

LARRY ELLISON wins 60 percent cut in property taxes on his Woodside estate. Page 5

New Home & Garden Design Magazine

Inside this issue



The Almanac

THE HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER FOR MENLO PARK, ATHERTON,

PORTOLA VALLEY AND WOODSIDE

MARCH 26, 2008 | VOL. 43 NO. 30

www.TheAlmanacOnline.com

30 years of saving open space

Craig Britton is retiring as general manager of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District after 30 years and more than 50,000 acres saved. [Page 10]



92.7% Current



We bet you've never seen this headline in any recent media coverage of the real estate market. Yet it is fact—92.7 percent of all mortgages in the United States are current. What's more, the "sub-prime mortgage crisis" refers to a tiny portion of sub-prime mortgages. Sub-prime mortgages represent only a fraction of all mortgages—and the vast majority of these are current.

- *Percent of U.S. mortgages that are current*
92.7%
- *Percent of U.S. mortgages that are sub-prime*
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- *Percent of sub-prime mortgages that are current*
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Source: Mortgage Bankers Association, 3Q07 Report

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* *Source:* Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation

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Inside

This week's news, features and community events.

FIRST SHOT



Photo by Veronica Weber/The Almanac

Up and over

For Marco Gillespie-Brown, second from left, Park Fabian, far left, and Owen Tidmarsh, in light green shirt, part of the fun is the run over the crawl-through tunnel at Portola Valley's new playground — referred to as Little People's Park — at Town Center last Friday.

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On the cover

Craig Britton, shown here at the San Antonio Open Space Preserve, will retire April 11 after 30 years of helping to build the greenbelt that overlooks Silicon Valley. Photo by Veronica Weber. See story on **Page 10**.

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INVITES APPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING COMMISSION

District 5

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.woodsidesidtown.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.woodsidesidtown.org, or telephone the Town Clerk at (650) 851-6790. Deadline for applications is Monday, March 31, 2008, 5:00 P.M.

Published in THE ALMANAC on March 12, 19, 26, 2008.

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Why Roses Make Such Good Scents

Have you ever wondered what it is that makes women's knees go weak after taking a sniff of the fragrance given off by a dozen roses? The fact is that scientists have discovered that a substance called PEA (phenylethylamine) gives roses their special scent. PEA contains an amino acid that has been shown to slow the break down of beta-endorphins, hormones that elevate our spirits and that contribute to the euphoria of being in love. Chocolate also contains phenylethylamine, which helps explain why people equate chocolate with love. For these reasons, PEA is thought to be an aphrodisiac of sorts. Now you see why the gift of a dozen roses and box of chocolates is so welcomed by romantics.



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HINT: The scent of flowers activates an area of the brain associated with memory.

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VIBS - DELI

WINE

New Pinots

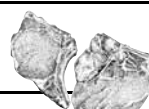


Spring has sprung. Is it time to put away our winter reds and break out the Pinots? Here are some recent arrivals that offer excellent quality at reasonable prices.

<u>2005 Moniz Family, Carneros</u>	\$19.99
<i>Sourced from a top Napa estate. 106 case production.</i>	
<u>2006 Patassy Vineyard, Russian River Valley</u>	\$24.99
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<u>2005 Foghorn, Monterey</u>	\$29.99
<i>Hand made in small fermenters. 300 cases produced.</i>	
<u>2006 Goldeneye "Migration," Anderson Valley</u>	\$31.99
<i>Supremely smooth and balanced.</i>	
<u>2006 Moshin Vineyards, Sonora Coast</u>	\$37.99
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Sale prices are net and do not qualify for further discounts.

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Local News

MENLO PARK | ATHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

Ellison wins lower taxes on Woodside estate

Larry Ellison will get a \$3 million refund; hit for school, town coffers.

By Marjorie Mader
Almanac Staff Writer

Woodside billionaire Larry Ellison will get an estimated \$3.06 million refund from property taxes he's paid since 2004 on his 23-acre Mountain Home Road estate, while local schools and the town of Woodside will see their share of annual tax revenue drop as a result of a recent 60 percent reduction in the assessed value of the lavishly developed property.

The reassessment will hit the Portola Valley School District the hardest: The district estimates a drop of \$250,000 to \$300,000 in tax revenue beginning this year because of the change.

Mr. Ellison had appealed a determination by the San Mateo County assessor's office of the value of his 745 Mountain Home Road property, which includes a main house, a two-bedroom guest house, three cottages, a barn converted into a gym, a five-acre man-made lake, two waterfalls and two bridges.

In a decision last December, the San Mateo County Assessment Appeals Board reduced the property's assessment from \$173 million in 2007 to an estimated \$69.7 million in 2008.

As a result, taxes on the property — billed at about \$1.86 million in 2007 — are estimated to be \$751,041 in 2008, according to Terrence Flinn, deputy county assessor. This represents an estimated \$1.1 million reduction in property taxes for this year.

The dispute

The appeal, filed by Mr. Ellison's Octopus Holdings LP, challenged the method of assessment used by the county, which was based on reproduction cost of the buildings and other improvements to the property.

Octopus Holdings, represented by attorney William R. Bennett of Bennett & Yee in San Francisco, argued that the assessment should be based on "the cost to replace an existing property with a property of equivalent utility as of a particular date" — an assessment that allows for discounting the value of many exotic features on the property, which is based on a Japanese emperor's 16th century estate, because they would have limited appeal to another buyer. (See related story.)

Mr. Bennett did not return the Almanac's phone calls seeking comment.

See **ELLISON**, page 8

Lavish estate has 'limited market appeal,' panel finds

By Renee Batti
Almanac News Editor

When it came down to it, the excesses and "limited market appeal" of billionaire Larry Ellison's 23-acre Woodside estate are what compelled a property assessment appeals board to issue a ruling that led to a \$1.1 million drop in Mr. Ellison's property taxes for the estate this year.

The San Mateo County Assessment Appeals Board last December agreed with Mr. Ellison's claim that the county's assessment of his Mountain Home Road property was \$100 million-plus more than its real value, and that, consequently, his annual tax bill was far too high.

It's a decision that maintains that the value of the lavish estate, which cost more than \$200 million to develop over a nine-year period, is greatly depreciated because it "suffers from significant functional obsolescence" — the result, in part, of the limited market appeal of its 16th century-style Japanese architecture, and its "structural 'overimprovements' and excessive landscaping/site improvements."

The ruling means that Mr. Ellison — named by Forbes.com

Taxes and assessed value 2005-2008

745 Mountain Home Road Woodside

YEAR	TOTAL TAXES	ASSESSED VALUE
2005	\$1,787,142	\$166,292,479
2006	\$1,831,360	\$169,618,328
2007	\$1,863,659	\$173,010,694
2008**	\$751,041	\$69,722,094

** Reflects decreases in assessed value of property and taxes as a result of the findings of the San Mateo County Appeals Board on Dec. 3, 2007.

earlier this month as the 14th wealthiest person in the world, with assets of \$25 billion — will not only pay about 60 percent less in taxes on the property from now on, but will also be refunded about \$3.06 million for taxes paid since 2004.

Although the refund will come from the county-wide property tax revenue coffers, the Portola Valley elementary and Sequoia high school districts, along with the town of Woodside, will be impacted annually by the loss of tax revenue beginning this year.

What's it worth?

The ruling centered on the question of whether the value of

the buildings and other developed elements on the property should be determined by their reproduction cost or on their replacement cost.

In general, the former refers to the cost of replicating the buildings and other features of the land's improvements in the same style and through the same processes. The latter refers to what it would cost to replace buildings and other features using an "equivalent utility" standard.

The appeal, filed by Mr. Ellison's Octopus Holdings LP, asserted that the replacement

See **ESTATE**, page 8

Woodside spars with county over parks

■ Huddart and Wunderlich parks could have more year-round facilities under plan.

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

If the town of Woodside had a kitchen sink available, some residents might be teaming up to throw it at San Mateo County in hopes of stopping or slowing down the implementation of a three-phase, 20-year master plan for Huddart and Wunderlich county parks.

The plan, which can be seen at the Parks Department's Web site, lists some 55 projects that would "concentrate development of new facilities in the already-developed portions of the parks (and) protect the wild character of the undeveloped portions of the parks."

Among the proposals: add lights to Folger Stables in Wunderlich Park to "enhance use during the winter months;" replace a seasonal picnic area in Huddart Park with an all-season community building; and continue to allow hikers, cyclists and equestrians to enter Huddart Park from rural Greer Road, where a back gate is now locked-open that used to be locked-closed, residents say.

The plan's environmental impact report (EIR) came up for discussion at the March 11 Woodside Town Council meeting ahead of an April 8 public hearing and possible certification of the EIR by the county Board of Supervisors. (The item has since been rescheduled for April 22.)

Threats were in the air at the council meeting. "I'm for litigating this thing into infinity, if necessary," Greer Road resident Jon Kapecs told the council. A fundraising campaign to pay for a lawsuit might be a good first step, he added.

Complaints "really ought to be taken seriously by the county, and if (they're) not, the town should make a stink about it," said Robert Susk, an attorney who represents Greer Road resident Elizabeth Flood and lives down the road himself.

"We ought to be able to hold them hostage some way or another to be able to stop this," said Councilman Dave Tanner.

Woodsiders live in a "rural buffer" zone and get a first-hand experience of the recreational interests of hundreds of thousands of people who live within



Photo by Dave Boyce/The Almanac

A mountain biker speeds by the back gate into Huddart Park from Greer Road in Woodside. The gate is locked open every day rather than locked closed, a point of contention for nearby residents criticizing San Mateo County's master plan for Huddart and Wunderlich parks.

10 miles, said Sam Herzberg, a senior planner with the county Parks Department. "We really tried to minimize the impact to these communities, but we are

not going to stop the use of these parks," he said in an interview.

If residents want to restrict

See **PARKS**, page 8

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Atherton to hold zoning workshop

Atherton residents have one final chance to weigh in on proposed revisions to the town's zoning code at a public workshop set for 7 p.m. Wednesday, April 9, at the Pavilion in Holbrook-Palmer Park, 150 Watkins Ave.

It will be the third workshop on the zoning code, a set of regulations that control a building's size, height, setback and a myriad of other development details.

At the workshop, participants can offer their opinions and hear a summary of feedback from the previous two meetings, which addressed building height, dormer windows, basement light wells, retaining walls and the calculation of floor area.

Over 50 people attended the previous workshops, said Christopher Jordan, a contract planner for the town.

Jim Dobbie, the chair of the Atherton General Plan Committee speaking at the March 19 City Council meeting, encouraged residents to attend, saying the previous meetings were well attended by contractors and developers but that residents have been under-represented.

Atherton's City Council decided to hire a consultant to help revise the zoning codes for clarity and consistency in the aftermath of a series of audits of the building department. Information about the workshop is online at www.ci.atherton.ca.us.

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Town of Woodside

Invites Applications For Committee

Trails Committee

(Meets second Thursday of each month, 3:00 p.m.; appointed for two - year term.)

The Committee reviews land divisions, subdivisions and conditional use permits for locations for equestrian, pedestrian and bicycle trails and makes recommendations to staff and to the Planning Commission.

