and councilmen Dave Tanner and Peter Mason to sit down with representatives from the college and Redwood City on March 5 or 6 and go over the design for the 56 to 60 unit complex.

The college is using a design drawn from a catalog, council members said. Mr. Mason, an architect, has told the Almanac that he favors a strategy that disguises the appearance of a three-story building so that it looks more like two stories.

The college's 131-acre campus straddles Redwood City and Woodside, with most of it located in Woodside, including the 3.8-acre site proposed for the apartments. The site looks down on parts of Woodside.

The college cannot proceed with construction until the Woodside council agrees to de-annex the site and redraw the town boundary to put the site in Redwood City, where zoning laws allow multi-family buildings.

The Redwood City planning manager recently wrote to Woodside Town Manager Susan George, noting that Redwood City's Planning Commission had approved the college's plans and asking for a design review with Woodside sometime soon. The Redwood City Council is scheduled to act on the matter on March 24.

Kepler's nominated for children's award

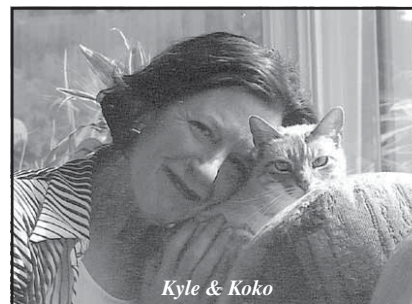
The Women's National Book Association has nominated Kepler's bookstore in Menlo Park for the 2008 Lucile Micheels Pannell Award. The award recognizes retail bookstores that excel in inspiring

the interest of young people in books and reading.

The award will be presented to two bookstores (one general and one children's specialty store) at BookExpo America May 29-June 1 in Los Angeles.

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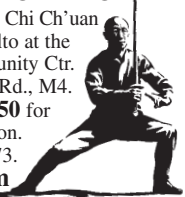
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See **SPRING CLASS GUIDE**, page 20



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SPRING CLASS GUIDE

continued from page 19

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20 ■ The Almanac ■ March 5, 2008

OBITUARIES

Sally Holland

World traveler

A celebration of the life of Sally Bubb Holland will be held at 1:30 p.m. Friday, March 7, at Christ Episcopal Church, 815 Portola Road in Portola Valley. Ms. Holland died Feb. 23 at Stanford Medical Center from respiratory failure. She was 85.

Ms. Holland was born in Marysville, California. Growing up in the Bay Area, she graduated from Mills

College in 1943. Soon after, she joined TWA as a flight attendant.

In 1962, she and her husband, the late Harry Holland Jr., bought land in Portola Valley and built a home for their family of four boys. They also opened their home to Stanford University's international students.

Ms. Holland visited all seven continents and 100 countries during her 60 years of travel. She worked as a travel agent at Norman Travel in Ladera and wrote articles about her journeys as a freelance writer. She studied all the Romance lan-

guages, learning French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian particularly well, say family members.

An accomplished pianist, Ms. Holland donated one of her grand pianos to Mills College. She sang in local church choirs and volunteered at Allied Arts Guild and at local language schools. She was the sole distributor of tapestries for "adriatica textil" of Brazil.

A member of the P.E.O. Sisterhood's chapter DD for more than 50 years, she was also corresponding secretary for her class at Mills and active in two

local book clubs, one of which she co-founded 45 years ago.

Ms. Holland is survived by her four sons, Harry of Menlo Park, John of San Carlos, Tom of Spain, and Bob of Redwood City; and a sister, Anne Jacques of Connecticut.

Donations in Ms. Holland's name may be made to a favorite charity.

Tom D. Harris Jr.

Veterinarian

Tom D. Harris Jr., a veterinarian and 48-year resident of

Woodside, died at home on Jan. 24. He was 88 years old.

Dr. Harris is survived by his wife of 66 years, Margaret Lorraine Harris; daughters Margaret Helton and Elizabeth Caselton; and two grandsons.

A private family service was held on Jan. 27.

The family requests that memorial contributions be made to either the Horse Park at Woodside, P.O. Box 620010, Woodside, 94062; or to the Los Altos Hounds, P.O. Box 620456, Woodside, 94062.

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

Fraud report: Three unauthorized charges on bank statement, first block of Euclid Ave., Feb. 25.

MENLO PARK

Burglary reports:

Cameras and camera kits worth \$40,000 stolen after thieves disabled alarm and broke through wall, Ritz Camera Center at 715 Santa Cruz Ave., Feb. 23.

Window broken, 1100 block of Alma St., Feb. 24.

