


Portola Valley conditions similar to Summit wildfire site, says fire captain. Page 8

The Almanac

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

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THE ALMANAC READERS' CHOICE 2008



JUNE 4, 2008

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| VOL. 43 NO. 40

When public meets private



The rewards and the risks of public-private partnerships

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MENLO PARK – Gorgeous remodeled home w/3 spacious BR's plus office w/granite countertop & built in cabinets. Inviting entrance w/soaring ceilings & skylight, large living room w/vaulted ceilings & wood burning FP looks out onto resort like backyard w/waterfall, pond, flat lawn area & deck.

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ATHERTON

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MENLO PARK

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Alexandra von der Groeben \$2,350,000

Location at it's very best! This 3BR/2BA has 2 master suites, chef's kitchen w/Wolf stove & BR bar & eat in kitchen.

Carol Christie \$1,895,000

Opportunity knocks in West Menlo Park. 3BR/1BA, needs TLC or build new. Las Lomitas School District.

Suzanne Scott \$799,500

Spacious 2BR/2BA bright top floor with views of landscaped common areas & pool. Recessed lighting.

Ken Reeves \$639,000

This adorable, 3BR/1BA home has hrdwd flrs, cozy FP, large backyard, lots of sunshine throughout.

Carolyn Mitchell \$599,000

This one bedroom condo has been extensively remodeled throughout. A must see!

Alexandra von der Groeben \$475,000

MOUNTAIN VIEW

Sought after Sylvan Park beauty! Updated kitchen w/granite counters & large island.

Meryle Sussman/Kristin Cashin \$1,195,000

PALO ALTO

Beautifully appointed & recently remodeled 4BR/3BA home. Hrdwd flrs, formal Living/Dining Room, upstairs Family Room, Den/Study.

Vivian Vella \$2,695,000

3 detached Tudor style homes, located on a quiet Residential street. Each w/1BR/1BA, & Spacious LR.

Paul Skrabo \$1,775,000

Charming home in Barron Park, featuring 1BR, Den, full BA, 1 car garage, hrdwd flrs, French drs & windows.

Paul Skrabo \$718,000

REDWOOD CITY

Gracious 4BR/3.5BA open family style home in a 12-home gated community. Light and bright home.

Nino Gaetano \$2,375,000

Stunning Mt. Carmel remodel. 4BR/2.5BA home. FR/LRw/lux appliances & dining area. Outdoor patio w/FP.

Kristin Cashin \$1,279,000

It's an adorable 3BR/2BA home. Remodeled w/ hrdwd flrs, granite cnttrps, new windows, drs & high-end appliances.

Michelle Englert \$999,000

Excellent 4BR/2BA opportunity in Mt. Carmel neighborhood. 1 block from North Star school. Sep. FR/LR.

Brendan Royer \$899,999

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Matt Shanks \$890,000

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Matt Shanks \$849,000

Charming, quaint & spacious 3BR/2.5BA home features high vaulted ceilings w/an open FR/DR combo.

Michelle Englert \$799,000

Charming 3BR/2BA home w/a Studio/Office w/sep. entrance. Hrdwd flrs, updated kitchen, central heat/air.

Vivian Vella \$699,000

Perfect starter home! 3BR/1BA in a charming neighborhood. Newly painted, hardwood floors and fireplace in cozy Living Room.

Mary Paige \$625,000

SAN MATEO

"Storybook" house with 2BR/1BA on a cul de sac. Charming garden and patio.

Regan Cinelli \$749,000

SANTA CLARA

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Matt Shanks \$239,000

WOODSIDE

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Gary McKae \$4,987,345

Mediterranean-styled 5BR/5BA home. Huge designer kitchen w/FR. Office w/FP, library & exercise rm.

Dana Cappelio \$2,599,000

Designer 4BR/3BA cottage in the Redwoods. Beautiful Cape Cod home, takes your breath away.

Dana Cappelio \$1,399,000

Beautiful lot in central Woodside. Approx. 1.2 acres.

Dana Cappelio \$999,000



PALO ALTO – Carmel Charm in Palo Alto. Spacious 5BR/3BA Tudor style home has been updated w/modern taste. Abundant flowering gardens, redwood tree, decking and patio area great for entertaining. Oversized garage w/wine cellar & room for office.

Jan Strohecker \$1,898,000



PALO ALTO – Remodeled 4BR/3.5BA Midtown Charmer! Spacious gourmet stainless kitchen. Mahogany hrdwd flrs, downstairs guest Bed & BA, good storage, new lawn & auto sprinklers front & back and great PA schools.

Camille Eder \$1,890,000



PORTOLA VALLEY – French Chateau w/4BR's, 4 & one half BA's, 2 FR's, office, living & DR's. Beautiful kitchen, winery & 12 stall barn.

Dana Cappelio \$8,275,000



REDWOOD CITY – Beautiful 5BR/2.5BA Tudor style home near Atherton's border. Formal LR & DR, Fam. Rm. Kitchen w/walk in pantry.

Michelle Englert \$1,189,000



SAN MATEO – Lovely remodeled 4BR/3.5BA single level home in San Mateo Park. Chef's kitchen w/top quality appliances opens to sunny breakfast nook. Refined living & formal dining rooms great for entertaining. Spacious FR. Sparkling pool and spa.

Regan Cinelli \$2,350,000

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Inside

This week's news, features and community events.

FIRST SHOT



Photo by Veronica Weber/The Almanac

Fallen Acorn

Jesus Jauregui Soto watches the building that housed the Acorn restaurant in Menlo Park come crashing down on May 30. Construction crews demolished the structure to make way for a medical office complex planned for the site at 1906 El Camino Real. The Acorn was in business from 1972 to 2005.

Atherton

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Menlo Park

■ Council faces budget with \$1 million deficit. **Page 9**
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San Mateo County

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 ■ County budget enters shrink mode. **Page 15**

Schools

■ Bob Sherman leaving Woodside School. **Page 21**

Food & Drink

■ They're seeing stars at Marché: Restaurant hopes to scale the culinary heights by offering impeccable cuisine. **Cover, Section 2**

On the cover

Private gifts can help public agencies provide services and build facilities. But these gifts have risks as well as rewards. Photo illustration by Gail Thoreson/The Almanac. See story on **Page 12**.

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Wine

ABC WINES: "ANYTHING BUT CHARDONNAY"

Viognier is just one of a burgeoning list of "exotic" grape varietals being exploited by CA vintners to great effect. For those of you tired of high alcohol, over-ordered Chardonnays, here are a few fun and delicious alternatives.

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Santa Ynez Valley

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2007 J Pinot Gris,

Russian River Valley

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2006 Westerly Viognier,

Santa Ynez Valley

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2006 Havens Albariño,

Napa Valley Carneros

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\$5.99 lb.

Asian Noodle Salad

With sesame oil, soy sauce lemon, lime, juice, carrots green onions, clantro, red pepper flakes, sugar.



Roberts Tip of the Week

VIIGNIER REVIVAL

If there were an "endangered species list" for grapes, Viognier might have once been on it. This white wine grape was reduced to plantings of only tens of acres in its native Rhone homeland nearly 50 years ago. Since then, however, it has experienced something of a revival, as it is now grown in Australia, Brazil, and various places in the United States. As for the white wines made from the finicky grape, they can be as full bodied as oaky chardonnay. What sets this wine apart, however, is its floral perfume. While the bouquet of honeysuckle and citrus blossoms may lead drinkers to believe that they are about to taste a sweet, Muscat-like flavor, the taste is actually quite dry.

Everyone should be pleased that Viognier has experienced such an expansive revival as it has. At ROBERTS MARKET, we know wine, and will be happy to show you are larger selection of wines, including fine white wines like those made from Viognier grape. As local wine experts we guarantee your satisfaction. Our wine department is the most extensive in the area, more than most liquor store. We hope to see you soon.

Hint: Viognier possesses more body than most Chardonnays, which makes it deserving of attention.



Local News

MENLO PARK | AHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

Council may rue decision to withhold fire map

■ Cal Fire suspects it's not getting the whole story from Portola Valley on wildfire risk.

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

■ PORTOLA VALLEY

Home fire insurance rates are a major concern in wooded parts of Portola Valley. The potential impact on fire insurance was a key factor in an April 23 decision by a unanimous Town Council to tell the state's firefighting agency that no updates were needed to its current map, which shows no "very high" wildfire risks presented by vegetation in the town.

Council members knew of several "very high" risk neighborhoods in town as described in a map recently prepared by fire-hazard consultant Ray Moritz and commissioned by the town. The council agreed not to include that map in its comments to the state and to fast-track steps to address local wildfire risks. But the state's

curiosity about the fire risk has been aroused.

If the state published that risk information, insurance companies could use it "without any nuance (as) a blunt instrument to redline Portola Valley," said Councilman Steve Toben in concurring with an opinion expressed at the April 23 meeting by Planning Commissioner Nate McKitterick, an attorney who has worked for insurance companies.

"We should accept that (benign) state map and move on," Councilman Ted Driscoll said at that meeting. "Why are we airing our laundry to the state?"

Now it seems that by not sending the Moritz map to the state, Portola Valley officials may have dealt themselves a losing hand: the California Department of Forestry

Page 8: Portola Valley conditions are similar to Summit wildfire site, says local fire district captain.

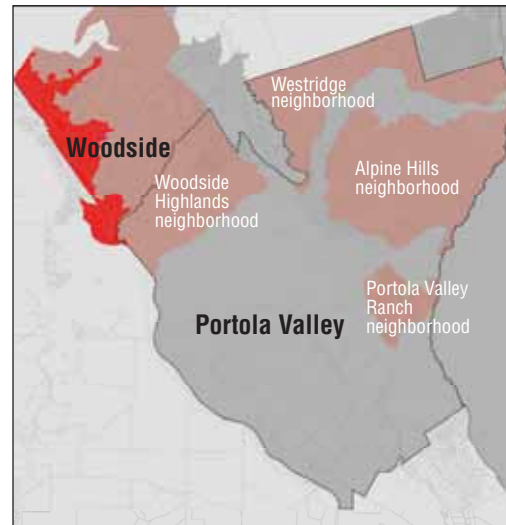
and Fire Protection, or Cal Fire, knows of the existence of the Moritz map and is now taking a closer look at the town's fire risk.

Cal Fire has received comments from Denise Enea, the fire marshal for the Woodside Fire Protection District, which includes Portola Valley. In a separate map, Ms. Enea maintains that parts of several neighborhoods — Woodside Highlands, Westridge, Alpine Hills and Portola Valley Ranch — should be labeled as "very high" risk for catastrophic fire.