Committees are volunteer positions and serve in an advisory capacity to the Town Council.

Interested residents may request information and applications Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 12 noon and 1 - 5:00 p.m. at Town Hall, 2955 Woodside Road, on the web site at www.woodsidesidetown.org, or telephone (650) 851-6790.

Deadline for applications is Monday, April 14, 2008, 5:00 p.m.

Published in THE ALMANAC on March 26, April 2, 9, 2008.

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CLASS	DAY	TIME	INSTRUCTOR	LOCATION	FEE	STARTING DATE
YOGA FOR EVERYONE						
10 Weeks	Mon.	9:30 AM - 10:30 AM	Carla Germano	Independence Hall	\$150	April 7
10 Weeks - Bring exercise mat and wear comfortable clothing	Tues.	9:30 AM - 10:30 AM		Wdse. Village Church Guild Hall	\$150	April 8
10 Weeks	Thurs.	9:00 AM - 10:00 AM		Wdse. Village Church Guild Hall	\$150	April 10
10 Weeks	Fri.	9:30 AM - 10:30 AM		Independence Hall	\$150	April 11
LOW IMPACT AEROBICS & JOYFLEX BODY TONING						
13 Weeks No class May 26	Mon.	7:45 AM - 9:00 AM	Joy Lopez	Independence Hall	\$425	April 7
Healthy Back, Cardio, Inner-Core Strengthening	Fri.	7:45 AM - 9:00 AM		Independence Hall	\$22 drop in	April 4
MUSIC TOGETHER						
10 Weeks	Tues.	8:30 AM - 9:15 AM	Sean Mendelson	Wdse. Library	\$140	April 8
Ages 0-4 Years	Tues.	9:15 AM - 10:00 AM		Wdse. Library	\$140	April 8
Creative Classes For Children	Tues.	10:15 AM - 11:00 AM		Wdse. Library	\$140	April 8
					\$45 mat. fee	
EXPRESSIVE ART WORKSHOP						
	Sat.	9:30 AM - 4:30 PM	Liz Amini-Holmes	Wdse. Village Church Guild Hall	\$320	April 26

Financial assistance available for children. Visit our Web Site at: www.woodsiderec.com

*** To Register or Fax: (650) 851-3534 ***

Ex-city manager exits Scottsdale post

By Rory Brown
Almanac Staff Writer

Jan Dolan, Menlo Park's city manager from 1990 to 2000, has been ousted from her post as city manager of Scottsdale, Arizona, according to news reports.

The Scottsdale City Council voted 7-0 March 18 to cut ties with Ms. Dolan, approving a severance agreement that will pay her more than \$160,000, according to a notice on the Arizona city's Web site.

Ms. Dolan served as Scottsdale city manager for almost eight years, filling the job after leaving Menlo Park in June 2000.

The separation agreement between the city of Scottsdale and Ms. Dolan stresses that the agreement is "voluntary," but stories in two newspapers — the Arizona Republic and the East Valley Tribune — say Ms. Dolan lost support from a majority of Scottsdale council members, and her departure was inevitable.

Ms. Dolan declined to discuss her departure from Scottsdale with The Almanac, according to a Menlo



Photo courtesy East Valley Tribune

Jan Dolan was city manager of Menlo Park from 1990 to 2000.

Park employee who contacted Ms. Dolan on The Almanac's behalf.

Ms. Dolan's departure comes less than a week after the March 13 announcement that former city manager Michael Bedwell died after a fight with heart and lung problems. Mr. Bedwell was 77, and served as Menlo Park city manager from 1964 until Ms. Dolan took over in 1990.

Dolan's tenure

In Menlo Park, Ms. Dolan

was known for her upfront management style, and work on major projects such as the Belle Haven redevelopment program and the formation of the San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority.

"[Ms. Dolan] was an excellent manager, but she was tough," said Pat Carson, the executive secretary to the city manager since 1981. "She came in on the heels of [Mr. Bedwell], who was so warm and fuzzy, and it was tough for people to adjust to her 'no nonsense' approach to things. ... But she did a lot of tremendous things for Menlo Park during her tenure here."

"I liked working with [Ms. Dolan]," said Dee Tolles, a council member from 1992 to 1996. "She was extremely upfront, but she always shot right down the middle. ... I didn't know anyone she didn't get along with."

Steve Schmidt, who served on the council from 1992 to 2000, said some people criticized Ms. Dolan for being "too friendly" to developers, but he noted that he "didn't have any problems with her." ■

New Derry project headed to commission

By Rory Brown
Almanac Staff Writer

The Derry condo-commercial project proposed for downtown Menlo Park will re-enter the public spotlight next week, with the Planning Commission set to consider the 108-condo project at its March 31 meeting.

The commission will hold a public hearing on the project in the council chambers at the Civic Center, between Laurel and Alma streets. It's the only agenda item for the meeting, which begins at 7 p.m.

The project, proposed by the San Mateo-based O'Brien Group, includes plans for one-, two-, and three-bedroom condominiums, about 25,000 square feet of commercial space, and a 3,000-square-foot public plaza on a 3.4-acre site bordered by Derry Lane and Oak Grove Avenue, between El Camino Real and the Caltrain tracks.

Commissioners are expected to make a recommendation to the City Council whether to approve the project.

The project is a scaled-back version of a 135-condo development

approved for the same site by the Planning Commission and City Council in 2006. The residents' group Menlo Park Tomorrow led a signature drive against that project, and the council opted to let the residents' group and the developer negotiate plans for the new, less-dense development, rather than put the original project to a city-wide vote.

If the Planning Commission and City Council approve the new Derry project, approval of the previous project would be rescinded. ■

Menlo Park may buy carbon credits from PG&E

By Rory Brown
Almanac Staff Writer

The Menlo Park City Council is considering getting into the world of carbon credits.

On Tuesday, March 25, council members are scheduled to weigh a proposal originally floated by Councilwoman Kelly Fergusson that the city join the Pacific Gas & Electric Corp. ClimateSmart program.

Under the program, the city

would pay a surcharge to PG&E based on the amount of gas and electricity used in city facilities from April to December. These payments, known as "carbon credits," would total \$15,000 over the nine-month period.

PG&E would invest the funds in various carbon-cutting measures, including buying conservation easements to save forests from logging and building facilities to capture methane from the state's dairy farms

"This is an opportunity for us to

do something in the short term," Ms. Fergusson said. "We can show leadership and get measurable [greenhouse gas] reductions."

Four California cities — Millbrae, Rocklin, Windsor and Riverbank — have signed up for the program.

Council members will consider Ms. Fergusson's proposal as a regular business item at the March 25 meeting. The meeting is set to start at 7 p.m. In the council chambers at the Civic Center, between Laurel and Alma streets. ■



NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING AND NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING CITY OF MENLO PARK PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING OF APRIL 7, 2008

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

PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS

Use Permit/Christopher Tripoli/203 Robin Way: Request for a use permit to demolish an existing single-story, single-family residence and construct a new two-story, single-family residence on a substandard lot in regard to lot area, width, and depth in the R-1-U (Single-Family Urban) zoning district.

Use Permit/Kohler Associates Architects/642 Harvard Avenue: Request for a use permit to demolish an existing one-story, single-family residence and detached garage and construct two new two-story, single-family residences and for excavation within the required side yard setbacks for basement light wells on a lot that is substandard with regard to lot width in the R-2 (Low Density Apartment) zoning district.

Use Permit/Lisa Stahr/506 Santa Cruz Avenue: Request for a use permit to expand an existing veterinary hospital (Scout's House) into vacant tenant space in an existing commercial building that is nonconforming with regard to parking in the C-4 (General Commercial, Applicable to El Camino Real) zoning district.

PUBLIC MEETING ITEMS

None

NOTICE IS HEREBY FURTHER GIVEN that said Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on public hearing items in the Council Chambers of the City of Menlo Park, located at 701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park, on Monday, April 7, 2008, 7:00 p.m. or as near as possible thereafter, at which time and place interested persons may appear and be heard thereon. If you challenge this item in court, you may be limited to raising only those issues you or someone else raised at the public hearing described in this notice, or in written correspondence delivered to the City of Menlo Park at, or prior to, the public hearing.

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

Si usted necesita más información sobre este proyecto, por favor llame al 650-330-6702, y pregunte por un asistente que hable español.

DATED: March 20, 2008
Deanna Chow, Senior Planner
Planning Commission

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Estate has 'limited market appeal'

ESTATE

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cost approach should have been used instead of the reproduction cost approach favored by the county.

The county had assessed the property by determining the cost of reproducing its buildings and other significant developments — amenities that required extraordinary levels of craftsmanship and cash to develop.

Based on a Japanese emperor's 16th century country estate, the development includes "a five-acre man-made lake, two waterfalls, two bridges, extensive irrigation and electrical systems and substantial plantings and numerous trees, many quite mature," according to the appeals board's ruling. It also describes a main house with two wings connected by a breezeway, and a lower-level garage, game room, media room, sauna and bathrooms.

There are also three cottages, a two-bedroom guest house, and a former barn that now houses a gymnasium and exercise area, the appeals board noted.

The original cost estimate of the project was set at \$40 million in the mid-1990s, but by 1999, the estimate had risen to \$60 million.

That figure proved to be hugely optimistic, however. Deputy county assessor Terrence Flinn said the final cost of the project exceeded \$200 million.

In 2004, the county assessed the value of improvements to the property at \$149.8 million; that's the assessed value excluding the value of the land, which was not in dispute.

Mr. Flinn said the \$149.8 million figure represented a concession to the property owner, who argued that the actual final cost of the project was excessively high due to mistakes made during the nine-year building process — a process that called for rare skills and innovative techniques that were sometimes unsuccessful.

The attorney for Octopus Holdings, William R. Bennett of Bennett & Yee in San Francisco, didn't return the Almanac's phone calls before press time.

The ruling

In ruling that the county should have considered replacement costs rather than reproduction costs to determine the property's value, the appeals board cited the Assessor's Handbook rule stating that "when property suffers from functional obsolescence or other depreciation, the reproduction cost approach is less reliable than the replacement cost approach,



unless the depreciation can be accurately measured."

The replacement cost, it noted, "is the cost to replace an existing property with a property of equivalent utility as of a particular date. Such an approach, therefore accounts for functional obsolescence."

In supporting its opinion that the estate is functionally obsolete, the appeals panel cited: "the limited market for high-end luxury homes; the limited market appeal of 16th century Japanese architecture and grounds; the limited amenities of the main residential structure due to its design and layout; and structural 'overimprovements' and excessive landscaping/site improvements, both of which are costly to maintain."

The board noted that "structures were 'overimproved' insofar as they contain costly amenities and their construction involves especially costly processes, neither of which would be valued in the marketplace." These include hand-crafted, untreated wooden shingles, thatched roofs that were "specially and laboriously created and treated," and the "ground-up" construction, which required that structures be tented "to prevent water damage during the extended building process."

The panel also cited the maintenance costs for the property's "excessive landscaping" — estimated at about \$4.2 million a year.

Ruling's impact?