Purse stolen from vehicle, 1300 block of Madera Ave., Feb. 26.

Cell phone charger and GPS device stolen from vehicle, 400 block of O'Connor St., Feb. 27.

Robbery report: Thieves struggled with security guard after taking whiskey and a six-pack of beer, Safeway grocery at 525 El Camino Real, Feb. 24.

Grand theft report:

Laptop stolen, Kepler's Books and

Magazines at 1010 El Camino Real, Feb. 23.

Tools stolen from locked trailer, 4700 block of Bohannon Drive, Feb. 26.

Camera stolen, 700 block of Pierce Road, Feb. 28.

Stolen vehicle report: Motorcycle stolen, 700 block of Ivy Ave., Feb. 24.

Fraud reports:

Identity theft, 1000 block of Sherman Ave. and 1100 block of Madera Ave. and 700 block of Laurel St., Feb. 25 and 27.

Unauthorized use of credit card, 800 block of El Camino Real, Feb. 26.

Child protective services report: 700 block of Menlo Ave., Feb. 25.

WOODSIDE

Theft report: Petty cash drawer looted, 4000 block of Sand Hill Road, Feb. 21.

PORTOLA VALLEY

Battery report: Aggressive unwanted advances by co-worker, 500 block of Portola Road, Feb. 20.

BIRTHS

Menlo Park

Kelly Brennan and Douglas Feick, a daughter, Feb. 13, at Sequoia Hospital.

Carmen and John Franceschi, a son, Feb. 17, at Sequoia Hospital.

CONGRESS

continued from page 16

for two of his six years on the commission. During his tenure on the PUC, he said, the telecommunications industry was deregulated. He also served on the California Transportation Commission for three years.

A former U.S. Air Force pilot, Mr. Conlon holds a bachelor's degree in business and accounting from the University of Utah, and a law degree from the University of San Francisco. ■



Peter Pan

Peninsula Youth Theatre will present the musical "Peter Pan" March 8-16 at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts. The cast (clockwise from left) includes Hanna Lauritzen as Peter Pan, Lucas Sarnow, Veronique Filloux, Jill Galbraith (Menlo Park), Ally Gishi and Tony Sinclair (Woodside). Tickets range from \$7 to \$18 and may be purchased by phone, 903-6000, or online at www.pytnet.org.

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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: Thursday, March 13 & Tuesday, March 18
- For Girls: Saturdays, April 5 & 12
- * **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, March 15
- * **SIBLING PREPARATION**
Designed for children two years of age and older, this class prepares siblings for the emotional and physical realities of the arrival of a newborn.
- Saturday, April 5
- * **THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS: BULLYING AND THE SOCIAL LIVES OF OUR CHILDREN**
Know how to help children communicate effectively and build healthy relationships. Learn about how boys and girls react differently in socially stressful situations and strategies that will help your child when they need to stand up for themselves or others.
- Tuesday, April 15

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

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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 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.

Don't believe high-speed sales pitch

Sure, who wouldn't like to hop a train in San Francisco and step off about three hours later in Los Angeles, for the low fare of \$55. But if you really believe that a system can be built to run trains at such speeds and at such prices, you might need a reality check.

First and foremost, cost estimates to build a high-speed rail system in California reach into the tens of billions of dollars now, without factoring in the cost overruns that have accompanied most large

EDITORIAL

The opinion of The Almanac

construction projects in the state in recent times. Big jobs like the new Bay Bridge and BART to SFO, as well as outside projects like the Big Dig in Boston and the Chunnel tunnel in England, nearly doubled in cost over the original estimates and delivered far fewer riders than promised.

Unless Gov. Schwarzenegger pulls it from the ballot, this November voters will decide whether to issue nearly \$10 billion in bonds to start the project, which will need \$20 billion to \$30 billion more from the federal government and other sources to connect L.A. to San Francisco by 2020, and eventually Sacramento to San Diego. In essence, the vote on the first \$10 billion is really a green light for the entire project, so we hope voters understand and realize what they are getting into.

Regardless of how you feel about high-speed trains, the cost alone should be enough to push this dream back where it came from. Given the huge state budget deficit — some \$16 billion is projected for the next fiscal year — we don't see how any responsible citizen could vote to spend \$10 billion more on a train that is likely to cost

billions more than current estimates and is not addressing an urgent need. It doesn't make sense, at least in these lean budget times, to even consider it.

Passage of high-speed rail would also bring with it a Catch 22 requirement that will force traffic to go under or over the tracks, a costly process that the Menlo Park City Council has yet to accept.