The fire district's map is slightly harsher in its assessment than the Moritz map, Ms. Enea told *The Almanac*.

The light red portions of this map represent areas that, because of their vegetation and terrain, are considered by the Woodside Fire Protection District to be at "very high" risk of wildfire. The dark red areas represent the state's view of the "very high" risk prior to asking for updates/comments from each town and the fire district. The Portola Valley Town Council is interested in reducing the number of "very high" risk areas because fire insurance rates could go up.

Source: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



Online comments at Cal Fire's Web site show that the state and the Woodside fire district agree on the risk in parts of Woodside Highlands. They disagree, so far, on the "very high" risk designations for parts of Westridge, Alpine Hills and Portola Valley Ranch.

Town staff sided with Cal Fire

on those last three neighborhoods and submitted a portion of the Moritz map to support a claim that parts of Woodside Highlands should also be spared the "very high" risk designation.

See **PV FIRE**, page 8

Calling 911 on cell phones: complaints and confusion

By Marion Softky
Almanac Staff Writer

When a Menlo Park man committed suicide in the parking lot of Palo Alto's Baylands Nature Preserve May 23, the bystander who called 911 on a cell phone waited 20 minutes on hold with the California Highway Patrol's regional dispatch center in Vallejo. Even then, it took an hour for police to arrive, according to a correspondent in a comment on *TheAlmanacOnline.com*.

What happened? What's being done? What can you do to prevent this?

If you are near a freeway, by law, all 911 calls on cell phones are routed to the Highway Patrol center in Vallejo, said Jamie Young, director of San Mateo County's emergency dispatch center. Also, calls from cell phones along state highways, such as Skyline Boulevard, Route 1 down the coast, Highway 92, and Highway 84 in unincorporated areas, go to the Highway Patrol.

In other locations, the destination of the call depends on a host of factors including the location of the call, what tower happens to catch the call, the service provider, and the local dispatch center.

"It may well not be the agency

you want," Ms. Young said. She noted that cell phone 911 system technology is drastically behind landline technology in identifying the source of a call.

"It's complex," Ms. Young continued. "There are a myriad of issues that go with cell phone use."

Starting June 3, county dispatchers will begin receiving wireless emergency calls. The dispatch center has spent several months installing and testing new equipment that will handle cell phone calls from towers within the areas it serves.

The new \$565,000 Positron system relies on voice over Internet protocol to direct wireless calls to the county dispatch center, rather than the overloaded CHP center in Vallejo. Local dispatchers can get a better fix on the source of the call.

The dispatch center's 58 dis-

See **DISPATCH**, page 20



Photo by Veronica Weber/*The Almanac*

New Equestrian Center

Barn manager Jennifer Dixon walks a horse past the new barn at the Menlo Circus Club in Atherton last week. The barn is part of a new Equestrian Center that has replaced the club's 75-year-old stables and grandstand. The center will be a highlight of the 16th annual stable tour June 8, sponsored by the Los Altos Hounds riding club. For details, see **Page 18**.

What you can do about 911 call uncertainties

One way to get around the uncertainties of reporting an accident by cell phone is to enter the number of your local dispatch center in your cell phone "Any 911 dispatch center will give you help," said Jamie Young, director of San Mateo County's emergency dispatch center.

If you're in Menlo Park and near a freeway or

city limit, for example, you could call the Menlo Park dispatch center directly, noted Jan Lanier, communications manager for Menlo Park.

Local dispatch numbers are:

- San Mateo County, 650-364-1313.
- Menlo Park, 650-325-4424.
- Atherton, 650-323-6131.



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Almost nine years later, Kaelyn is fully recovered, working on a bachelor's degree and building on her dreams of interior design. Her battle with leukemia long behind her, Kaelyn is free to focus on the promise of her future. Visit www.lpch.org for more information.

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**Lucile Packard
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AT STANFORD





Photo by Veronica Weber/The Almanac

The Clara-Mateo Alliance in Menlo Park provides temporary housing and shelter to about 100 people, including expectant mother Amanda Carrasco and her two children, Sariha (right) and Justin Martinez.

Homeless shelter needs new home

By Rory Brown

Almanac Staff Writer

Clara-Mateo Alliance has provided shelter and temporary housing to people on the Menlo Park Veterans Affairs campus for 11 years. Now the shelter itself is in need of a home.

The Veterans Affairs department is in the midst of renovating its campus at 795 Willow Road near U.S. 101. Construction of new facilities for veterans will displace the 100-bed shelter, which serves about 30 veterans and 70 non-veterans.

The building now occupied by the Clara-Mateo Alliance is "seismically unsafe" and will be leveled to make way for sports fields and recreation facilities for patients at the site, said VA spokesperson Kerri Childress. She said the VA is expanding a lot of veteran services, and needs the space on its campus.

"We notified [Clara-Mateo] of our plans two years ago," Ms. Childress said. "Primarily, we let Clara-Mateo be there because we had the space. But we have our hands full just caring for our homeless veterans."

She said the building is tenta-

tively scheduled to be demolished in 2010, giving Clara-Mateo time to find a new site.

Finding a home

Even with the warning that Clara-Mateo has to move off the VA campus, there are major challenges facing the shelter's search for a new location.

"It's not easy or cheap to site a shelter," said Christine Boroughs, executive director of InnVision, the nonprofit that operates the Clara-Mateo Alliance. City zoning laws prohibit shelters in some areas, and the shelter has to be close to local bus lines to allow residents to get to and from the location, she said.

The VA campus is owned by the federal government, meaning Clara-Mateo currently isn't subject to local zoning restrictions. The VA is also a regular stop on local shuttle and bus routes, and the shelter doesn't abut a residential neighborhood. Clara-Mateo is also one of the few local shelters that allow couples and families to bunk together.

"The ideal situation would be to keep some kind of shelter on [VA] land because it serves the region so well," said Suzanne Bayley, a

volunteer with InnVision. "It will be very difficult to find a new place for this shelter."

Dr. Keith Harris, who heads the VA homeless programs on the Menlo Park campus, said he's uncertain if the VA plans to increase its homeless services to fill the void created when Clara-Mateo leaves. He said the VA has its own 100-bed facility, and will do what it can to accommodate more homeless veterans.

"We don't want to just lose beds without replacing the services," he said.

Regional issue

Homelessness as a regional issue was the topic of a May 28 forum organized by Menlo Park Mayor Andy Cohen.

At the event, about 50 people gathered to talk about homelessness and how to address it, and Mayor Cohen said local cities should come together to solve the problem.

"We have to fill the need that's going to be created when Clara-Mateo moves," he said. "We need a place like [the Opportunity Health Center in Palo Alto] in south San Mateo County for our homeless." ■

Founder of Al's Nursery in Portola Valley dies at 80

Alwin Bertschinger, always called Al, who founded a nursery in 1959 on a neglected orchard along Portola Road that became one of the area's finest, died May 31 at his home in Menlo Park. He was 80.

He was very healthy and active, and went to the nursery regularly up until last year when he suf-

fered from kidney disease, said his daughter Karin Wu.

The family plans to hold a celebration of Mr. Bertschinger's life at the nursery later this summer.

A native of Switzerland who came to the U.S. in 1952, Mr. Bertschinger was an authority on plants and trees who shared his time, advice and plant mate-

rials with the town of Portola Valley since its incorporation in 1964.

The family suggests that any memorial donations be sent to Pathways Hospice, 585 N. Mary Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94085.

Additional information about Mr. Bertschinger will appear in a future article in The Almanac.

REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Gloria Darke



Real Estate Cycles

Dear Gloria,

Our home has been on the market for 4 weeks with very few showings and no offers. We are at a loss as to what to do. I know that real estate goes in cycles so presumably it has been through challenging times like this before. Historically, what do sellers do in a down market to generate activity in this kind of situation?

Helen B.

Dear Helen,

While it is true that our market has slowed down a bit, it is likely due to seasonal changes as much as it is to the other problems that the housing and financial markets are dealing with. In San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, for as far back as I can remember, starting in mid to later May we start to see less activity at open houses as well as fewer showings by the agents. People are involved in graduations anywhere from 6th grade to middle school

to college and it is also the start of the "wedding season". It is a bit reminiscent of mid-November when potential buyers thoughts turn to other things. Do not be discouraged by this because things start to pick up again when activities settle down.

However, you should meet with your realtor to compare your activity to other properties for sale in your area. While I said that there is a slowdown, we still continue to be a good market and well priced properties that show well, (ie staged, painted, cleaned) are still selling. Often, there is only one offer as compared to robust times when we would see four or five or more. Just from your question I would guess that your price is too high. Some sellers who simply do not want to take less for their houses are putting them on the rental market to see if things improve. If you elect to do this I would suggest that you be prepared to hold it for two years to wait out this blip in our housing market.

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

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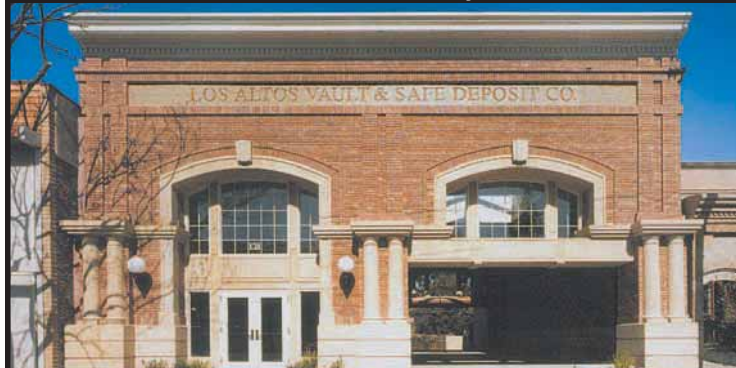
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Portola Valley conditions similar to wildfire site, says fire district captain

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

The Summit wildfire in the Santa Cruz Mountains occurred in terrain and vegetation very similar to that in Portola Valley, says Capt. Marshall Hird of the Woodside Fire Protection District who led a strike team at the Summit fire.

“The similarities in that sense are definitely strong,” said Capt. Hird, who is based at the district’s Portola Valley station. And the major differences? “I can’t think of anything off the top of my head,” he said.

The Summit fire, about 50 miles from Portola Valley, started on May 22 and destroyed 31 homes and burned 4,300 acres. Similarities in the terrain and vegetation, and the moisture content of the vegetation, may illuminate the push by Fire Marshal Denise Enea of the Woodside fire district to have the state’s firefighting agency declare parts of neighborhoods in Woodside Highlands, Westridge, Alpine Hills and Portola Valley Ranch as at “very high” risk for wildfire.