Mr. Flinn, the deputy county assessor, said that his office disagreed that the Woodside estate suffered from depreciation. "We thought that what was built was valuable," he said.

Challenges to the county's assessment of property value happen from time to time, he noted, and he doesn't view the Ellison ruling as a precedent to be concerned about.

"Each (case) has its own argument," he said, adding that this one was argued primarily on the style of the development and its consequent decline in "full value." ■

Woodside spars with county over parks

PARKS

continued from page 5

access to Greer Road, they need to make it a private road, Mr. Herzberg said, adding that the county is not opposed to such a step.

Part of the road is already private, but an easement allows public access, Town Manager Susan George told the Almanac. "I'm not sure the residents are interested in it becoming a private road because they would have to pay to maintain it," she said.

Ms. George said that neither the master plan nor the EIR adequately address potential year-round increases in traffic and noise and the impacts on Woodside's rural atmosphere. "We just want to know what (the impacts) will be ... and how the county is going to mitigate that."

"I think that what people have been trying to do is to get the EIR to address these other issues," Woodside Councilman Peter Mason told The Almanac. Park officials tend not to see beyond park property lines when considering the impacts of this master plan, Mr. Mason said.

More reviews ahead

Woodside's specific issues will be addressed in future public hearings, but not in documents such as a master plan that is intended as an overview, Mr. Herzberg said repeatedly.

"It's almost like (Woodside) are getting themselves more upset than they need to be," he added. "As we do projects, we're going to go through a process of working with the public. Every project is going to have additional environmental review."

ELLISON

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Mr. Flinn, the deputy county assessor, said the reduction in the property's assessment and tax bill is retroactive to May 1, 2004. The appeals board set the assessed value of the property for that date at \$64.4 million, as opposed to the county's \$163 million assessment.

The reductions in assessed value amount to \$100 million in 2005, \$102 million for 2006, and \$104 million for 2007, Mr. Flinn said.

Although local school and special districts, and the town of Woodside, will be affected by the future decline in tax revenues, they won't bear the brunt of the \$3.06 million refund due Mr. Ellison. Instead, the refund will be deducted proportionately from the future tax revenues disbursed to all gov-



A hiker steps out of Huddart Park at the back gate on Greer Road, an avenue that residents say is getting too much park traffic, including what one resident called a constant stream of ranger vehicles and garbage trucks.

Photo by Dave Boyce/The Almanac

If the supervisors certify the master plan's EIR, would that imply that individual projects would be evaluated with a mitigated negative declaration, which doesn't have the scope or detail of an EIR?

"The whole point of doing (a negative declaration) is that there is some impact that needs to be addressed," Mr. Herzberg said. If a negative declaration is inadequate to a particular impact, a focused EIR may be necessary, he added.

As individual projects come up for action, Woodside will not have veto power, but "we're certainly sensitive" to the town's concerns, he said.

Missing notifications

Ms. George said she could appreciate "how hard the (county) staff works," but noted feeling frustrated when notification on a public meeting that affects

Woodside "is late or missing."

Mr. Herzberg disputed the idea of missing or late notifications, since every interested party is notified through the mail at the same time. Asked if he had received similar complaints from other jurisdictions, he said "No."

Ms. George said she plans to meet with Mr. Herzberg and Parks Department Director David Holland before the EIR goes to the supervisors.

Will the council file suit to stop the EIR being certified? "I don't think the council is eager at all to litigate this," she said. "I think that we're hoping to work with the county." ■

INFORMATION

To view the master plan, go to www.co.sanmateo.ca.us, click on the Parks Department link on the left, then on Park Planning.

ernmental districts in San Mateo County, said Kanchan Charan, the county's deputy controller.

That's the sanctioned method for such a refund under Assembly Bill 8 — a "share the pain" approach that spreads out the impact of large tax refunds among a larger base, according to Mr. Charan and Mr. Flinn.

Local impact

The Woodside property is located in the Portola Valley School District, although children from that area have the option of going to either Portola Valley schools or Woodside School.

Tim Hanretty, assistant superintendent of the Portola Valley district, calculates the impact as a \$250,000 to \$300,000 loss to the district in the 2008 tax year. The \$300,000 figure translates into the cost of almost three teachers.

The revenue loss is significant because the elementary school district faces a \$1 million shortfall for 2008, zero property revenue growth, and an increase in enrollment from 714 students to 750.

About 87 percent of the district's budget comes from property taxes, parcel taxes, the Portola Valley Schools Foundation, grants and contributions.

Susan George, Woodside town manager and director of finance, said the town received about \$130,000 in tax revenues from Mr. Ellison's property in 2007. Because of the reassessment, that figure is likely to drop to under \$53,000, she estimated.

The Sequoia Union High School District will lose approximately \$62,000 in revenue this year because of the reassessment, said Ed LaVigne, the district's assistant superintendent for administrative services. ■

Neighbors at odds with district over Oak Knoll School plans

By Andrea Gemmet
Almanac Staff Writer

God is in the details, as the saying goes. Details about new construction slated to begin at Oak Knoll elementary school in Menlo Park this summer are spelled out in the 61-page draft environmental review, called a negative declaration, that's currently being circulated for public comment.

It's one of the last steps on the road to approval for the project, which was authorized by the Menlo Park City School District's board in September.

The report for Oak Knoll school details trees to be removed, "minimal" improvements to utilities, traffic studies, pollution prevention measures, and drainage. The public has 30 days from the March 11 release date of the draft negative declaration to raise questions or concerns that must be answered in the final document.

For Rich Rollins, who lives near the school, the report hasn't assuaged his list of concerns, including impacts from traffic, drainage, noise and the loss of as many as eight mature trees.

Mr. Rollins is part of a group of nearby residents who are lobbying the Menlo Park City Council to intervene on the neighborhood's behalf. The City Council put discussion of the Oak Knoll negative declaration on the agen-



Almanac map by Gail Thoreson

New construction planned for Oak Knoll School in Menlo Park has some nearby neighbors lobbying for changes.

da of its April 1 meeting.

The project is intended to replace the 14 portable buildings on campus, freeing up playground and field space by constructing a two-story classroom building, and modernizing existing classrooms.

Mr. Rollins' group opposes the plan to build a two-story multipurpose building at the north end of the school near Oak Avenue, a change in the school district's original plan for the campus, he said. Neighbors would like to see the building changed to a sunken

footprint, so it won't be so tall compared to surrounding homes, Mr. Rollins said.

The group is also upset over the fate of an enormous valley oak near the existing playground, slated for removal to make way for a new, 22-car parking lot that would be accessed via a driveway on Oak Avenue. They'd like to see the parking lot moved to another spot, saving a tree that's estimated to be 300 years old, he said.

Ram Duriseti, another nearby neighbor, said the group has little hope that officials from the Menlo Park City School District will consider a compromise plan they've put together that would save oak trees and lessen the school's impact on the neighborhood. Neighbors have been unfairly categorized as "a shrill minority that is against the educational needs of kids," he said.

"One might ask why the school board should voluntarily compromise when they have the ability to ram their preferences down the proverbial throat?" Mr. Duriseti said in an e-mail to the Almanac. "One would hope that responsible civil agencies would seek broad consensus without compulsion, simply out of a sense of responsibility and decency."

A negative declaration is a more modest level of review than an environmental impact report. It's reserved for projects that show that any negative impacts can be mitigated. ■

Atherton fails to notify public of new laws, resident claims

By Andrea Gemmet
Almanac Staff Writer

For a couple of 28-year Atherton residents, timing is everything.

Larry and Jeanne Lowry agonized over remodeling their Stockbridge Avenue home for 10 years, but on May 16, 2007, after finalizing their plans — but just before submitting them to the Atherton Building Department — a key building policy changed.

As a result, the Lowrys' remodeling plans went from perfectly legal to perfectly impossible because they could no longer keep a couple of their existing home's nonconforming rooms — the linchpin of their building plans.

Attorneys for Mr. Lowry allege that Atherton violated state law by not publishing an announcement in the local newspaper to

notify the public that the ordinance might be changed.

Atherton's city attorney said that the town fulfills its legal obligations by posting notices on town bulletin boards, such as the one outside the Town Council Chambers, and is not required to run newspaper ads.

The Atherton City Council could resolve the Lowrys' situation at next month's council meeting, when it is set to re-hear the couple's appeal of the building department's denial of their remodeling plans.

The council may also choose to go above and beyond current noticing requirements, said Atherton City Attorney Marc Hynes.

"With all the people who come in say, 'You never tell us, you need to do a better job to get the word out,' the City Council might make a determination to

start to publish (ads)," Mr. Hynes said. "I wouldn't be surprised."

Legal ads

As a longtime resident who makes a point of reading the local newspapers and keeping up with what's going on in Atherton, Mr. Lowry said he was shocked that the new ordinance was passed without either him or his architect knowing about it.

According to Mr. Lowry and his attorneys, Atherton is circumventing public hearing notification requirements by posting notices on town bulletin boards instead of buying legal ads in newspapers that circulate in Atherton, such as The Almanac, the Palo Alto Daily News and the Palo Alto Weekly.

"We see so many (legal notices), we didn't notice they were all from Palo Alto, Woodside, Portola Valley and Menlo Park," Mr. Lowry said.