The local impact and cost of such work will be tremendous. If crossings are installed at Ravenswood, Oak Grove and Glenwood avenues in downtown Menlo Park, the downtown area adjacent to the railroad tracks would be decimated. And the impact at the Atherton intersections of Encinal, Watkins and Fair Oaks Lane would be a tremendous intrusion on these quiet neighborhoods. Even if the rail authority pays for the grade separations, we can see a snarl of disputes erupting as land and business owners attempt to win compensation for their property losses and for business lost during a long construction period.

More than a century ago, the Southern Pacific Railroad, forerunner of Caltrain, played a major role in opening up the Peninsula to sun-seeking San Franciscans. Since then millions of local residents have hopped aboard this convenient commuter link to San Francisco. Now high-speed rail threatens Menlo Park's tranquil downtown and Atherton's quiet grade crossings. If high-speed rail gets a green light in November, Menlo Park, Atherton and other Peninsula cities will be forced to install and endure grade separations that will dramatically change their relationship to the trains that sustained them since the first 19th century locomotive chugged up and down the Peninsula rail corridor. ■

LETTERS

Our readers write

Rail bond figures don't add up

Editor:

I read with interest the pro and con articles on the high-speed rail plan published last week.

I, too, question the financial viability of the plan. However, I believe Martin Engel has a slight error in the figures he lists. It is an error of about \$10 billion. He is correct in calculating the annual payments and the total cost of \$19.5 billion on the \$10 billion bond. The error comes in the fact that an amortization computation was made rather than an interest only. Hence at the end of the 30-year period no balance remains on the loan. It is paid off.

Daniel H Goodman
Trinity Drive, Menlo Park

Looking for clues on the 'Creamery' photo

Editor:

I would like to ask if any of your readers knows the exact location of Hazele and Ethyl's creamery shown in the Almanac's Regional Heritage photo Feb. 13. All I recall is that it was on El Camino



Atherton Heritage Association

Our Regional Heritage

This view of El Camino Real was photographed looking south from Selby Lane in Atherton in 1938. Note that the roadway had three lanes at the time.

Real in Menlo Park.

I have fond memories of going there in the summers of 1939-1943. Being a San Francisco child, summers were foggy. I was sent to the Convent of the

Sacred Heart summer camp in Atherton. It was glorious, with sunshine, swimming and horseback riding at the Menlo Circus Club.

I have fond memories of Victory

Gardens, being assigned to sleep in the "Alcove," and the "store" opening at 4 p.m. for letters and packages from home. We had

See **LETTERS**, next page

Unaffordable high-speed rail dream

By Jack Ringham

Thanks, Almanac, for last week's comprehensive story and related comments on high-speed rail. Local residents need to know what such a project means.

If high-speed rail is implemented, initial plans would bring 278 trains each weekday, including Caltrain and Dumbarton Rail, zipping through Menlo Park and Atherton at speeds up to 125 mph for high-speed rail.

There would be at least four tracks and probably one additional track through Atherton to connect a Dumbarton line. Tracks would be raised or lowered, cross streets raised, lowered or closed, or some combination. In the best case, trains and power lines could be hidden in a trench with cross streets at grade. This could cost extra, requiring cities to find funds. In the worst case, tracks could be set on a berm 20 feet above grade with poles supporting power lines up to 40 feet above that. Our towns could face this blight forever, without benefit.

During the 10-year first-phase construction of high-speed rail, Atherton and Menlo Park's right-of-way and nearby streets, homes and businesses would be in chaos for at least three years and probably longer. Temporary tracks would be added to keep Caltrain running, which requires "borrowing" or permanently taking private and city property by eminent domain. Heritage trees would be lost and property

values would tumble.

High-speed rail supporters tell us to endure local devastation for the "greater good."

The history of large rail and other transportation projects tells us that California high-speed rail will be a huge failure. Construction costs could be two to three times the projections, or \$80 billion to \$120 billion instead of \$40 billion. Ridership and revenue will probably be one-half to one-third of forecasts. Here are some examples:

■ In 2007 BART ridership on the SFO airport extension was 25 percent of original forecasts. In January 2008 BART halted service between Millbrae and SFO due to low ridership.

■ The Bay Bridge East span seismic retrofit project in 1997 was estimated to cost \$1.3 billion. In early 2008 the estimate was \$ 6.4 billion — five times the original forecast. What will total costs be when the span opens in 2013?

■ The high-speed "Chunnel" train between England and France had only 18 percent of forecast ridership its first year and actual costs exceeded estimates by 80 percent. In 2007 ridership was

only 55 percent of forecast.