The Town Council has been trying to keep the number of “very high” designations down

out of concern for potential impacts on fire insurance costs for residents in those neighborhoods.

The vegetation in those neighborhoods, Ms. Enea said, is like that at the Summit fire, including redwood, pine, oak, chaparral and lots of “ladder” fuel — vegetation that enables a fire to rise from the ground into tree canopies. It “burned to a moonscape,” she said. “Does that not tell the story? Does that not reaffirm what we’re saying?”

Firefighters told her they were seeing “live green material that was burning like dead material.”

In tests this year, Ms. Enea said moisture content in local coyote bush, a form of chaparral, is at 20 percent, down from 40 percent three years ago. She also had trouble igniting it back then. “Now it explodes. That tells me a lot,” she said. “These fuels are adapting to less moisture.”

At the Summit fire, the structures that survived had composite roofs, stucco exterior walls, and no vegetation close by, Capt. Hird said.

Structures that burned included those with wooden roofs and shingles and vegetation up to the walls, he said. ■

PV FIRE

continued from page 5

“Picking and choosing”

Dave Sapsis, a senior fire scientist at Cal Fire assigned to Portola Valley’s map, said he is concerned that the town did some “picking and choosing” in forwarding data from the Moritz map.

“(Mr. Moritz’s) analysis was, I believe, more extensive,” Mr. Sapsis said, noting that he has collaborated with Mr. Moritz before. “If I haven’t received that information, I’ll have to seek it out.”

In an interview, Town Planner George Mader said: “It may prove to be unfortunate that Ray Moritz’s map was not sent to the state (in its entirety) since it’s possible that the state will issue a map that shows more ‘very high’ hazards,” than would otherwise have been the case.

During the next few weeks, Cal Fire will be weighing the lower fire risk designations on the state’s old map against the harsh assessment it received from the fire district.

“I can’t make a political move here,” Fire Marshal Enea said,

defending her view of the wildfire risk. “I have to make the right move.”

Ms. Enea should have been more forthcoming with the town about comments to Cal Fire, Mayor Maryann Derwin said. “No one knew it was even happening.” The fire district should inform the town when taking actions “that affect our residents,” Ms. Derwin said.

Fire district board member John Gardner responded: “It was pretty clear to me that they (council members) were on notice that we were going to submit comments. You’ve got a fire-education problem here. The whole (fire) board supports being honest (to Cal Fire) about this whole thing.”

Referring to Ms. Enea, Mr. Gardner noted that she is a fire marshal, not a politician. “That’s why we have her,” he added.

“Very high” explained

Designations of “very high” risk by the state are likely to force homeowners and developers in those areas to meet higher fire-resistant standards in building new homes. Major

Cyclists blow through this stop sign at Alpine and Portola roads in Portola Valley on a daily basis despite state laws that mandate a full stop. The “Honor the Stop” campaign will be getting under way soon, starting in Woodside, in which campaigners hand out red-and-black wristbands to anyone — cyclist, motorist, motorcyclist or equestrian — who agrees to obey all traffic laws.

Photo by Veronica Weber/The Almanac



Cyclist seeks to heal rifts with drivers

■ Woodside council agrees to buy and promote “honor the stop sign” wristbands.

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

It’s so easy to elicit sighs of exasperation from officials in towns such as Woodside and Portola Valley and the law enforcement officers who patrol there. Ask them to solve just one of the following issues:

■ Cyclists are drawn to the challenge of riding steep, narrow, twisty mountain roads, but residents who live there feel entitled to drive at normal speeds without worrying about fragile bicycles and their riders.

■ On most afternoons, a knot of 50 to 100 cyclists — a peloton — courses through the two towns, ignoring stop signs and slowing four-wheeled traffic. Drivers have rights, but so do cyclists, particularly on roads without bike lanes.

■ A deputy may want to cite a peloton cyclist for violating a stop sign, but often has no way to safely impound a bike, may not be sure of who the offender is given the similarity of spandex outfits, and can’t write a ticket anyway because

the cyclist isn’t carrying ID.

■ A motorcycle officer patrolling Skyline Boulevard may want to cite a motorcyclist, but try catching a kid putting his super-bike through the paces, hurtling around blind corners and reaching triple-digit speeds on the straight-aways.

Enter cyclist, triathlon coach and Daly City resident Marc Evans, who spoke to an agreeable Woodside Town Council on Tuesday, May 27, about his idea for stopping the insanity: an “Honor the Stop” campaign, in which anyone using the roads — cyclists, drivers, equestrians, pedestrians, joggers, motorcyclists — can agree to obey all traffic laws and symbolize that commitment by wearing a red-and-black wristband.

The red color symbolizes the agreement to be law-abiding and to encourage others to do likewise when a wearer offers a wristband to someone else, Mr. Evans said. The black commemorates the deaths and injuries caused by inattention and mistakes on the road.

A cyclist accepting the wristband would “agree to stop at all

stop signs, period,” Mr. Evans said, noting that his principle aim is to end the divisiveness among cyclists, motorcyclists, drivers and equestrians.

The council voted 5-0, with members Sue Boynton and Peter Mason absent, to allocate up to \$2,500 to buy 5,000 of the wristbands, use Town Hall as a distribution site and begin a publicity campaign.

“It’s time for everyone to start respecting one another,” Mr. Evans said.

Mayor Ron Romines said Mr. Evans has “done a great service by conceptualizing and bringing this concept forward.” “It’s something we truly need,” Mr. Romines added. “There has grown up a kind of antagonism. This can be a way to promote a dialogue.”

The key to success is in the handing off of a wristband from one person to another, Bicycle Committee Chair Milo Fenzi told the council.

When the recipient shows an attitude of “I get it and I’m there, too,” then you give them one,” he said, adding: “This could become a nationwide and a worldwide program.”

For more information, go to www.honorthestop.org. ■

remodels are not affected.

A town can forego a tougher building code for “very high” risk areas, but then could be liable if Cal Fire is called in to fight a wildfire, Mr. Sapsis of Cal Fire said.

Portola Valley’s council may impose tougher building standards regardless of what the Cal Fire map eventually shows, council members acknowledge, but they are reluctant to have the town’s vulnerability posted on the Cal Fire Web site.

(The Woodside fire district already has a requirement to create a “defensible space” of sparse vegetation around structures.)

Mr. Moritz has advised the council on how to dramatically

reduce the risk of a catastrophic fire. Fire moves much more slowly, for example, when an urban forest is cleared of underbrush, he said.

A discussion of fire safety is ahead, Mayor Derwin said.

It was Planning Commissioner Leah Zaffaroni who, at the April 23 meeting, proposed fast-tracking local action to improve fire safety. Ms. Zaffaroni has called repeatedly about it, Ms. Derwin said. “We really need to get on it.”

Would the council change the town’s building code to require fire-resistant construction in some neighborhoods?

“I would take a hard line” for new standards, Ms. Derwin said. “I think it’s reasonable.”

Councilman Richard Merk, a retired builder, said fire-resistance measures could raise the cost of a new house by about 3 percent. “I don’t know that it’s that much of a burden,” he said.

As for whether insurance companies use Cal Fire maps, Wayne Mitchell, a fire prevention official with Cal Fire, noted that they may use them, but that state vegetation maps are just one of several factors used to assess risk. ■

■ INFORMATION

To see the fire maps, go to the Portola Valley Town Hall at 765 Portola Road and ask for Planning Manager Leslie Lambert.

Where do neighborhoods fit in El Camino Real vision?

■ Menlo Park council to tackle plans for main thoroughfare on June 10.

By Rory Brown
Almanac Staff Writer

Developers are eyeing Menlo Park's abandoned El Camino Real auto dealerships as sites to build multi-story projects.

Neighbors who live near the abandoned lots want to retain the nature of their small, closely knit neighborhoods, and don't want projects towering over their homes.

It's up to City Council members to try to come up with a plan that leaves all parties satisfied.

Council members will have a first go at discussing that plan at a June 10 study session. At the meeting, the council will discuss a city-hired consultant's list of ideas to improve the aesthetics and viability of El Camino Real and the city's downtown area.

The meeting is set to start at 7 p.m. in the council chambers at the Civic Center, between Laurel

and Alma streets.

Recent opposition

Council members saw a preview of the neighborhood-versus-developer struggle last month, when the Redwood City-based Matteson Companies publicly presented plans to build a 48-condo project at the former Anderson Chevrolet truck lot at 389 El Camino Real.

The project called for 59-foot-tall buildings near homes on College and Partridge avenues, as well as driveways that funneled traffic onto both streets.

Residents showed up in force at a council study session to oppose the plans.

"This is not about building what's been built in Redwood City or Millbrae," said resident Frank Priscaro, outside his College Avenue home. "This is about the symbiotic relationship between our commercial areas and our residential areas."

"I don't think any of us want to see El Camino Real become a canyon with four-story buildings on both sides," said Nick Pekelsma, another College Avenue

resident. "We'll lose the character of this city, and we'll lose the character of our surrounding neighborhoods."

"Tricky process"

Council members acknowledge that crafting a plan that leaves everyone happy won't be easy, but they seem optimistic leading up to the June 10 meeting.

"It's a tricky process," said Councilwoman Kelly Ferguson. "Neighborhood tranquility is a top priority for Menlo Park residents, so we have to find a way to preserve that."

Councilman John Boyle said the council should make a point of planning El Camino Real on a "block by block basis," recognizing that different projects are more appropriate for certain sites.

"We can't treat all of El Camino Real the same," he said. "For example, we're probably not going to be able to have the height, density, and overall intensity on the west side of El Camino Real because it's more residential. We'll probably need a bigger buffer zone." ■

Council faces budget with \$1 million deficit

Menlo Park is facing a projected \$1.01 million deficit heading into the fiscal year that starts July 1, and City Council members will weigh in on what do about it at their June 3 meeting, when they take a first crack at the city's budget.

The meeting is scheduled to start at 7 p.m. in the council chambers

■ MENLO PARK

at the Civic Center, between Laurel and Alma streets.

City Manager Glen Rojas released the first copy of the proposed 2008-09 fiscal year budget on May 22. According to the 200-page document, the city is expected to spend about \$38.24 million in the upcoming fiscal year and collect about \$37.23 million in revenues.

Rather than make any drastic budget cuts, or raise the utility tax rate from the current 1 percent tax on all utility bills, Mr.