Mr. Hynes said the law clearly says that publishing legal ads is

See **LOWRY**, page 14



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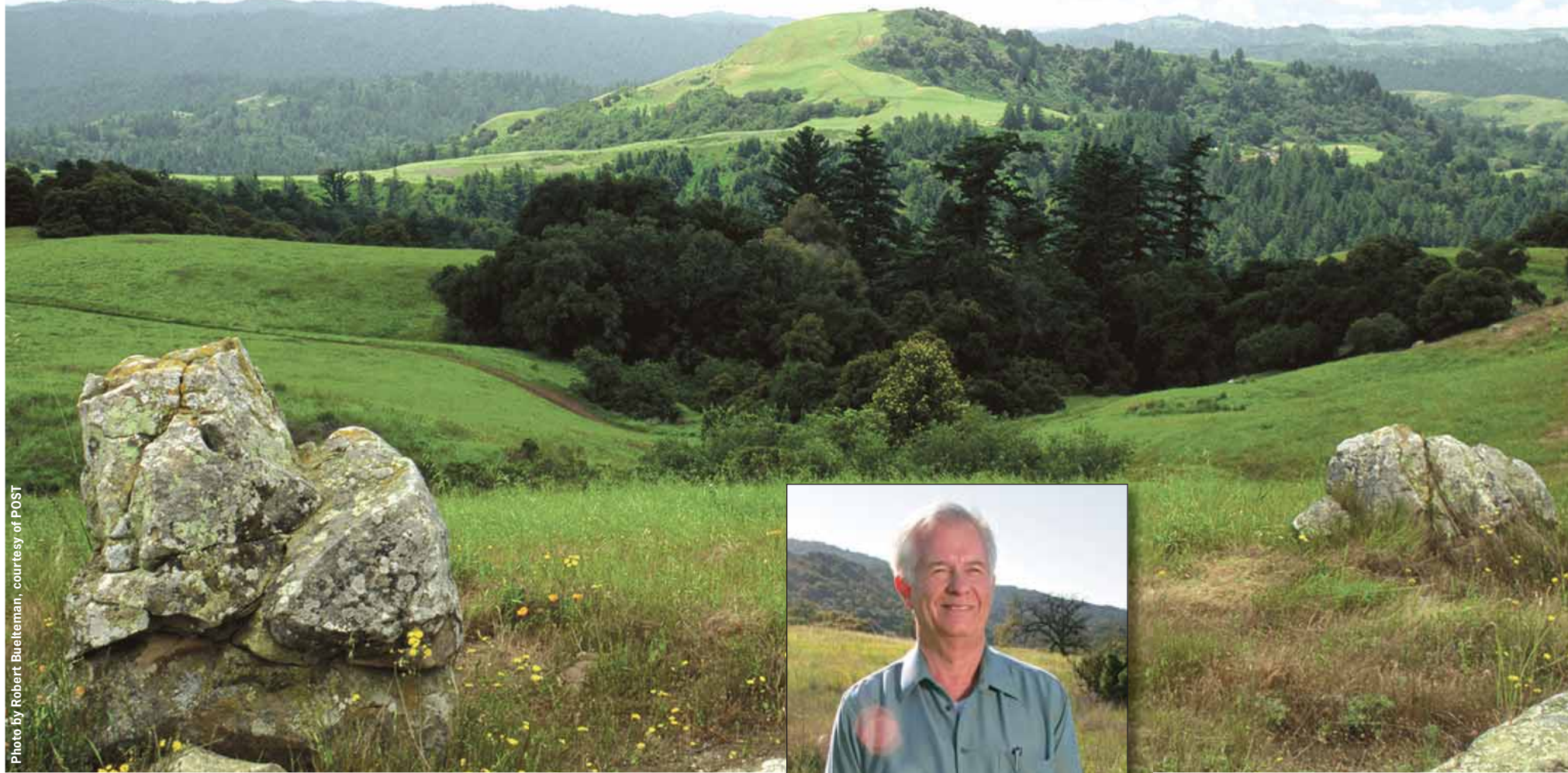


Photo by Robert Bueteman, courtesy of POST

By **Marion Softky**
Almanac Staff Writer

Craig Britton's legacy is almost 60,000 acres of open space in the Peninsula's foothills, mountains, Bayfront and Coastsides

When Craig Britton came to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District as land acquisition manager in 1977, it owned approximately 6,000 acres of land in the hills of Santa Clara County. As he retires 30 years later as general manager, the pioneering agency expects to top 60,000 acres of open space preserved on the Peninsula by the end of 2008.

As a result, the oasis of open lands in the hills, mountains and Coastsides of the San Francisco Peninsula is almost unique for major metropolitan areas around the world. Windy Hill, Edgewood Park, Purissima Canyon, and much of Skyline ridge are now preserved and open to the public because of Mr. Britton's negotiating skills.

"Craig's legacy is the greenbelt above Silicon Valley," says Mary Davey, one of the founders of the district and a current member of its board. "It's the truth. It was his ability to find ways to buy the most land for the least amount of money."

The saga of the open space district — aided for 30 years by Mr. Britton — and its sister agency, the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), is the story of how the San Francisco Peninsula did not follow the development path of Daly City or Los Angeles: subdivisions, threaded by freeways and expressways, sprawling over hills and valleys to the beaches and bluffs of the Pacific.

In the 1960s, environmental groups, such as the Sierra Club and the new Committee for Green Foothills, supported by



Photo by Veronica Weber/The Almanac

the eloquent voice of the late author Wallace Stegner, began fighting the seemingly inevitable spread of developments. They fought subdivision by subdivision; they won some, lost some.

Increasingly they realized, as Mr. Britton says, "Once a piece of property is developed, it's never open space again."

At that time, Skyline ridge was almost entirely in private ownership. I can remember, personally, looking at the green hills and wondering where I could take the kids for a picnic. The answer was Huddart Park. Almost everything else was privately owned — and subject to the wishes and intentions of its owner.

Around 1970, a group of environmentalists centered in Palo Alto began looking for a way to avoid the constant battles over development: buy the land — or "fee

simple," as Wallace Stegner said. They planned a government agency, similar to the East Bay Regional Park District, that could levy taxes, buy land, and manage it for open space and public recreation.

In 1972, voters in northern Santa Clara County formed what is now the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District. In 1976, voters in San Mateo County, from San Carlos south, voted to join the district.

In 1977, Mr. Britton joined the district as land acquisition manager. He became assistant general manager to general manager Herb Grench in 1979; and then in 1994, Mr. Britton became general manager.

"Some very forward-thinking people started the district," Mr. Britton says in a farewell interview.

Audrey Rust, president of POST, adds, "Craig built on a vision to make the district grow beyond the dreams of its founders."

Early days

Mr. Britton came aboard during one of the district's noisiest controversies. It was purchasing 750 acres off Page Mill Road that was occupied by a large commune called The Land. The property is now part of the Monte Bello Open Space Preserve.

A substantial chunk of his first seven years was occupied by demolishing numerous buildings and platforms built by members of The Land, and in dispersing close to 100 commune members — who fought on for years. Some are still telling their stories online at theland.wikispaces.com.

Counting

District's next general manager brings new skills to open space position

By Marion Softky

Almanac Staff Writer

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District will enter a new era April 14, when Stephen Abbors takes over as its third general manager.

Mr. Abbors, a trained biologist who has managed 28,000 acres of watershed lands for the East Bay Municipal Utility District, will increasingly focus on managing the nearly 56,000 acres the open space district already owns, as well as acquiring new land for open space.

"I'm very excited," says Mr. Abbors, winding up his job in Oakland. "My task is to clearly understand the vision of the board, the public and staff. I'll take a different look at programs. I want to get in touch with community and use groups, and get to know their issues."

"It's going to be a very, very steep learning curve."

Retiring General Manager Craig Britton welcomes his replacement. "I came out of real estate and land purchase; Steve's background is biology and resource management," he says. "In reality, resource management is more important."

Mr. Abbors' experience fits well with his new job. He's worked on the "full gamut" in the East Bay, he says, including land acquisition, grazing, trails, water quality, endangered species, recreation, and fire control.

Mr. Abbors, an enthusiastic gardener whose wife comes from an old farm family, particularly looks forward to working with the farming community on the coast to promote farming and grazing on district lands. "The mission of the district and the mission of the farming community are mutually supportive," he says.

The district's next big purchase of the historic Mindego Ranch, just west of Skyline and north of Page Mill Road, will give Mr. Abbors a chance to transfer his skills.

The district is in the process of buying the 1,047-acre ranch — highlighted by landmark Mindego Hill — from the Peninsula Open Space Trust. Former owner Chris True will be moving his cattle herd — including his rodeo Brahma bulls — to Idaho in the fall; the district will be working with neighbors to prepare a plan for future uses and recreation on the signature property.

Mr. Abbors is in the process of moving his family from Walnut Creek to Los Gatos. "It's very important to wake up each morning to local news," he says.

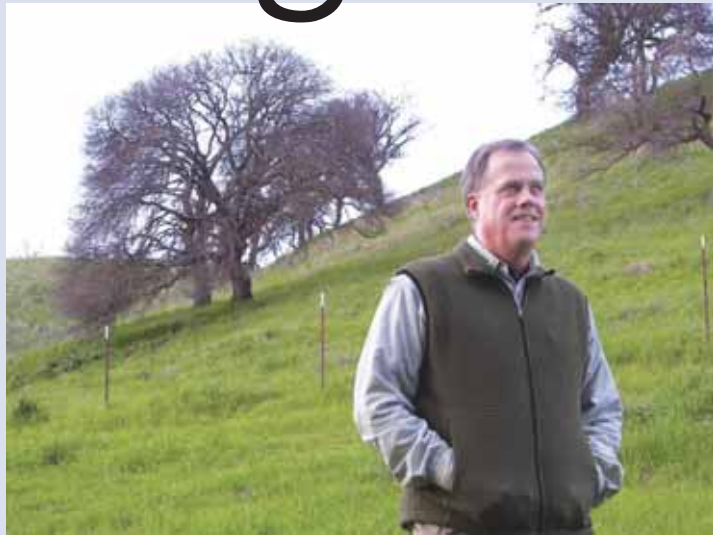
An avid hiker, Mr. Abbors expects to develop a hands-on, feet-on relationship with the district. "I hiked 1,300 miles last year," he says. "I love to be out in nature."

Mr. Britton will continue consulting for the new general manager on specific projects. Eventually, he and his wife Carlene plan to move to Port Townsend, Washington, where they have bought an 1871 Victorian house to fix up. "The nearest freeway is 30 miles away," he says. "It's an opportunity to get involved with a small community."

Mr. Britton admits what he would like to do if he were still general manager. "I would like to shoot for 100,000 acres," he says. "But to accomplish that, the district would have to do a funding measure. We've never done that in 35 years."

Asked for his advice to his successor, Mr. Britton says, "Listen to your heart, and get out on the land enough to renew your spirit."

Mr. Abbors gives high praise to Mr. Britton. "What a legacy Craig has left!" he says. "I look forward to continuing that legacy." ■



Courtesy of Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Mindego Ranch, topped by landmark Mindego Hill, is in the process of being purchased from POST by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District. Key players in acquiring the 1,047-acre cattle ranch and planning its future are retiring General Manager Craig Britton, left, and incoming General Manager Stephen Abbors, above.

"That consumed a lot of time," Mr. Britton comments.

Also in 1977, the district initiated the formation of POST, a private, nonprofit land trust that could raise private money, purchase and manage land, and operate with a lot more privacy and flexibility than a government agency.

The landmark Windy Hill, rising above Portola Valley and long a target for development, was the first big success of the long-running partnership between the open space district and POST. Bob Augsburg, POST's first executive director, negotiated the gift by Hare, Brewer & Kelley of 537 acres to POST, Mr. Britton reports. In 1981, POST sold it to MROSD for \$1.7 million, half of what it was worth. That money allowed POST to buy more land.

"That put us on the map," says Mr. Britton.

Another early success was the purchase in 1978 of 386-acre Long Ridge Ranch, west of Skyline and south of Page Mill Road. With Pulitzer Prize-winning author Wallace Stegner as one of the owners, the district bought it for \$500,000, or 50 percent of market value.

"What a bargain! At today's prices that's like free," Mr. Britton says. "Looking out over Butano Ridge and the Pacific Ocean, it doesn't get any more beautiful!"

Harry Turner of Ladera, one of the first district directors from San Mateo County, praises Mr. Britton for his creative ways of negotiating and assembling financial pack-

ages — combining grants with resources from POST and district funds — to make purchases possible.

"Craig was a lynchpin; he was creative and persistent," Mr. Turner says. "He found highly efficient ways to use public resources."

Mr. Britton came to the district with real estate skills honed by years of service as a right-of-way agent for Caltrans. "I was essentially purchasing land for free-ways," he says.

Born in Winfield, Kansas, Craig grew up in San Francisco, and earned a degree in business administration from San Francisco State University.