These are not exceptions. A 2005 study by a Danish university professor found ridership overestimated on over 90 percent of rail projects. The average costs on 25 projects worldwide were 106 percent above estimates. A study of 44 projects showed average cost overruns of 45 percent.

Virtually all claimed high-speed rail benefits depend on ridership forecasts, which appear to be grossly overstated. So, resulting benefits are overstated:

■ Fewer passengers will shift to high-speed rail from planes and cars.

■ Savings in highway and runway construction costs will be far less than claimed. There will also be construction costs to build high-speed rail and operating costs to run underutilized trains.

■ Pollution reductions and energy savings will be less than predictions.

■ Operating surpluses will become deficits forcing subsidies, and bonds could default requiring a taxpayer bailout.

The California high-speed rail authority hypes benefits to convince voters to approve the bonds. It is not in their self-interest to identify potential problems or risks. They present a case based on over-optimistic projections to mislead well-intentioned but uninformed voters.

As November approaches we can also expect a media blitz, funded by special interests hoping to gain billions of dollars, urging bond passage. If history repeats and reality becomes far less than advertised, taxpayers will get stuck with an unwelcome tab. The impossible dream could evolve into a horrible nightmare. The "greater good" would go to special interests reaping huge profits.

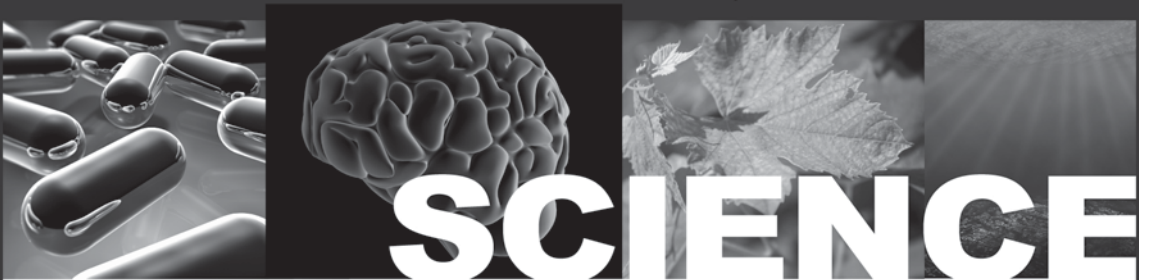
California has higher priorities such as education, health care and regional/local transportation needs to relieve gridlock commuters face every day.

Jack Ringham is a member of the Atherton Rail Committee and the Dumbarton Rail Citizens Advisory Panel.



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LETTERS

Continued from previous page

25 cents to spend for the week's treats.

Twice during our one- to two-month stay, my parents would drive down to the "country" and take me to the creamery. And after all these years, I've never met anyone yet who remembers it.

Can anyone help me out?

Diane Daube Sperisen
Southgate, Atherton

Inadequate publicity for Atherton meeting

Editor:

A second workshop to discuss upgrading Atherton's police station and town facilities will be held Wednesday, March 5, at the Jennings Pavillion at Holbrook-Palmer Park.

Notice for the sparsely attended first meeting Feb. 27 was limited to an article in the Almanac the day before. Councilman Charles Marsala's presentation was informative and a panel of representatives from Palo Alto, Portola Valley and Los Altos Hills shared their experiences in planning, financing and building new city centers. A critical component that was not discussed is what

Caltrain is going to do about high-speed trains and grade separations.

I am concerned that there has not been adequate notice of the second workshop March 5. While there is information about this meeting on the Almanac's online Web site; the town's Web site has not been updated about this meeting, I have not received notice via mail, nor has there been a notice in the printed newspaper.

Atherton's outreach to residents for town workshops is commendable; however, more must be done to ensure that all citizens are notified clearly and well in advance so they may attend, engage, and participate fully in the process of government.

I recommend that notices for these workshops and town meetings be distributed on the town Web site; via town-wide e-mail and recorded phone notification; by postcard mailers 10 to 14 days in advance; and through public notices in local newspapers 10 to 14 days in advance.

All notices should have a clear and precise agenda of what will be discussed at the workshop so citizens can come prepared and know what to expect.

Elizabeth Lewis
Alejandra Avenue, Atherton
General Plan Committee



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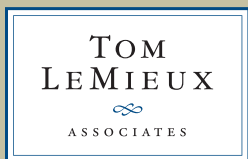
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To view these properties and others, please visit my website at www.tomlemieux.com



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