Rojas is suggesting that the city pull the \$1.01 million needed to cover its costs from its \$24 million reserve fund.

About 71 percent of the city's expenditures are projected to be personnel costs, and those costs are the subject of a widely distributed e-mail from former council members Lee Duboc and Mickie Winkler.

"We fear if Menlo Park continues to increase the salaries and life-long defined benefits of existing employees, and continues to add new employees, our city could fall off a fiscal cliff," they say in the e-mail.

Vote results online

Tuesday, June 3, is Election Day and polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. On a relatively short ballot, voters in South San Mateo County will help choose party candidates for Congress, the state Senate, and the state Assembly; weigh in on three San Mateo County supervisors, one judge, and some party central committee members; and vote on one local and two state ballot measures.

Election results will be reported on TheAlmanacOnline.com.

To find your polling place, check the back of the voter information pamphlet provided by the county elections office.

For more information, call the elections office at 312-5222 or go to shapethefuture.org. Other online sources are the California elections site at sos.ca.gov/elections and the League of Women Voters site, smartvoter.org.

Meeting on Encinal School's EIR

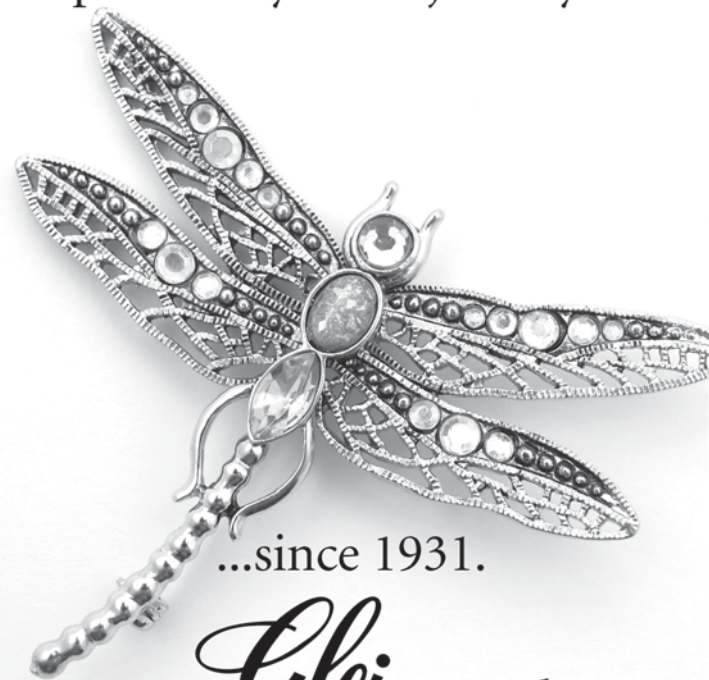
The Menlo Park City School District's board is set to discuss — and likely adopt — the environmental study for construction at Encinal School in Atherton at a special meeting set for 7 p.m. Monday, June 9. The meeting will be held in the school board chambers, 181 Encinal Ave. in Atherton.

The environmental impact report (EIR) documents the potential negative impacts of the project to construct new classrooms, a multi-use

building, and a Teacher Education Resource Center.

The board must vote to adopt the EIR in order for the construction project to move forward. Information about the project, and its environmental study, can be found on the district's Web site, www.mpcsd.org, by clicking on "facility development" in the left-hand menu. The meeting's agenda and supporting documents will be posted online by Friday, June 6, district officials said.

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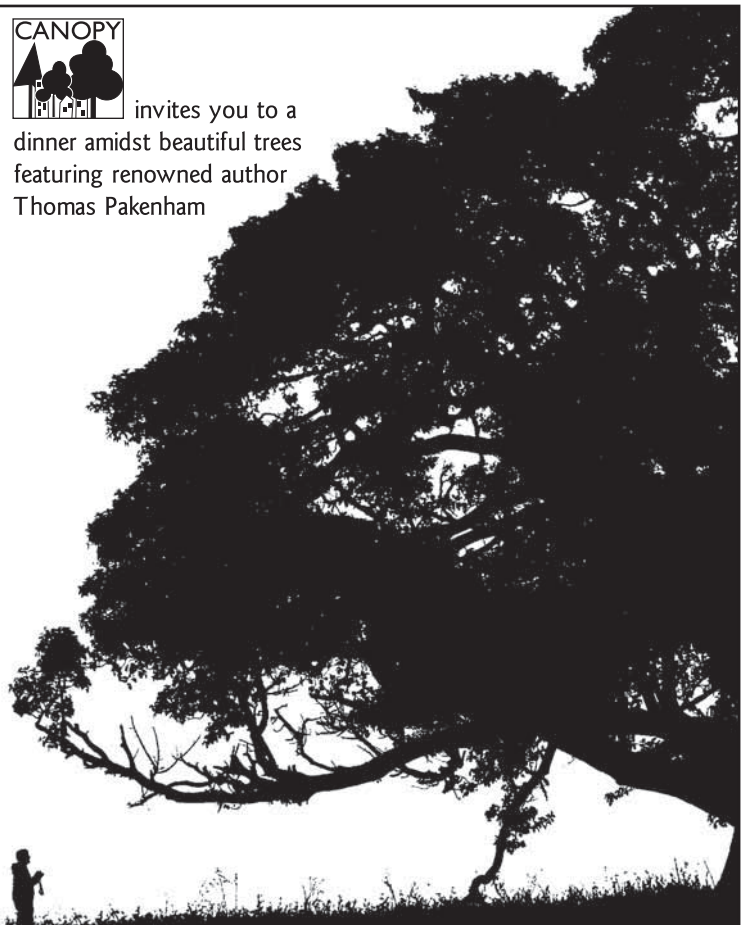
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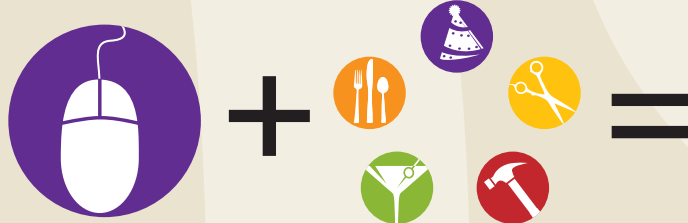
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When public meets private

The rewards and the risks of public-private partnerships

Reporting by
The Almanac staff

Photos by **Veronica Weber**

What would the towns in The Almanac's circulation area — Atherton, Menlo Park, Portola Valley and Woodside — be like if it weren't for private gifts to public agencies from

legale for the town's first park and athletic field. The land was assessed at \$6.9 million when the gift was made in 2005. The Barkley Fields and Park project is a public-private collaboration in another way:

60 percent reduction in the assessed value of the Larry Ellison estate, an anonymous donor (not Mr. Ellison) stepped forward and gave the district \$200,000 to help implement its technology plan.

These "advantages" can be seen as disadvantages — hurdles that public officials don't have to scale if they can raise private donations.

"It is very difficult to get 67 percent of a vote for pretty much anything," said Portola Valley Councilman Ted Discoll last year when asked why the council did not seek voter approval of a bond measure to finance the building of a new Town Center. "If someone felt strongly that we should not do this project, they should have run" for election to the council, he said.

Restrictions on public funding, including Proposition 13, adopted by California voters in 1978, led to major local efforts to raise private funds for schools, including through nonprofit foundations. These fundraising efforts also involve large numbers of people, particularly parents, in the public process, and in a more direct way than in elections, supporters point out.

But private gifts, particularly large ones, can come at a cost, or at least a risk. Large donors may have an influence, directly or indirectly, and perhaps unseen, on public policy. In addition, there may be the perception — founded or unfounded — among some members of the community that large donors receive favored treatment, leading to a feeling among less-wealthy members of the community that they are somehow second-class citizens.

In this and future stories, The Almanac will examine the rewards and risks of public-private partnerships. We will look at mechanisms set up to avoid undue influence on public policy by private donors. And we will ask members of the public, in addition to public officials, how comfortable they are with the role of private wealth in the local public process. ■



In **Portola Valley**, a new \$20 million Town Center complex, including this community hall, is being built with \$17 million in private donations.

local town governments to school districts?

Private gifts to public schools, mostly through school foundations, range from around 8 percent of the budgets in the Portola Valley, Las Lomas and Menlo Park elementary school districts to 25 percent in the Woodside Elementary School District.

In Portola Valley, a new \$20 million Town Center complex is being built with \$17 million in private donations. Atherton officials have indicated they may follow this model of privately funding the building of a new Town Center. The Atherton council voted May 21 to form a task force to explore whether there is public support for such an effort.

In Woodside, resident Noel Perry donated approximately six acres off Farm Hill Boulevard across from Cañada Col-

About \$2.3 million in private funds were raised to help pay for around \$4 million in work on the field.

In Menlo Park, an anonymous private donor recently offered \$8 million or more to fund the building of a new gymnasium in the Civic Center.

There are many large donations. Among the 500 people who donated a total of \$17 million to build a new Portola Valley Town Center complex, six donors gave \$1 million or more, and 72 gave between \$10,000 and \$999,000.

With the Portola Valley school district facing revenue shortfalls, in part due to a

Many people in all four towns also give the gift of labor, volunteering on boards and commissions, in the classroom, and to organize fundraising events.

Of course, there are alternatives to private donations. Bond issues and tax measures can be passed, and regularly have been in local towns and school districts.

School parcel taxes, which require approval by two-thirds of the voters to pass, range from \$233 a year per parcel in the Woodside district to \$561 in the Menlo Park district.

Voters also have backed many school bond proposals, notably the \$91 million bond measure approved by 70 percent of voters in the Menlo Park district in 2006. The funds are being spent to improve and expand facilities on all four the district's campuses.

Municipal governments have won voter approval for tax measures, including a new Menlo Park utility users tax in 2006.

Portola Valley voters approved renewal of its utility taxes in 2005, and Atherton voters have long supported a parcel tax to help finance

town operations.

Tax and bond measures have the advantage of engaging large numbers of people in the decision-making process. The measures require that public officials convince a majority, and often a supermajority, of voters to approve the proposal.

Large donors may have an influence, directly or indirectly, and perhaps unseen, on public policy.

LET'S HEAR FROM YOU

We welcome your observations and comments about the rewards and risks of private gifts to public agencies. Post your comments online at TheAlmanacOnline.com (check the links under the heading, TownSquare), by e-mail (editor@AlmanacNews.com), by fax (650-854-0677) or by mail: Editor, The Almanac, 3525 Alameda de las Pulgas, Menlo Park, CA 94025. Please specify if the comments are for publication. If so, we need your name and the name of your street and town, plus a phone number. The phone number is not for publication but gives us a way to contact you. If you wish to remain anonymous, but would like to talk with a reporter, please provide a way to contact you.