In the late 1960s, Mr. Britton encountered the burgeoning environmental movement. When he was still at Caltrans, he got to write an analysis of a proposed freeway over Highway 17 to Santa Cruz.

"What made Santa Cruz special was not being able to commute over the hill," he says with hindsight. "If we built a full freeway, I thought it would ruin Santa Cruz County. It would become a bedroom community."

Mr. Britton recommended against a freeway; he suggested a monorail instead. And he took a job with Santa Cruz County.

In Santa Cruz County, Mr. Britton broadened his real estate experience by purchasing land, not just for highways, but for libraries, parks and sewer lines. He bought and restored a Victorian house within walking distance of the beach.

After a short stint with the Marin County Open Space District, Mr. Britton accepted

a job with MROSD while on vacation in Amsterdam. "I didn't like Marin that much," he says.

Now he lives in Los Altos, less than a mile from his office, with his second wife, Carlene Bruins. They married in 1992 when she was in charge of community programs at the district. Now she's in charge of Web content for Foothill College.

Thirty years after Mr. Britton joined the district, the joint accomplishments are impressive. The district newsletter gives some more numbers:

■ Eight open space preserves have grown to 26.

■ The staff has increased from 13 employees to just over 100.

Mr. Britton often jokes that when he joined the district in 1977, it had 6,000 acres and \$12 million in the bank; now it owns almost 56,000 acres and is \$130.2 million in debt. He says, "They aren't making any more land, but they print money every day."

Highlights/controversies

Relaxed in his office, Mr. Britton reviews the successes, challenges and controversies surrounding his 30 years of preserving and managing open space for the district.

An early setback was the passage in 1978 of Proposition 13, which cut property taxes to cities, schools and other tax-supported agencies.

"All of a sudden the rug was pulled out from under us," Mr. Britton recalls. The eventual upshot has been a reduction in property

tax revenue of about 30 percent, he says.

Mr. Britton takes pride in his role in negotiating the preservation of two major properties in San Mateo County: Edgewood County Park and Natural Preserve, formerly a surplus state college site bordering Redwood City; and the Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve, once the Hassler Health Home, San Francisco's abandoned tuberculosis sanitarium in the San Carlos hills.

While spring wildflowers are now attracting visitors to both the Edgewood and Pulgas preserves, the negotiations leading to their acquisition were long, complex, and contentious. Edgewood was acquired in 1980 with a federal grant; Pulgas, in 1983 after a lawsuit.

"The city and county of San Francisco was the hardest to deal with as a landowner," Mr. Britton still sighs.

The biggest controversies focused on The List, the nuns, and, more recently, the district's annexation of the entire Coastsides.

When the district was forced by state law to publish a list of all properties it might negotiate with in closed session, it released a single list of all 600 properties in the acquisition area.

The resulting uproar stirred the fears of Skyline property owners already suspicious of a government agency that was buying property and opening it to the public — and had the power to take property by eminent domain.

Continued on next page

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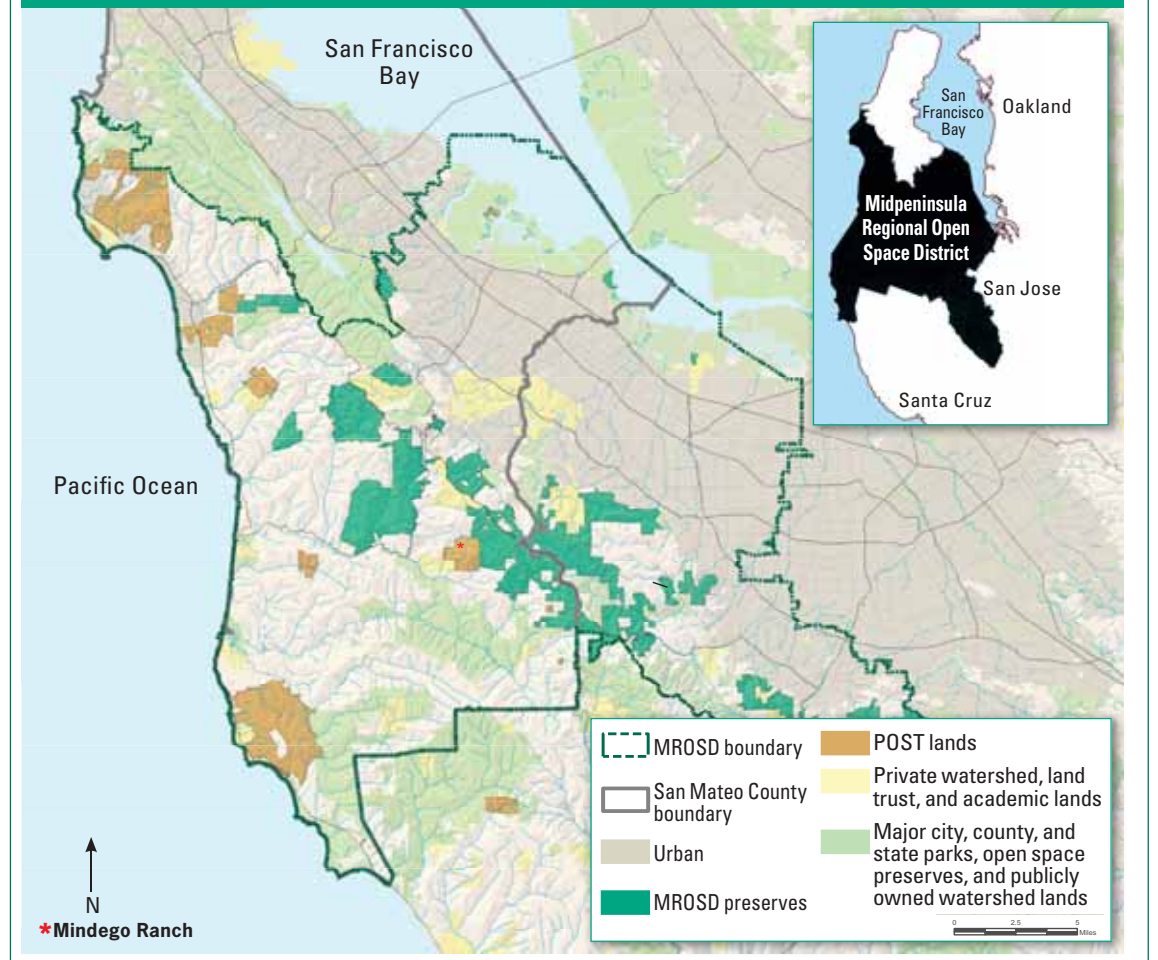
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Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Preserves and Other Land Holdings



Courtesy of Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District extends from the Pacific Ocean to the Bay, and south to Los Gatos. It owns and manages 56,377 acres in 26 open space preserves.

Continued from previous page

Mr. Britton remembers the controversy ruefully. “It introduced a lot of people who didn’t know each other,” he says. And it stirred fears that the district would condemn their property, and open Skyline to hordes of people and traffic.

The district responded by adopting a policy in 1986 that it would not condemn private homes. And it began to develop a good neighbor policy to work with neighbors of its preserves on issues affecting them.

Over the years, the mood on Skyline seems to have calmed, and many residents appreciate that the district is preserving land, and slowing development. “We were getting used to each other,” Mr. Britton says. “It takes 20 years to develop a relationship like this.”

Larry Hassett, a Skyline resident and owner of hardware stores in Palo Alto and Half Moon Bay, was among the early critics. Now he’s a member of the district board, where he brings a Skyline perspective and strong support for the good neighbor policy.

“I don’t see the animosity between the district and its neighbors,” he says. “On Skyline ridge, the district has become very much appreciated.”

Another flash point was the proposal to build a convent for a group of elderly Russian Orthodox nuns on a parcel of prize open space high on Skyline, south of Route 92. The district started to condemn the property, and after much bad publicity, settled with the nuns, and acquired a new open space preserve.

“It was a terrible place for nuns,” Mr. Britton says. “That was one of the most difficult things I ever did. But I’d have to recommend it again.”

Meanwhile, the district has continued a more low-key approach, buying open space lands when they come on the market. “When people are ready to sell, we’re ready to buy,” says Mr. Britton.

POST has also been preserving properties, some 60,000 acres. It has sold some to MROSD, often at bargain rates. Some POST properties have gone to state and national parks, some to private owners with restrictions to maintain farming and open space, and POST is managing some, according to Audrey Rust, president and CEO of POST.

POST has worked with MROSD and Mr. Britton on a number of its signature properties, Ms. Rust says. Besides Windy Hill, POST has been involved with Purisima Creek Redwoods, Bear Creek Redwoods in Santa Clara County, Skyline Open Space Preserve, La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve, and now the Driscoll Ranch, a working cattle ranch the district now owns and is managing.

Annexing the Coastside

Annexing 220 square miles of the San Mateo County Coastside in 2004 was a huge step in the district’s efforts to save open space. “We thought the coastal annexation would take two years and \$200,000,” says Mr. Britton ruefully. “It took seven years and \$2 million.”

Two years after the annexation was completed, the controversy — which mirrored some of the earlier fears on Skyline — seems to have subsided, although the last lawsuit has been appealed to the California Supreme Court, Mr. Britton says.

He hopes the Coastside will grow to appreciate the district’s efforts to save open space and agriculture as the residents of Skyline have. “I hope it will be shorter on the Coast,” he says.

Jack Olsen, executive administrator of the San Mateo County Farm Bureau, sounds a positive note on relations between the farmers and the district. He praises the district for maintaining grazing on the Driscoll Ranch and reintroducing it on the Big Dipper Ranch. “Now we have a very positive relation,” he says. “Before, there was a lot of concern and mistrust.”

Mr. Britton has high hopes for the district’s role on the Coastside. “To have that beautiful and idyllic rural agricultural community on the Coast, next to an urban area — I think it’s unparalleled,” he says. “I actually consider that one of my legacies.” ■

INFORMATION

For more information on the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, call 691-1200 or go to openspace.org. For more information on POST, call 854-7696 or go to openspacetrust.org.

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BICYCLE COMMITTEE

Meets third Thursday of each month, 7:30 p.m.; appointment for a two-year term.

The Committee advises and recommends to the Town Council on the policies for planning, developing, maintaining, and usage of Town’s bikeways system and provides an open forum for bicycle issues.

CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Meets fourth Monday of each month, 6:00 p.m.; appointment for a two-year term.

The Committee advises and assists the Town Council, Planning Commission, and staff on conservation, open space, noise, public services and facilities as pertaining to the elements of the Town’s General Plan.

OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

Meets fourth Thursday of each month at 5:00 P.M.; appointment for a two-year term.

The Committee advises and assists the Council and staff in implementing the policies and goals of the Open Space and Conservation Elements of the General Plan, specifically with respect to acquisition and maintenance of conservation easements and open space preservation.

RECREATION COMMITTEE

Meets first Thursday of each month, 7:30 p.m.; appointments for three-year and one-year terms.

The Committee guides the activities of the community recreation programs.

Committees are volunteer positions and serve in an advisory capacity to the Town Council,

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, on the web site at www.woodsidetown.org, or telephone (650) 851-6790. Deadline for applications is Monday, March 31, 2008, 5:00 p.m.

Published in THE ALMANAC on March 12, 19, 26, 2008.



Jay Inslee Bracken Hendricks

At Kepler's

Jay Inslee and Bracken Hendricks, co-authors of "Apollo's Fire: Igniting America's Clean Energy Economy," will speak at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 27, at Kepler's bookstore, 1010 El Camino Real in Menlo Park. Rep. Jay Inslee, D-Washington, is a lead sponsor in Congress of the New Apollo Energy Act, a plan to build a clean energy economy, a Kepler's spokesperson said. Bracken Hendricks is a senior fellow with the Center for American Progress and former executive director of the Apollo Alliance, an organization of environmental, business and labor organizations.

PV council may endorse park tax

The Portola Valley Town Council may endorse this week a one-eighth-cent county-wide sales tax that would go toward supporting county parks. The council meets at 8 p.m. Wednesday, March 26, in the Historic Schoolhouse.

The tax, which needs approval of two-thirds of the voters in San Mateo County to pass, is on the June 3 ballot as Measure O. A similar measure in November 2006 fell short with 55 percent voter approval.

Also on the agenda: a discussion about Portola Valley's policies for granting variances to zoning ordinances, which have been inconsistent with state law, according to the town planner. The council may approve an updated policy.

The council may also formally adopt as an ordinance the town's existing practices that govern temporary residence in new homes nearing completion or existing homes undergoing a major remodel.

Green building workshop

Residents of Portola Valley are invited to a free workshop on the morning of Saturday, April 5, when green building experts and local architects will discuss how to add green features to a new or remodeled home.

The workshop is scheduled for 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the multi-use room at Corte Madera Middle School at 4575 Alpine Road.

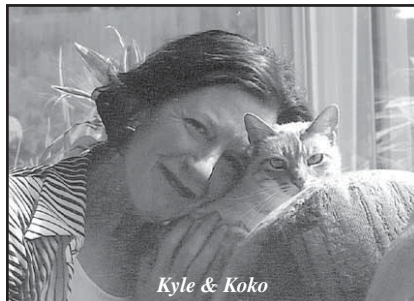


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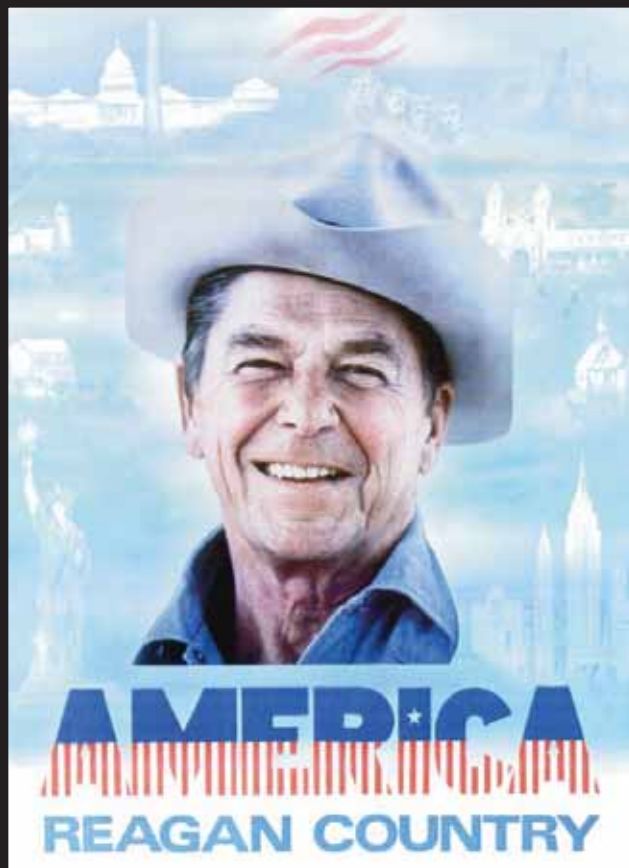
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Atherton fails to notify public, resident claims

LOWRY
continued from page 9

only required if there is a general circulation newspaper printed and published in the jurisdiction. Since there is no newspaper based in Atherton, the legal alternative is to post notices in public locations, he said.

Posting notices after an ordinance is changed is legally acceptable, according to Mr.

Lowry's attorney, John Hanna of Hanna & Van Atta in Palo Alto. But before an ordinance is passed, when it's under consideration, a "notice of hearing" ad must be published to let people weigh in on proposed ordinance changes, Mr. Hanna said.

"(It) gives them an opportunity to voice their objection to the adoption of the ordinance, should they have an objection," Mr. Hanna said in a March 10 letter to Mr. Hynes. "More importantly, in the case of the Lowrys, it gives them the opportunity to file their application for approval of the plans before the new ordinance is heard and/or adopted."

Mr. Hynes said he doesn't agree with that assessment.

"That's their opinion, and they are entitled to it," Mr. Hynes told *The Almanac*.

According to his appeal letter, Mr. Lowry and his architect met with Atherton building staff multiple times and specifically asked about the Atherton regulation that allows nonconforming portions of buildings — for example, a room built closer to a property line than currently allowed — to be rebuilt in the same location.

Mr. Lowry said in his letter that

he was repeatedly assured that it would be fine. And, if the plans had been submitted in April 2007, when they were ready, the project could have gone on as planned.

However, for reasons that aren't entirely clear, the building department didn't receive the plans until June 22 — a month after a new ordinance came into effect that removes the exemption for nonconforming buildings, if 50 percent or more of the structure is being remodeled.

The City Council unanimously adopted the amended ordinance on April 18, 2007. It became law 30 days later.

The Lowrys appealed their project's denial in February, but the council sided with the building department on a 2-1 vote, with Charles Marsala opposed and Kathy McKeithen absent. The Lowrys asked the council to reconsider their appeal, in light of the lack of public notification alleged by their attorneys.

"This probably needs a little more thinking and consideration before moving ahead on it," said Councilman Jerry Carlson at the March 19 meeting, when the council voted 4-0 to rehear the appeal next month. ■

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- Saturday, April 5
- ✱ **MAMAYOGA**

Join other prenatal and postpartum mothers in a Yoga class designed to enhance strength, flexibility and tranquility. Practice Yoga stretches and poses while pregnant and return after your delivery for a gentle shape-up and relaxation time.

- Saturdays, April 5-26
- ✱ **THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS:
BULLYING AND THE SOCIAL LIVES OF OUR CHILDREN**


Learn how children react to socially stressful situations, such as being Cyber-Bullied, and develop strategies that will help your kids stand up for themselves or others.

- Tuesday, April 15
- ✱ **BECOMING GRANDPARENTS**

Designed for new and expectant grandparents, this class examines the change in labor and delivery practices, the latest recommendations for infant care and the unique role of grandparents in today's society.

- Thursday, April 24

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9 am Soulwork — Education for Adults
10 am Sunday School — Children's Worship & Education
10-11:30 am Childcare
10:15 am Holy Eucharist, Rite II, with hymns, choir, & organ

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Higher garbage rates likely for businesses, residents

Menlo Park residents and businesses may have to pay more to get their garbage collected.

The City Council plans to vote Tuesday, March 25, on whether to raise commercial garbage rates 14 percent, and residential rates, 10 percent.

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

City staff recommends the council hike rates to recover rising charges from Allied Waste, which collects trash in the city under contract with the South Bayside Solid Waste Management Authority.

The proposed commercial rate increases would be retroactive to Jan. 1. Menlo Park businesses would pay about \$143 a month for a two-yard bin and \$214 a month for a three-yard bin. After the hikes, Menlo Park businesses would still pay less than the county-wide monthly averages of \$185 and \$258 for two- and three-yard bins, respectively, according to a city staff report.

The proposed residential hikes would raise monthly garbage bills to \$12.55 for one 32-gallon can, \$32.21 for two cans, and \$48.30 for three cans. The county averages are \$19.36 a month for one can, \$38.96 for two cans, and \$58.57 for three cans, according to city staff.

MENLO WATCH

The multi-family fee increase would be retroactive to Jan. 1, but the single-family hike would not go into effect until July 1.

El Camino workshop



About 100 people attended a Menlo Park community workshop March 6 to give their ideas about revamping El Camino Real and the city's downtown area. City officials hope for another big crowd at the next workshop, set for Thursday, April 3.

The meeting starts at 7 p.m. in the Burgess Recreation Center at 700 Alma St.


At the workshop, a city-hired consultant will discuss ideas for improving the aesthetics, traffic flow, and viability of El Camino. Participants will break into groups and discuss the ideas, according to city staff.

Free compost

Menlo Park residents can pick up free compost on April 5 and 19 at Bayfront Park, near the intersection of Bayfront Expressway and Marsh Road. Residents must bring their own shovels and containers, and can come as early as 9 a.m.

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The Sequoia Union High School District Board of Trustees



...is seeking applicants to serve on the District's Construction Bond Oversight Committee

This committee will meet four times per year to monitor expenditures for the building projects of the recently approved Measure J school construction bond. Periodically, the committee will report bond expenditures to the community.

Applications

Applications may be downloaded from the Sequoia District web site at www.seq.org or may be requested from the district office by calling Assistant Superintendent, Administrative Services Edward LaVigne at 650-369-1411, ext. 2218.

Send completed applications to
Edward LaVigne
 Assistant Superintendent, Administrative Services
 Sequoia Union High School District
 480 James Avenue
 Redwood City, CA 94062

Timeline

- Application filing period – March 20, to April 11, 2008, 4:30 p.m.
- Committee membership announced by the Board of Trustees on May 7, 2008

For further information, contact Edward LaVigne at 650-369-1411, ext. 2218.

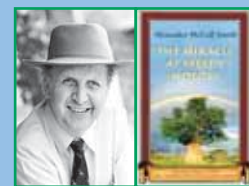
KEPLER'S FEATURED AUTHORS IN APRIL

Jeanne Birdsall
The Penderwicks on Gardam Street
 Monday, April 21, 7:00 p.m.



The Penderwicks are back! Join them and author Jeanne Birdsall for piano music, butterfly wings, bunnies, brownies and many other things to remind you of the magical captivating tale of "four sisters, two rabbits, and a very interesting boy..."

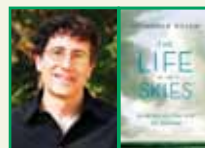
Alexander McCall Smith
The Miracle at Speedy Motors: The New Novel in the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency Series
 Tuesday, April 22, 7:30 p.m.



In the ninth installment of this infinitely enjoyable and best-selling series, Precious Ramotswe is doing what she does best – helping people with their problems and enjoying the simple pleasures of life.

Don't miss these other exciting author events!

Jonathan Rosen
The Life of the Skies
 Thursday, April 3, 7:30 p.m.
 The Life of the Skies is a genre-bending journey into the meaning of a pursuit born out of the tangled history of industrialization and nature longing.



Nancy Ortberg
Looking for God: An Unexpected Journey through Tattoos, Tofu, and Pronouns
 Sunday, April 6, 1:00 p.m.
 Nancy Ortberg presents a candid compilation of personal essays on finding God in the most unlikely times and places.