Menlo Park: Another partnership, another controversy?

Gym proposal is the latest attempt to merge public, private sectors



Warren Dale serves the ball during a volleyball game with friends last week at the Burgess Gym in Menlo Park. An anonymous private donor has offered to pay the city \$8 million or more to help build a new gymnasium. But the offer comes with conditions. The anonymous donor can pick the contractor and play a major role in the design and construction of this public facility.

Of the big controversies to hit Menlo Park over the past three years, many have been rooted in public-private partnerships.

In 2005, a developer's proposal to build a golf course and three sports fields at the city-owned Bayfront Park pitted environmentalists against sports groups.

In 2006, the City Council quickly turned over operation of the city's brand new \$6.8 million publicly funded aquatics center to a for-profit company, and considered doing the same to the city-sponsored child care programs.

And in 2007, council members flirted with the idea of using taxpayer dollars to convert the deteriorating former Park Theatre into a dance studio for a for-profit company, sparking an outcry from many residents who said there was little — if any — public benefit to the project.

Keeping with tradition, the city is weighing another public-private partnership in 2008, with an anonymous would-be donor offering the city \$8 million or more to build a new Burgess Gym.

Rising construction costs have pushed the estimated price tag of building a new gym and gymnastics center from \$9 million to upwards of \$20 million, so the donation would provide a much-needed boost to actually getting the gym built.

But the donation would come at the cost of skirting the city's usual practices of open and transparent government

because the deal is contingent on several unusual conditions:

■ Council members and top city staff know the identity of the donor, but he or she would remain anonymous to the public until the gym design is approved by the council.

■ The donor would hand-select the construction contractor rather than having the city conduct an open-bid process.

■ The donor would play an active role in managing construction. (He/she has already suggested increasing the square footage of the gym to fit two NBA-sized basketball courts.)

Thus far, there has been little to no outcry about an anonymous private donor playing a major role in the construction and design of a public facility.

All five council members have given their initial support to the potential partnership, stressing that the city is just starting the months-long environmental review process tied to building a new gym, and city commissions will review the gym plans before the council decides whether to approve the final design.

But in the past, these council members have made a point of emphasizing the importance of public vetting of council decisions, with several making government transparency a main selling point of their council campaigns.

Now, they're giving serious consideration to a proposal that would allow an anonymous, private party to influence a public project in return for a multi-million dollar donation.

The public is being kept in the dark about the identity of the donor, leaving unanswered questions about

his or her political connections, previous construction projects, relationship to the hand-picked contractor and influence over the gym design.

City staff and council members say the potential donor doesn't have any other projects planned for Menlo Park, and he or she doesn't present any potential conflicts of interest for the current council. But without a name, members of the public can't verify those claims. Under the proposed timeline, council members would cast a vote regarding the design of the gym with the identity of the donor kept from the public.

That leaves council members in the place of deciding whether it's appropriate to keep information from the public, and alter the city's usual public process if the price is right, said Peter Scheer, executive director of the California First Amendment Coalition, a nonprofit and nonpartisan group that advocates free speech and open government.

"If a city outsources some government-serving function to a private party, the citizens and media don't have the same right of access," Mr. Scheer said. "The

public has certain rights, but people have the option to waive those rights — like a contract. The big question [in Menlo Park] is: Are people willing to waive some of those rights for \$8 million?"

Thanks to the size of the donation, and the pressure to get the gym built, the council's answer to that question may very well be yes.

"The size of the donation certainly matters," said Councilman Heyward Robinson. "If the donation is \$500,000, the project still doesn't get off the ground. But without this (\$8 million) donation, I'm not sure we have a project."

Councilman John Boyle, a proponent of past public-private partnership efforts, said the city should be able to walk the fine line of protecting the public's interests while respecting the donor's request for anonymity.

"With public-private partnerships, you want to make sure that private donors don't dictate public policy," Mr. Boyle said. "But [by remaining anonymous], the donor can gracefully bow out and say 'OK, never mind' if things don't work out."

City staff says the donor wants to remain anonymous to avoid requests from other cities looking for similar donations.

Financial boost

With construction costs rising, and national, state, and local economies slowing,

Story by Rory Brown

Almanac Staff Writer

PARTNERSHIP

continued from page 13

public-private partnerships are an alluring option for cities looking to cut costs while continuing to provide — or in the case of Menlo Park's new gym, enhance — city services.

Jaws dropped in disbelief at the March 12 Parks and Recreation Commission meeting when a city-hired architect said rising construction costs would push the costs of building a new gym and gymnastics center from the previously estimated \$8.4 million to upwards of \$20 million.

The most recent cost estimate pegs the project at about \$25.7 million, and the city has about \$15.8 million to spend — \$9.1 million from the next Measure T bond issuance, and \$6.7 million in recreation-in-lieu funds from developers who have had to compensate the city for building projects with a lack of park space.

That leaves the city about \$9.9 million short of covering its costs, and an \$8 million donation would go a long way toward bridging that financial gap.

Under the proposed arrangement, the gymnasium and the gymnastics center would be housed in two new facilities. The city would pay \$6.2 million toward designing and building the gym between the city's existing Burgess Recreation Center and Alma Street; that facility would be used for basketball, volleyball, and other recreation programs. The donor would cover the remaining costs — currently estimated to be \$8 million — tied to that facility.

The city would demolish the existing gym, which is adjacent to the Burgess Aquatics Center on Laurel Street, and build a 17,400-square-foot gymnastics facility at the site. That building would cost about \$11.5 million to build, and the costs would be covered by the city.

"Here we have Menlo Park working on an agreement that would protect the public's interests, and would get the gym built with private money. How could you go wrong?" said Michael Taylor, a longtime Menlo Park community services employee who left the city last year to head the Saratoga Recreation Department.

Mr. Taylor, who has continued to help the city with the gym plans



In Woodside, resident Noel Perry donated approximately six acres off Farm Hill Boulevard across from Cañada College for the town's first park and athletic field, where Little League games are now played, including this one last week.

as a Menlo Park resident, said the \$38 million Measure T bond measure approved by voters in 2001 has proven to be "a quarter" of what the city actually needs to build new recreation facilities, and public-private partnerships could provide much needed funds.

"These opportunities for partnerships come up because [public agencies] have the land and the private industry has the money and the expertise to design and build facilities," Mr. Taylor said. "The bottom line is public-private partnerships get projects done faster, cheaper and better."

He noted that Saratoga and its public schools have used public-private partnerships to provide services and build facilities.

Whether it's Menlo Park, Saratoga, other Bay Area cities or beyond, David Henderson, a Hoover Institution research fellow who focuses on public policy, said merging the public and private sectors should only get more common.

"Local governments are meet-

ing tax resistance, and have to get more creative in funding things," Mr. Henderson said. "It's wonderful when people who want to give money get to help out, instead of cities having to tax residents."

Uncharted territory

Menlo Park has no set policy about how to address public-private partnerships, leaving council members in the position of reacting to potential partnerships on an ad-hoc basis.

Jim Ewert, a public records expert who serves as legal counsel for the California Newspaper Publishers Association, said that's all the more reason the city should abide by a completely transparent process, so taxpayers can determine what the public stands to benefit, and what it stands to lose, in any given partnership.

"As seductive and alluring as these partnerships are, when they sour, and the officials and taxpayers are saddled with debt or unintended consequences, it can be really, really bad," Mr. Ewert said. He pointed to the strife between Alameda County and the Oakland Raiders when the team returned to Oakland as an example of a partnership that has gone far less smoothly than anticipated.

In order to accommodate the would-be donor's request, the city is considering allowing the donor to pick the construction contractor rather than put the



In Atherton, police and other departments work out of trailers. Atherton officials have indicated that they might follow Portola Valley's model of raising private funding for a new town center.

project out to a public bid.

City Attorney Bill McClure said the city puts construction projects out to bid to ensure the city is getting the best deal. Because the city would save far more by sharing construction costs with the donor than by hiring its own contractor, it likely isn't necessary to put the project out to bid, he said.

But built with private money or not, the new gym will be maintained by the city and house city programs. To ensure that the gym will be cost effective to operate, and will accommodate the city's needs, the city should be the leading force in deciding who gets to build the facility, Mr. Ewert said.

"Cities need to think long and hard about what they're giving up when they enter an agreement with a private entity," Mr. Ewert said.

But Mr. Taylor noted that public-private partnerships aren't new to Menlo Park. The city contracts with private companies to provide martial arts and dance classes at the recreation center, and the Footsteps Preschool operates on city-owned land, he said.

He also noted that the privatization of the Burgess Aquatics Center — which was brought about through a process that took a mere five weeks amidst strong community opposition — has resulted in a list of aquatics programs well liked by many residents. Mr. Taylor was acting community services director when the council voted 3-2 to privatize the pool in early 2006.

"Each partnership is unique," he said. "Say what you will about the pool, but it works. That's my claim to fame." ■

County budget enters shrink mode

■ Hearings start June 23 on \$1.73 billion budget.

By Marion Softky

Almanac Staff Writer

With revenues slumping and needs growing in a faltering economy, San Mateo County faces a stiff challenge to balance its budget and tame a structural deficit that could balloon to \$92 million in five years.

On May 23, retiring County Manager John Maltbie and Assistant County Manager David Boesch proposed to the Board of Supervisors a \$1.73 billion budget for fiscal year 2009, which starts July 1.

The proposed budget would fund 5,860 positions, 12 fewer than in the current budget, and would spend \$4 million less.

The budget would be balanced by tapping \$26.4 million in general fund reserves, and reducing operating costs of county departments by \$8 million.

The county instituted a hiring freeze in December that directed departments to hold 5 percent of positions vacant.

The proposed 2010 budget is slightly lower at \$1.7 billion and

5,853 positions.

The county is relying on reserves to balance its budget through 2013, when it hopes to have eliminated the structural deficit. Reserves are projected to remain healthy at almost \$210 million, or 21 percent of budgeted spending.

to \$672,500.

Another wild card is the state budget crisis. "About 35 percent of county revenues come from state and federal sources," said Budget Director Jim Saco.

The county was expecting cuts of \$7.4 million in state funding. As a result of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's May budget

More than 1,000 properties have been reassessed downward by a total of \$350 million. April home sales were down 15.9 percent from last year, and the median home price dropped 17 percent from \$810,000 to \$672,500.