Esther Gokhale
8 Steps to a Pain-Free Back
 Tuesday, April 8, 7:30 p.m.
 Natural posture solutions for pain in the back, neck, shoulder, hip, knee, and foot.



Susan Griffin
Wrestling with the Angel of Democracy: On Being an American Citizen
 Wednesday, April 9, 7:30 p.m.
 In this compelling and intensely personal work, Griffin blends history, cultural criticism, and memoir to discover the essence of our democracy.



Mary Roach
Bonk: The Curious Coupling of Science and Sex
 Thursday, April 10, 7:30 p.m.
 The best-selling author of Stiff turns her outrageous curiosity and infectious wit on the most alluring scientific subject of all: sex.



Germaine Greer
Shakespeare's Wife
 Sunday, April 13, 2:00 p.m.
 A provocative and perceptive work that reclaims the life of Shakespeare's often maligned wife--Ann Hathaway--from generations of scholarly neglect and misogyny.



Nick Taylor
The Disagreement: A Novel
 Thursday, April 17, 7:30 p.m.
 This remarkable debut follows the story of John Alan Muro, a Virginia medical student who must choose between family and ambition during the Civil War.



Patrick McGrath
Trauma
 Friday, April 18, 7:30 p.m.
 A genuine psychological thriller by "an uncommon storyteller [with a] trademark ability to probe the layers of the human psyche."



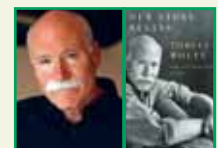
Nathaniel Rich
The Mayor's Tongue
 Saturday, April 19, 2:00 p.m.
 A stunningly original novel of literary obsession and imagination that is already one of the most highly anticipated debuts of the year.



Susan Tiberghien
One Year to a Writing Life, Twelve Lessons to Deepen Every Writer's Art and Craft
 Wednesday, April 23, 7:30 p.m.
 With a format similar to The Artist's Way, longtime workshop leader Tiberghien guides writers through every major literary genre in a cycle of 12 workshops.



Tobias Wolff
Our Story Begins
 Thursday, April 24, 7:30 p.m.
 One of our most exquisite storytellers gives us his first collection in over a decade, new stories and classics that display his mastery over a quarter century.



Susan Jacoby
The Age of American Unreason
 Friday, April 25, 7:30 p.m.
 Combining historical analysis with contemporary observation, Susan Jacoby dissects a new American cultural phenomenon--one that includes a lazy and credulous public.



Carl Honoré
Under Pressure: Rescuing Childhood from the Culture of Hyper-Parenting
 Monday, April 28, 7:30 p.m.
 From the bestselling author of In Praise of Slow comes a fascinating look at childhood today and how we are raising a generation of overachieving, exhausted children.



George Johnson
The Ten Most Beautiful Experiments
 Tuesday, April 29, 7:30 p.m.
 From the acclaimed New York Times science writer George Johnson, an irresistible book on the ten most fascinating experiments in the history of science.



V.V. Ganeshanathan
Love Marriage
 Wednesday, April 30, 7:30 p.m.
 One of the first-ever novels to deal with Sri Lanka and its ongoing war, Love Marriage examines decades of families suffering from this war and displacement.



Special Family Events

John Flanagan
Ranger's Apprentice: The Battle for Skandia (Book #4 Ranger's Apprentice)
 Friday, April 11, 7:00 p.m.
 Surround yourself with the action and bravery of Ranger's Apprentice when the creator of this rich fantasy brings medieval style adventure to Kepler's.



Margaret Peterson Haddix
Found (The Missing)
 Saturday, April 26, 4:00 p.m.
 The imaginative author of the Shadow Children series brings you another nail biter of a ride that will leave you clamoring for more.



What's New in Books: A Spring Preview with SMCRA
 Monday, April 28, 4:30 – 6:30 p.m.
 San Mateo County Reading Association book experts and Kepler's specialists will preview the newest and best books for youth and children.

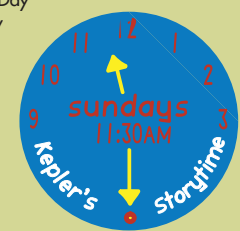


Kepler's Story Time every Sunday at 11:30 a.m.

- April 6th – Story Time with Oliver Chin
- April 13th – Wordy Story Time with SCORE Educational Services
- April 20th – Earth Day Story Time with "Hey Mom!"
- April 27th – Storyteller Spree! Benefit Day for the San Mateo County Reading Association



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All events are at Kepler's unless otherwise noted. Please visit Keplers.com for an updated calendar.



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■ POLICE CALLS

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

ATHERTON

Shots heard: Dry ice and soda bottles, components of a simple explosive device, found in area where shots were reported, Brittany Meadows Ave., March 18.

MENLO PARK

Burglary reports:

■ Car stereos, car navigation devices and jewelry stolen from vehicles, 100 block of Hanna Way and 800 block of University Drive and 1000 block of Creek Drive, March 14.

■ Compact discs and wallet stolen from vehicle, 1600 block of Marsh Road, March 14.

■ CD player stolen from vehicle, 1500 block of El Camino Real, March 15.

■ Car stereo stolen from vehicle, 300 block of Haight St., March 16.

■ Sean Robertson, 41, of Saratoga arrested and booked into county jail on burglary charges connected to theft of scrap metal, 100 block of Constitution Ave., March 19.

Shoplifting report: Halide Etiz, 74, cited and released on charges connected to various missing food items, Draeger's supermarket at 1010 University Drive, March 15.

Motorcyclist killed on Hwy. 35

A 22-year-old San Francisco man —identified by the San Mateo County Coroner as Troy Taylor — died at about 2:30 p.m. Saturday, March 22, on Highway 35 south of Portola Valley after his southbound 1996 Ducati M900 motorcycle crossed over a double-yellow line and collided head-on with a northbound 2001 Chevrolet Silverado driven by a 34-year-old man from Loma Mar, said

Officer Grace Castillo of the California Highway Patrol.

The motorcyclist was ejected from the bike after the collision, Officer Castillo said. The CHP did not have information on possible injuries to the driver of the Silverado. Witnesses to the accident are asked to call Officer Garcia at 369-6261.

Bay City News Service contributed to this report.

Stolen vehicle reports:

■ 1300 block of Windermere Ave., March 16.

■ 700 block of Ivy Drive, March 17.

■ 100 block of Newbridge St., March 17.

Grand theft report: Bottle of Scotch whisky stolen, Beltramo's Wines & Spirits at 1540 El Camino Real, March 18.

Fraud reports:

■ Unauthorized use of corporate credit card, 500 block of Santa Cruz Ave., March 18.

■ Unauthorized withdrawals from bank account, 1100 block of Rosefield Way, March 19.

PORTOLA VALLEY

Assault report: Bicycle thief caught in act by bike's owner and friends, who gave chase and recovered bike after being assaulted by thief, who then got away, Corte Madera School at 4575 Alpine Road, March 13.

WEST MENLO PARK

Fraud report: Number from check card stolen and misused for several Internet purchases, 3000 block of Alameda de las Pulgas, March 17.

Correction

■ A wrong date was given in the March 19 issue for the special meeting of the board of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District to consider purchase of Mindego Ranch. The meeting is set for Tuesday, March 25, not March 18, from 7 to 9 p.m. at the district's Skyline Field Office at 21150 Skyline Boulevard.

Can you beat this?

On TheAlmanacOnline.com a poster is reporting the lowest gasoline price he can find in the area and challenges other to beat it. See the post in the "Around Town" category of Town Square.

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Beatrice Mengel

Former Menlo Park resident

A celebration of the life of Beatrice Matheson Mengel will be held at 2 p.m. Saturday, March 29, at Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church, 49 Knox Drive in Lafayette. Ms. Mengel, who was a resident of Sharon Heights in Menlo Park for 33 years, died March 13 in Walnut Creek.



Beatrice Mengel

Born in Vancouver, British Columbia, Ms. Mengel and her brother, S. Edward Matheson, left Vancouver for San Francisco in 1956. She met her future husband, Raymond C. Mengel, in June of that year and they were married two months later. Mr. Mengel died in 1969.

Ms. Mengel was a former member of the Olympic Club, Woodside-Atherton Auxiliary to the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford, and Menlo Park Presbyterian Church.

She enjoyed playing golf — first at the Olympic Club and later at Deep Cliff in Cupertino. When she moved to Rossmoor in Walnut Creek eight years ago, she learned how to play

OBITUARIES

Obituaries are based on information provided by families and funeral homes.

bridge and joined many groups, including the Bacchus Society, the Wine and Food Club, and the International Club.

Friends say Ms. Mengel was a gracious hostess who enjoyed entertaining, especially at a proper English tea, using her best china and silver. They recall a "royal tea" she gave in 1981 to celebrate the marriage of Prince Charles to Lady Diana Spencer. The guests all wore hats and their finest garden party attire.

"Mom was a wonderful cook, generous friend, and a happy, fun person," says her daughter, Lisa Stackpole.

Ms. Mengel is survived by her children, Lisa Mengel Stackpole of Walnut Creek and Raymond M. Mengel of Bay Point; stepson John Mengel of Berkeley; brothers S. Edward Matheson of Santa Rosa and John A. Matheson of South Surrey, British Columbia, Canada; and three grandchildren.

Memorials in her name may be made to the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford or to a favorite charity.

Lynne Anne Tuite

Longtime resident of Portola Valley

Lynne Anne Tuite, a lifelong resident of San Mateo County who lived in Portola Valley for 38 years, died peacefully in her home March 18 at age 61.

Ms. Tuite had a zest for life, and could quickly bring sunshine into the day of children, say family members. She enjoyed gardening and had a passion for the written word, often reading two or three books a week, they said. There was nothing she liked better than an interesting conversation with a good friend, family said.



Lynne Anne Tuite

She was a longtime member of Greenpeace and Amnesty International.

Survivors include her husband of 44 years, Thomas; her son Sean; and two grandchildren.

A rosary was said March 22 in the Brother's Chapel at St. Francis High School in Mountain View.

The family prefers donations to the COAST Program at St. Francis High School. Arrangements were by the Cusimano Family Colonial Mortuary in Mountain View.

Plaque at USGS to be dedicated to Howard Oliver on Monday

The late Howard Oliver of Menlo Park contributed to the community in many ways: as a geophysicist at the U.S. Geological Survey; for promoting studies of groundwater underlying Menlo Park and Atherton; and — most widely — for his passion for camellias and rhododendrons.

When his jungle of the showy flowers outgrew his modest West Menlo Park backyard, Dr. Oliver expanded to USGS. There he turned the campus into an arboretum for camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons. He frequently won best of show at camellia shows.

To recognize these contributions, the San Francisco Camellia Society and the De Anza Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society will dedicate a plaque in Dr. Oliver's honor on Monday, March 31, at an event at the USGS,

at 345 Middlefield Road.

The celebration will begin at 5 p.m. with tours of the USGS gardens. Participants should meet in front of Building 3 by the flagpole.

Tours will be followed by:

■ At 5:45 p.m., dedication of the plaque at the base of the large specimen of Sierra Nevada granodiorite surrounded by red and white blooming rhododendrons. This is located under the wisteria arbor between Buildings 1 and 2.

■ At 6:30 p.m., plant sale and refreshments in the second-floor auditorium foyer of Building 3.

■ At 7 p.m., lecture by consulting arborist Barrie Coate on pests and diseases of camellias and rhododendron, plus a short pruning demonstration.

For information, call Leslie Gordon at 329-4006; or Cameron Ainsworth at 368-2645.

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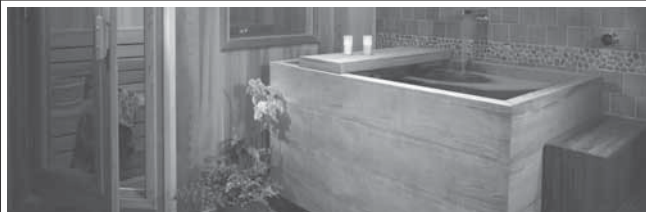
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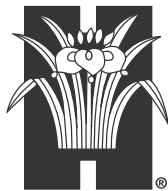
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WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

All views must include a home address and contact phone number. Published letters will also appear on the web site, www.TheAlmanacOnline.com, and occasionally on the Town Square forum.

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Slowdown clips two Menlo projects

Menlo Park is finding that it is not immune from the economic downturn that has struck many Bay Area communities and others around the state.

In just the last few weeks, General Motors announced that development of its new Bayfront Expressway dealership would be put off until the economy improves. And the O'Brien Group, backers of the plan to build 108 condominiums on 3.4 acres downtown, said its plans may not move forward unless it qualifies for a \$3.78 million state grant.

Construction of the \$34 million housing project is in jeopardy, its backers say, due to lower profit margins, higher materials costs and the weakening financial markets. To obtain the tran-

EDITORIAL
The opinion of The Almanac

sit-oriented development grant, O'Brien spokesman Jim Pollart said, the firm must apply to the state's Department of Housing and Community Development in a competitive process and assert that the project is not feasible without the state's backing.

Unless there is a sudden change in market conditions, the firm believes it can qualify for the grant and will seek a formal endorsement from the City Council before the May deadline to apply. Mr. Pollart said part of O'Brien's financial problem came after a referendum against the already approved project forced it to downsize from 135 to 108 units and provide an additional \$2 million payment to the city. The changes, agreed to in talks with the citizens' group Menlo Park Tomorrow, reduced the project's profit margin to levels at or below the minimum required by construction lenders, Mr. Pollart said in a memo to city staff members.

At this point, it makes perfect sense for the city to support a state grant for the Derry project, which won't cost anything and will help the O'Brien Group pay for the considerable infrastructure work necessary to build the condos and 25,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space next to the Caltrain corridor on

Oak Grove Avenue. Given its proximity to Menlo Park's train depot, we can't imagine that there could be a more appropriate "transit-oriented-development" anywhere.

Although controversial, the Derry condominiums have been molded into a project that satisfies Menlo Park Tomorrow, which led the referendum to overturn the project's approval by a prior City Council in 2006. The O'Brien Group will be before the Planning Commission on March 31, seeking the first round of city approvals necessary before it can proceed. Now, the even more critical step will be approval of a state grant in order to keep the project alive.

Youstra has PV school seat edge

In the mail-ballot election to fill a 17-month term for the fifth Portola Valley school board seat, voters have a tough choice:

Bill Youstra, 42, an active parent who has two children in district schools, has some teaching experience, and is a proven decision-maker in the large and small companies he has worked for.

Dr. David Morris, 43, a relative newcomer to the community whose first child is not yet in school, is eager to get involved and has a knack for thinking outside the box. He is a physician and researcher who has taught medical students and is already up to speed on the major issues before the school board.

In this race, we favor Mr. Youstra due to his service on the principal selection committee at Ormondale School, and his hands-on work as a volunteer in several schools. Besides an MBA from Stanford, he has a master's degree in education administration and policy analysis, also from Stanford.

We believe Mr. Youstra will add depth and solid decision-making skills to the board. Dr. Morris will be able to try again in the fall of 2009, when the terms of two other board members will expire.

LETTERS
Our readers write

Conclusive testimony on artificial turf left out

Editor:

In last week's otherwise fine article regarding Portola Valley's Town Council rejection of an expensive consultant study of artificial turf vs. natural grass, some of the most important facts were omitted.

Thoughtful and well-documented testimony presented at the council hearing brought out that recent, first-rate objective scientific studies show that the current generation of artificial turf poses an unacceptable risk to field-users and the environment due to off-gassing and leaching of carcinogens, toxins, allergens and heavy metals.

Given the current state of the relevant science and professional literature, no "expert" can currently demonstrate the safety of artificial turf; hiring a consultant would not change these facts. It would only waste the public's money and the



Menlo Park Historical Association

Our Regional Heritage

San Francisco attorney Milton Latham built Thurlow Lodge in Menlo Park during the 1870s, just a few years before his railroad-based fortune collapsed in 1878. The opulent home was said to cost \$1 million, and boasted 50 rooms, including a 98-foot tower, but was sold at auction in 1880, when Latham moved east to become president of the New York Mining Exchange.

See **LETTERS**, next page

LETTERS

Continued from previous page

precious time of our citizenry.

Public comments were an overall overwhelming 45 to 6 against our town pursuing further study of plastic playing fields. Artificial turf is just plain out of keeping with Portola Valley's values and the "green" ethos of our new Town Center.

Also, it was brought out at the hearing that there is a safe and sustainable natural alternative to the present field maintenance regimen which entails excessive water and chemical usage. A local landscape designer presented a powerful all-organic approach to field management that could result in deeper, healthier root growth, more resilient grass, reduced water consumption and zero pesticide and herbicide use and attendant runoff. This idea would give Portola Valley playing fields that are truly "green" in every way.

One day we will look back on the current generation of artificial turf the same way people now view lead paint, MTBE in gasoline and asbestos as a building material. Those who have avoided it will consider themselves fortunate.

Jon Silver

Portola Road, Portola Valley

Let the sun shine; keep trees trimmed

Editor:

In a "Going Green" article March 12, shade trees were mentioned a number of times.

Shading one's own property is a good thing. Shading a neighbor's property is not. There are other quiet, passive ways to keep one's home cool in the summer. No need for noisy air conditioners.

Being a good steward of our residence allows and encourages all people in a community to express conservation in their own way. Drying clothes outside is "green." Solar hot water and electric systems need all the sun they can get. Some people cook via the sun. How many times do we hear "buy locally"? Even better are free fresh fruits and vegetables from neighbors.

Two bonuses to keeping trees trimmed are: Neighbors don't need to clean their rain gutters as often; and it is easier to be aware of any unusual or inharmonious activity in the neighborhood.

Keeping trees confined to one's own yard and allowing the sun to shine on neighbors' property seems like a common courtesy and the way to nurture conservation.

Jackie Leonard-Dimmick
Walnut Avenue, Atherton

Rail critic not happy with NIMBY label

Editor:

I enter the high-speed rail discussion with only three relevant

credentials. I've commuted on every transit system from San Francisco and Oakland down to San Jose. I volunteered to help promote high-speed rail in Peninsula communities. I live along the Caltrain tracks and have been studying high-speed rail for well over six years.

Apparently, from published letters and comments at City Council study sessions, my proximity to the issues of high-speed rail disqualifies my opinions. Labeled a NIMBY, or "against change," I do oppose high-speed rail plans but I wish the name callers would actually acknowledge what has been said.

Have they heard the alternate engineering proposals that could cut, by 50 percent, the cost and time to implement grade separations? Do they care about proposals to actually improve transit services? Will they listen to ideas or should we be excluded as stakeholders in this process?

Besides offering tactical suggestions over the last five years I have changed my strategic thinking. I now oppose California's high-speed rail plan and, name calling aside, it is for many valid reasons:

- Regional (Bay Area) transit infrastructure is in disrepair and high-speed rail does not solve this issue or improve transit coordination.

- Ridership projections, 117 million per year, imply five to six trains per hour (every 10 minutes, 24 hours a day). Really?

- The TGV is subsidized by the French government. All trains, high-speed rail trains too, are subsidized.

- Siemens (the equipment manufacturer) states that high-speed rail is "economical" for distances less than 300 miles.

- The \$40 billion cost has been used for 10 years while steel prices have jumped over 40 percent in half that time. I'd rather not guess at the increase in construction, equipment and fuel costs.

This list is not at all comprehensive but speaks to some misunderstandings about high-speed rail. Our state lawmakers cannot handle getting us past a \$14 billion budget deficit so it seems unlikely they'll handle high-speed rail with alacrity. We also need to ask if high-speed rail is worth more to us than funding schools, fixing our water systems, and implementing needed changes in our health-care system?

Draining energy and resources from items that we can universally agree on seems bad policy. Those of us who have studied the history of high-speed rail recognize the huge risks, and are trying to inject modern, regional transit ideas into the discussion. We don't deserve to be labeled anti-change, no matter where in Menlo Park we live.

Russ Peterson
Felton Drive, Menlo Park

Stray cat the best deal in town

By John Schulte

I have always maintained that a pet can't be replaced; rather, a new addition helps to heal the loss.

About a year after the death of Muffin, our Himalayan, my wife and I decided to seek a new feline companion.

Marion, a very dear friend of ours who volunteers at the local humane society, suggested we "give a stray a chance." I am always amused by my clients who say they are just going to look at a litter but they still have not decided if they are going to get one. Life doesn't work that way.

We visited the Palo Alto Animal Services site and fell in love with an eight-week-old black kitten named Molly. We were told that she was already promised to another family but that was contingent upon the landlord's approval. We were granted "second hold" on her; if the first family did not claim her by 4 p.m. Friday, she was ours on Saturday morning. We were like children waiting for Christmas. When the doors opened on Saturday my wife was present to adopt our new ward.

Molly is now four months old and has taken over the house in the manner that only cats exhibit. Feeding her stimulates bursts of energy enabling the antics unique to felines. This includes the mugging of her new fur pal Cooper, a two-year-old Labrador retriever who endures her mock attacks.

His tail provides a never-ending source of assails

The black cat
Molly has no fear of the family Labrador, Cooper.



and they both find great delight when she grabs his massive head with both her front paws.

Before acquiring Molly we anticipated spending about \$800 to \$1,000 for a purebred Himalayan. As a veterinarian, I tell my clients that the purchase price is often the least cost of pet ownership. I was astounded upon reviewing the services included in our \$100 adoption fee at the Humane Society. I called several local veterinary hospitals for price quotes and calculated the average of the following costs:

1. Office call and initial examination \$48.50
2. Flea treatment (6 month supply of Advantage) . . .74.90
3. Stool examination and worming 72.57
4. First vaccination for feline distemper21.70
5. Feline leukemia blood test 40.54
6. Micro chip insertion and registration 68.20
7. Spay210.00
8. Total \$536.41

Our friend was correct. Giving a stray a chance has not only given us a wonderful new family member but, thanks to the Palo Alto Animal Services, verified that Molly is the best deal in town.

John Schulte is a Portola Valley veterinarian.

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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.

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