REPORT BY COUNTY MANAGER JOHN MALTBIÉ

However, the local housing economy is slowing, reducing revenue from property taxes, document fees, and other property-related sources, Mr. Maltbie and Mr. Boesch reported.

More than 1,000 properties have been reassessed downward by a total of \$350 million, they reported. April home sales were down 15.9 percent from last year, and the median home price dropped 17 percent from \$810,000

revision, the county may face another \$23.2 million in cuts for health and human services, criminal justice, and child support services, Mr. Maltbie reported.

But the county still has strong finances, Mr. Maltbie maintained. "While the county's fiscal sun may have disappeared behind a gathering storm, there is still time to get our fiscal house in order," he argued. "Doing so now will avoid the much more difficult choices

neighboring cities and counties are having to make."

2009 and beyond

To eliminate the structural deficit by 2013, two major expenses will have to be reined in: salaries and benefits, and the San Mateo Medical Center.

With a budget of \$244 million, the medical center is receiving a \$72 million subsidy from the county general fund this year and next. "We've just stopped the bleeding," Mr. Saco said. "Our goal is to get it to \$50 million by 2013."

In fact, the county is already engaged in a major effort to redesign its health system to better serve low-income and underserved residents. "Our plan is to collaborate with private health-care providers to create an effective public-private network for the underserved in San Mateo County," Mr. Maltbie wrote.

While the 2009 budget shows a negotiated increase of \$20.6 million in salaries and benefits, Mr. Saco is optimistic that these can be kept under control.

The county has reduced some of the costs for health and benefits to retirees, so that the annual increase in benefits is now lower, Mr. Saco explained. "We were able to keep the growth in salaries and benefits to 3 percent; in the previous five years, it was 8 percent," he

said. "That's a huge thing."

The 2009 budget shows several additional expenses. These include: \$1.5 million to the Sheriff's Office for overtime relief; \$1.5 million extra toward Healthy Kids, the county's program to provide health coverage for children in poor families; and \$1.1 million for a 3 percent increase to contracts with community-based organizations that provide direct services to clients in health, human services, and probation.

The 2009 budget also includes \$4 million as a one-time contribution to stabilize the landslide that has been plaguing La Honda for years.

As the county strives to cut costs and reduce its structural deficit by 2013, it faces other expensive challenges, according to Mr. Maltbie and Mr. Boesch. These include: overcrowding at the Maguire Jail; the need for a new women's jail and homeless center, and re-entry programs to reduce recidivism; a \$100 million backlog of road projects; and renegotiating the emergency ambulance contract to contain costs.

The budget proposal's only suggestions for new revenue were increasing the fees for dumping solid waste at the Ox Mountain

See COUNTY BUDGET, page 17

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View from the Bay

Atherton council seeks public support for new town hall

By Andrea Gemmet

Almanac Staff Writer

Portola Valley pulled it off. But will Atherton residents step up to fund a brand new town hall facility with millions in donated money?

The Atherton City Council seems cautiously optimistic that the answer will be yes.

Council members took the first step toward building consensus for a new facility to replace the town's motley assortment of leaking trailers and inadequate and seismically suspect buildings that house the Atherton Police Department and town staff. The council voted at its May 21 meeting to create a "blue ribbon committee" charged with gauging public opinion, exploring various designs and, in all likelihood, raising millions of dollars in private donations to pay for it all.

As for the details about how big, how expensive, and where it will go, at this point, there are far more questions than answers.

At one end of the spectrum, there could be a two-story building that houses the police station, staff offices, a new council chambers and top floor rental space for future expansion. At the other

end, it could be a simple remodeling and seismic retrofitting of existing buildings.

Councilman Charles Marsala has been championing the idea of building a new town hall, and even organized a recent panel discussion about privately funded public facilities in nearby towns. Over the past decade, Atherton has done various studies looking at design options, space needs and public interest, but never taken the idea any farther.

Council members agreed that the only way for the project to succeed is to get lots of public input throughout the process. Councilman Jerry Carlson said that Athertonians are not well-informed about the need for new facilities — yet.

"We need to do this thoughtfully, and not try to ram something through," Mr. Carlson said at the meeting. "And we need to test the water."

Councilwoman Kathy McKeithen said it might be a good idea to have a referendum vote on the project.

"We ought to find out how a majority of this town feels about the design and whether there should be public or private

(funding)," she said.

The problems with the current facilities are well known to those who spend time at the town hall on Ashfield Road. The building and public works departments are located in leaking trailers along the Caltrain tracks right-of-way. The police station doesn't have locker room facilities for its female officers and its detectives are housed

in a moldering trailer. The historic and charming Town Council Chambers are small and seismically unsound. And the administrative offices are cramped.

The blue ribbon committee is expected to spin-off a couple of subcommittees, one charged with overseeing the design and another to conduct the fundraising. City Manager Jerry Gruber encouraged

the council to make the meetings open to the public and to have the town's finance director involved.

"Every month we need to have this on our (council meeting) agenda so there's a lot of transparency," said Mr. Marsala.

A list of candidates for the blue ribbon committee will come back to the council for approval at a future meeting. ■

Stuart G. Moldaw, founder of Ross stores

■ OBITUARY

Stuart G. Moldaw, an Atherton resident and the founder of a number of clothing retailer stores, most notably the Ross Dress for Less chain, died May 24 following a brief illness. He was 81.

Mr. Moldaw founded Ross in 1982, serving as chairman of the board until 1993, and then staying actively involved as chairman emeritus until his death, according to a press release issued by the company. He was a lifelong entrepreneur who started his first company in 1958. Among his many ventures, he was a founding investor in the Gymboree Corp., and cofounder of Menlo Park-based U.S. Venture Partners.

He was active in philanthropy, and served on the boards of

the Moldaw-Zaffaroni Boys & Girls Club of East Palo Alto, the Palo Alto Medical Foundation, the Jewish Community Endowment Fund, the San Francisco Urban League, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, among others.

Mr. Moldaw was politically active as well. He was appointed by President Bill Clinton as a public delegate to the U.S. Mission at the United Nations in 1993 and as chairman of the

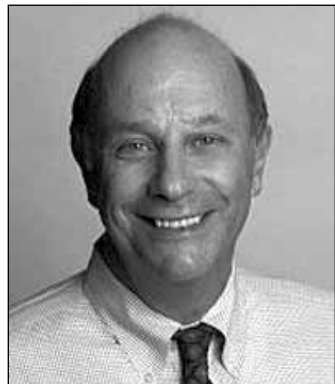


Stuart Moldaw

White House Commission on Presidential Scholars in 1996. Then-Gov. Gray Davis appointed Mr. Moldaw to chair California's World Trade Commission in 2000, and then in 2002, to serve as a commissioner on the state's Little Hoover Commission.

Mr. Moldaw is survived by his wife Phyllis of Atherton; daughters Carol and Susan; and four grandchildren.

A private memorial service is planned. The family prefers that memorial gifts be made to the Moldaw-Zaffaroni Boys & Girls Club of East Palo Alto, Eastside College Preparatory School, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco.



Len Tillem, Esq.

Host of KGO's "Legaltalk"

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Community

NEWS OF LOCAL PEOPLE AND EVENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

Ladera Oaks women's team wins senior tennis title

A Ladera Oaks women's senior tennis team recently won the senior sectional title and will go on to the U.S. Tennis Association senior league national championships at Indian Wells, California, in October.

The team is made up of players, age 50 and over, from Menlo Park, Atherton and Portola Valley. It is coached by Ray Bilsey and Bobby Fenton at Ladera Oaks Swim and Tennis Club in Portola Valley.

"Many of the team members have been playing together for over 10 years," says team member Leigh Flesher. "This season was especially gratifying as we started the season with four straight losses."

The team then went on to win the local league (made up of such teams as Sharon Heights Country Club, Alpine Hills Swim and Tennis Club, and Foothills Tennis and Swim Club); the district tournament in Sacramento in April; and the sectional tournament, held May

SPORTS

16-18 in Walnut Creek.

"We think this may be the first time any Ladera Oaks team has qualified for the national tournament, so needless to say we are very excited," says Flesher in an e-mail.

At the Walnut Creek tournament, the Ladera Oaks team won the section championship at the 4.0 level, based on a National Tennis Rating Program system that ranges from 2.5 for beginners to 5.0 for advanced.

Team captain is Carolyn Peters. Co-captain is Martha Bacon. Team members include Heather Abbis, Elizabeth Bellock, Diane Brandt, Laurie Burmeister, Ursula Cooney, Elizabeth Dixon, Charmaine Eliason, Leigh Flesher, Enid Greenfield, Nanci Kauffman, Kay Melchor, Nancy Paxton, Laurie Rose, Nancy Sallaberry, Nancy Serrurier and Cece Waters.

Members of the championship team are: first row, from left: Laurie Rose, Nancy Sallaberry, Captain Carol Peters, Diant Brandt, Heather Abbis, Cece Waters and Liz Bellock; and second row, from left: Leigh Flesher, Nancy Paxton, Kay Melchor, Fan Sue Johnson and Coach Ray Bilsey. Not pictured: team members Martha Bacon, Laurie Burmeister, Ursula Cooney, Elizabeth Dixon, Charmaine Eliason, Enid Greenfield, Nanci Kauffman and Nancy Serrurier, and Coach Bobby Fenton.



Photo by Marcelo Gumucio

Woodside Vaulters hold Spring Fest

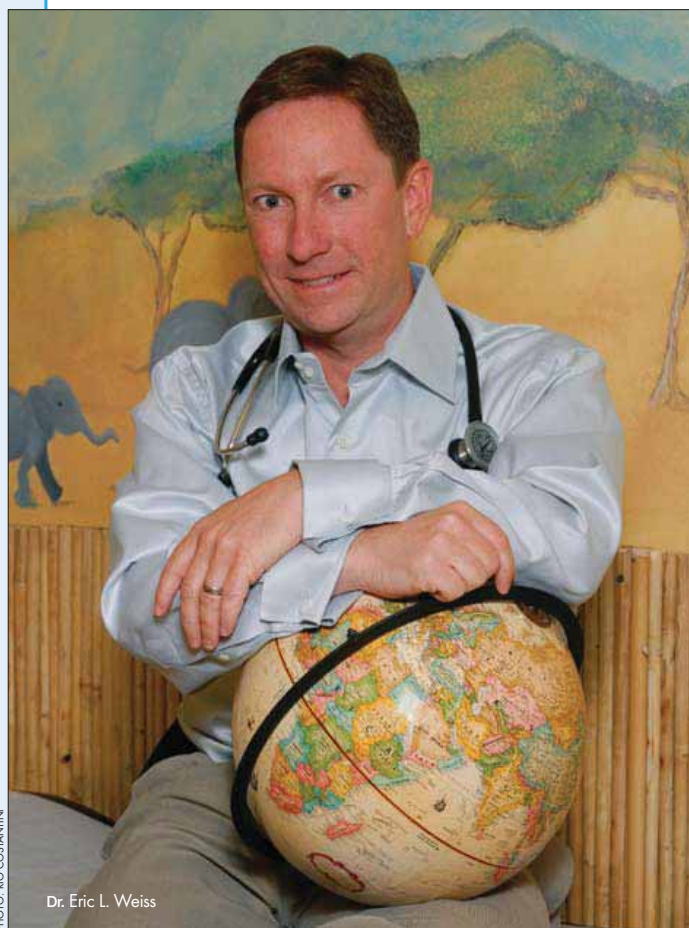
The Woodside Vaulters' Spring Fest will be held Sunday, June 8, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Spring Down Equestrian Center, 725 Portola Road in Portola Valley.

This annual equestrian vaulting competition is recognized by the U.S. Equestrian Federation and the American Vaulting Association. Vaulting is the sport of gym-

nastics and dance on horseback.

This year's Spring Fest is the final qualifying event for U.S. vaulters vying for a chance to compete at the World Vaulting Championships in July at Brno in the Czech Republic.

For more information, go to the Woodside Vaulters' Web site: www.woodsidevaulters.org.



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The Village Doctor is open to the public Monday - Friday, 9:00 - 5:00 by appointment.

COUNTY BUDGET

continued from page 15

landfill, and making county-run sewer and sanitation districts pay their own way.

"The next years are going to be tough," Mr. Saco said.

"We dare not fail in this effort," Mr. Maltbie concluded. "For the consequences of failure

are profound indeed — the loss of public confidence, the inability to meet the basic needs of our most vulnerable citizens, and mass layoffs — things from which it would take the county a generation to recover." ■

INFORMATION

■ The Board of Supervisors will hold three days of public hearings on the proposed budget beginning Monday, June 23, at 9 a.m., in the board chambers, 400 County Center, at the corner of Bradford and Hamilton streets in Redwood City.

■ The recommended budget is available for viewing online at www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/budget, or at the county manager's office at County Center. A document showing the schedule of hearings for different departments is available at both sites.



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Community Health Education Programs

June 2008

Events and Lectures

Taking the Burn Out of Heartburn

Tuesday, June 10, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Frank Fazzolari, M.D., PAMF Gastroenterology

Join us for a presentation on acid reflux, also known as GERD. The talk will focus on the diagnosis and treatment of this condition.

Hearst Center for Health Education, Level 3, Jampils Building, Palo Alto Medical Foundation, 795 El Camino Real, Palo Alto. RSVP to 650-853-4873.

Classes

Learning About Heart Failure, Wednesday, June 11, 2:30 – 4 p.m. and Friday, June 27, 10 – 11:30 a.m.

This class, taught by a cardiology nurse practitioner, discusses medications used in treatment, dietary requirements, weight monitoring, self-care, activity guidelines, and symptom recognition and reporting, and more.

What You Need to Know About Warfarin, Wednesday, June 18, 6 – 8 p.m.

A PAMF pharmacist will discuss what warfarin is, why you are taking it and how you can help yourself.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, begins on July 7 & 8, 6:30 – 9 p.m.

Free orientation on Monday, June 23, 6:30 – 9 p.m. This program is designed to help people learn how to deal effectively with physical and emotional stress by providing training in breathing, meditation and gentle yoga.

Supermarket Wise, Wednesday, July 9, 2 – 4 p.m.

Learn techniques for making healthier food choices in a local supermarket with dietitian Karen Ross, M.S., R.D.

Support Groups

Cancer (1st & 3rd Tuesdays) • **Diabetes** (1st Wednesday) • **Multiple Sclerosis** (2nd & 4th Mondays) • **Sleep Apnea** (1st Thursday) • **Alcohol and Drug Education** (Every Tuesday) • **Healing Imagery for Cancer Patients** (June 11 and 25)

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'All Things'

An exhibition of new works in oil by Lindy Duncan includes this painting of Venice. The show, which includes a collection of local landscapes and a glimpse of travel beyond, will be on display at the Portola Art Gallery at Allied Arts Guild June 3-30. Ms. Duncan is a new member of the Portola Art Gallery. A reception for the artist will be held from 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday, June 7, at the gallery, 75 Arbor Road in Menlo Park. Hours are Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.



Los Altos Hounds invites public to tour local stables

Visitors are invited to explore unique barns, watch riding exhibitions, have lunch and browse through equine art and gift items when the Los Altos Hounds holds its 16th annual stable tour and luncheon on Sunday, June 8, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., in Atherton, Woodside and Portola Valley.

A highlight of the tour will be a visit to the new Menlo Circus Club Equestrian Center in Atherton that has replaced the club's 75-year-old stables and grandstand. The center now includes a Craftsman-style Turf Club, a new square sand jumping arena, and a new 66-stall horse barn. The handsome center is painted a smart Oxford gray.

The Turf Club houses a wood-paneled recreation room and offices. The adjoining barn has paneled tack rooms, restrooms with lockers for the riders, grooming stalls and wash racks on each aisle for the horses.

Polo games will be under way on the Circus Club field during the stable tours. Riders will show American Saddlebred horses exhibiting

their three- and five-gaited movements.

See photo on Page 5.

In Woodside, a tack sale, with new and used saddles, bridles, bits, halters, blankets and boots, both English and Western, will be held at 2955 Woodside Road, behind the Pioneer Hotel.

Lunch will be served at Woodside's National Center for Equine Facilitated Therapy, where demonstrations of therapeutic riding will be set up. The facility includes a fully restored 1920s dairy barn, with additional paddocks to accommodate more than 50 horses.

Nearby is the EquiSport Rehabilitation Center, which offers lay-up facilities for horses. It includes 28 stalls and an "aquapacer," which is used for rehabilitation from surgery, preparation for the track, and for treating bowed tendons and pulled ligaments.

Private barns in Portola Valley and Woodside will also be open on the tour. Carol Tague and Mindy Baxter are once again serving as tour co-chairs.

See LOS ALTOS HOUNDS, page 21

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The Almanac



Photo by Veronica Weber/The Almanac

Making plans for the “Symphony in Flowers” benefit are, from left, co-chair Nancy Greenbach, Gaye Bruce, and co-chair Darlene Woodson. They are in the Atherton garden of the Manus/Salzman home, where the party will be held. Ms. Bruce is president of the Mid-Peninsula League of the San Francisco Symphony, sponsor of the event.

Garden party, concert benefits symphony

By Jane Knoerle
Almanac Lifestyles Editor

The garden party and twilight concert fundraiser for the San Francisco Symphony was such a hit four years ago that the symphony’s Mid-Peninsula League is orchestrating a repeat performance.

This year’s benefit will be held on Saturday, June 14, at “Chateau Le Refuge,” the Atherton estate of Jillian Manus and Alan Salzman. Guests, asked to come in evening garden party attire, will stroll the lawns of the 3-1/2-acre estate, enjoy a light gourmet supper and wine, and attend one of two concerts featuring musicians from the San Francisco Symphony.

Plein air painters and strolling musicians will add to the party atmosphere. Mid-Peninsula League members are also making sure there will be plenty of their signature home-baked cookies.

Nancy Greenbach and Darlene Woodson are co-chairs of the party. They know it takes a spectacular event to attract sophisticated Peninsula partygoers, and are confident the garden party will do just that.

The setting of the estate will lend a note of opulence that’s hard to match, even in Atherton. Symphony league members will lead tours of the gardens, which feature a series of boxwood-edged “rooms,” including a “secret garden.” Areas of the garden are inspired by favorite Parisian gardens.

A shady “forest glen” features an antique fountain surrounded by hostas and begonias. Nearby are 400-year-old gates that were imported from a European estate once belonging to royalty. In the fern garden, a waterfall that flows into a koi pond is banked

by Japanese maples.

Since purchasing their property several years ago, the owners have completely renovated the house, often using centuries-old materials, including a fireplace mantel dating back to 1604.

Ms. Manus is the founder of Manus & Associates Literary and Media Management Inc., based in New York and Palo Alto. Mr. Salzman is co-founder, CEO and

See SYMPHONY, page 21



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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that the City Council of the Town of Atherton will hold a public hearing on Wednesday, June 11, 2008, commencing at 7:00 p.m. (or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard), in the Town Council Chambers, 94 Ashfield Road, Atherton, for the purpose of:

ADOPTION OF A RESOLUTION authorizing the levy of a Special Parcel Tax for Municipal services and capital improvements, and expenditures of funds derived from such a tax

INTERESTED PERSONS may appear and be heard, or written comments may be submitted to the Atherton City Council, c/o City Clerk, 91 Ashfield Road, Atherton, CA, 94027. Comments may also be faxed to the City Council at 650-688-6528, or emailed to: khamilton@ci.atherton.ca.us. Any attendee who wishes accommodation for a disability should contact the City Clerk's Office at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.

/s/ Kathi Hamilton
Kathi Hamilton, Acting City Clerk

Dated and Posted: May 30, 2008

Published in THE ALMANAC on June 4, 2008.



Photo by Veronica Weber/The Almanac

'I hadn't heard that'

President Bush seemed incredulous earlier this year when a reporter asked him about motorists facing the prospect of \$4 a gallon gasoline this year. "I hadn't heard that," he said. To many local drivers, including patrons of this Chevron station in the Ladera shopping center last week, \$4 gas seems like a happy memory.

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DISPATCH
continued from page 5

patchers field 911 calls for fire departments, the Sheriff's Office (including from Woodside and Portola Valley), the AMR ambulance service, and East Palo Alto, Half Moon Bay, Millbrae and Broadmoor. The dispatchers handled some 400,000 calls last year, according to Ms. Young.

On June 3, county dispatchers will start accepting 911 calls from SPRINT, Ms. Young said. Later the county will phase in calls from other cell phone companies, including Verizon, T-Mobile, AT&T, and Metro PCS.

Reception of wireless emergency calls will still be uncertain, depending on where the towers are located. Each company has its own antennas scattered throughout the Peninsula. In the Skyline Boulevard area or in the country, or near a freeway, your call may still go to the CHP in Vallejo. "Every single vendor has its own infrastructure," Ms. Young noted. Dispatch centers operated by the Menlo Park and Atherton police departments also receive 911 cell phone calls in their areas — if they are not too close to a freeway. "It depends where you are in relation to the tower the call bounces off of," said Jan Lanier, communications manager for Menlo Park. "That tower determines where the call goes."

Not all cell phones are the same. Some give precise locations, while older ones may only identify the location of the tower. The Atherton dispatch center recently received a call from a cell phone with a GPS system that pinpointed an accident at the corner of El Camino Real and Alejandra Avenue, reported Janelle Miller of the Police Department. ■

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Bob Sherman leaving Woodside School

By Andrea Gemmet
Almanac Staff Writer

■ SCHOOLS

At other schools, getting sent to the assistant principal's office might be cause for fear and trembling. But that sure doesn't seem to be the case with Bob Sherman, Woodside Elementary School's assistant principal for the past six years.

Mr. Sherman, the friendly guy who welcomes students by name every morning, is leaving Woodside School to become the principal of John Muir Elementary School in Cupertino in the fall.

"It's a great opportunity (for him), but our loss is Cupertino's gain," said school board president Bettina Pike. "I think he inspired trust, and made a terrific connection with kids across the board, from kindergarten to eighth grade."

Mr. Sherman's role as full-time assistant principal is being phased out as part of an administrative restructuring taking place over the next year. The dual role of superintendent and principal will end with Dan Vinson's retirement next June, to be replaced by a full-time principal and a full-time superintendent. Recruitment for

a new principal is already under way, a year sooner than expected, to help fill Mr. Sherman's role.

"When Bob looks you in the eye and shakes your hand, and says good morning, you get it, you feel that he's there to take care of your children," Ms. Pike said.

Mr. Sherman said he's tried to wed the role of disciplinarian to that of school counselor, rather than using fear and punishment to elicit good behavior from students.

Mr. Sherman said that, career-wise, the timing is perfect for him to move on. But it won't be easy, he said. The administrative restructuring was a "happy accident" that forced him to dust off his resume and start looking for opportunities, he said.

"Woodside is an incredibly warm and comfortable place, it's an easy school to feel safe and happy at," Mr. Sherman said.



Bob Sherman

"When you need to take a risk, and make a jump, it's not a comfortable thing, but it's a great time to do it. It's hard though, because I have a lot of friends here."

John Muir, a K-5 school that's roughly the same size as Woodside, is part of the 25-school Cupertino Elementary School District. It's an easy commute from his home in Woodside Hills, and he's going to continue helping out with Woodside's annual May Day celebration next year, he said.

Ms. Pike said that while she appreciates the professional relationship between board president and assistant principal, as a parent she's seen firsthand how Mr. Sherman impacts students. When her extremely shy first-grader recently announced she would be singing karaoke during the school's "lunchtime jam," Ms. Pike said she was amazed.

"(My daughter) told me that Mr. Sherman encouraged her. I don't know how he did it," Ms. Pike said. "He just inspires that kind of behavior. It's just remarkable."

The school plans to celebrate "Bob Sherman Day" on Wednesday, June 11. ■

Dr. Nancy Snyderman at Allied Arts

■ AROUND TOWN

Dr. Nancy Snyderman, chief medical editor for NBC News, will be at Allied Arts Guild from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, June 14, to sign her new book, "Medical Myths That Can Kill You." The Guild is located at 75 Arbor Road in Menlo Park.

A cocktail reception for Dr. Snyderman will be held from 4 to 8 p.m. Saturday, June 14, at the Stanford Faculty Club, 439 Lagunita Drive at Stanford. Admission is \$125 and includes an autographed copy of her new book. Reservations are required.

Dr. Snyderman's appearances are coordinated by the Allied Arts Guild Auxiliary, in support of Lucile Packard Children's Hospital, and Kepler's bookstore in Menlo Park. For reservations, call 325-3259.

Garden party benefit

Guests are asked to come in evening garden party attire for "Summer Magic," a benefit for St. Francis Center, to be held Sunday, June 8, at the Burns estate in Atherton. The evening will begin with a 4 p.m. reception and silent auction. A gourmet dinner will be served at 5:30 p.m.

Joe Putnam and Mike Nevin will be masters of ceremony for the live auction at 7 p.m. Valet parking will be available.

Tickets for "Summer Magic" are \$100 each. Checks in the name of St. Francis Center may be sent to Josephine De Luca, P.O. Box 620356, Redwood City, CA 94062.

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SYMPHONY

continued from page 19

managing partner of VantagePoint Venture Partners Inc.

"The Salzmans are generous community supporters. That's why they donated their home to our event," says Ms. Greenbach.

For the past 18 years, the Mid-Peninsula League has been raising money for the San Francisco Symphony. For years, their signature event was "Symphony in Flowers," a garden tour held every other year. The difficulties of staffing and finding home owners willing to

open their gardens to the public led members to look for a new format, which seems to be a winning one.

The June 14 garden party will take place from 4 to 7 p.m., rain or shine. Tickets are \$150 per person, by advance reservation only, and include valet parking.

Marcia and John Goldman are honorary chairs of the garden party. Mr. Goldman is president of the San Francisco Symphony's board of directors.

Funds raised by the benefit will be used to support the symphony and its outreach programs.

Active members of the league

working with Ms. Greenbach and Ms. Woodson are: Susan Barkley, Noyon Berg, Jocelyn Blum, Mary Britton, Gaye Bruce, Gloria Capps, Peggy Chamberlain, Carol Clarke, Janet Conlan, Nancy Davidson, Glenda Derman, Frances Edwards, Maria Erdi, Betsy Furst, Louise Geraci, Dorothea Gordon, Phyllis Gray, Jane Hartman, Elsa Heald, Sylvia Hochscheid, Dana Horner, Gilda Itskovitz, Mary Louis Johnson, Doris Kellett, Regina Koontz, Mimi Kugushev, Ling-Ling Kulla, Virginia Levick, Lois Lin, Margaret Lyon, Julie Michelson, Betty Ogawa, Judy Orttung, Judy Palm, Andrea Palmer, Susie Pearsall, Barbara Roberts, Betty Rudolph, Gae Sares, Dexter Scherling, Carolyn Schmarzo, Bernice Schwabacher, Up-C Scott, Lucy Solberg, Danuta Szeffler, Eugenie Taylor, Joan Wells, Helene Wickett, Twila Woods, Elizabeth Wright and Edith Zitelli.

For more information, call 851-1704 or e-mail: symphonyinflowers@yahoo.com. ■

2955 Woodside Road. The cost is \$25 per person; children under 5 are admitted free. Luncheon tickets are \$25; advance reservations are suggested.

Send a check, made payable to LAH, to 150 Golden Oak Drive, Portola Valley, CA 94028. Include your name, number of tour tickets and number of luncheon tickets desired. For more information, call 851-2551. ■

LOS ALTOS HOUNDS

continued from page 18

The Los Altos Hounds is a riding club that meets from November to March. The club was organized in the Los Altos Hills area in 1953 and continues today in the Woodside-Portola Valley area and other Northern California locales.

Tour tickets will be available on June 8 at Woodside Town Hall,

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



WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

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

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

A recap of Almanac endorsements

The Atherton City Council

The Almanac recommends Jim Dobbie in this race with Elizabeth Lewis.

Measure O, the sales tax for city, county parks

The Almanac recommends a "yes" vote on this important measure, which will establish a one-eighth-cent sales tax to support city and county parks. Menlo Park and Atherton parks would benefit from Measure O.

Prop. 99, the correct way to restrict eminent domain

Voters should not be confused over the dueling Propositions 98 and 99. Don't be fooled. Proposition 99 would stop the wanton taking



of private property under eminent domain, while Proposition 98 would also do away with rent control, which is still badly needed

in some communities like East Palo Alto. Vote yes on Proposition 99 and no on Proposition 98.

Annexation idea worth a look

As they head to the polls Tuesday to vote for City Council candidate Elizabeth Lewis or Jim Dobbie, Atherton residents aren't likely to be thinking much about Mayor Jim Janz's "out of the box" idea to annex a good chunk of unincorporated North Fair Oaks on the city's northern and eastern borders.

But when the full council convenes with a new member, we suggest that they begin a dialogue to discuss the possibilities for relieving some of the budgetary pain the town has experienced over the years. We believe the mayor makes some good points: There is pressure from regional and state agencies to build more multi-family housing, which is not going to happen on the mostly one-acre, strictly single-family residential parcels that make up the bulk of the town today. Clearly Atherton, which has no com-

mercial property or multi-family housing, could benefit from sales-tax-generating enterprises and smaller lot developments.

Mr. Janz admits that there is a downside, which is that many annexation plans do not end up producing a net gain for the acquiring entity. For example, just to provide adequate police protection for what is now the unincorporated county community of North Fair Oaks could add thousands of dollars to the town's annual budget. And planning and zoning matters could also be a drain on the town's coffers.

On the plus side, Mr. Janz says several members of the county Board of Supervisors and Redwood City's City Council indicated they not would oppose annexation, although it is way too early in the process to be able to count on support from any board or agency.

But looming in the future is the 2010 expiration of the current parcel tax, an exercise that has in recent years been a pain in the side of Atherton council members and town officials. The \$750 annual levy doesn't seem like much in such an affluent community, but anti-tax opponents never fail to take the opportunity to bash the town's failings before voters have their say.

Mr. Janz believes it is possible for sales tax collections from an annexed area to drop to the bottom line, and give the town a new source of income. That might appeal to some Atherton residents, but we predict that many would turn up their noses at being associated with the smaller homes and businesses found east of Middlefield Road up to Fifth Avenue. In addition, the North Fair Oaks community may not be eager to jump on Atherton's bandwagon, especially if it means paying a parcel tax for the privilege.

Mr. Janz said he had been thinking of the annexation idea for the last 10 or 15 years, but did not promote it because he thought it would not get any traction. We believe now is the time to study the idea and decide if it deserves a push or should be relegated to the junk heap. The new council should take a serious look at the pros and cons of annexation. It may, or may not, be an idea whose time has come.

LETTERS

Our readers write

Bike tunnel idea a waste of money

Editor:

It is a shameful waste of the city of Menlo Park's money to pay a consultant \$41,000 to study the feasibility and placement for a bike tunnel under the Caltrain tracks.

The 4-1 vote (with John Boyle against) by the City Council is just another example of fiscal mismanagement by the council. Just a few years ago the city went through this same wasteful exercise. Didn't that consultant give them the answer they were looking for?

If the biking public needs to go west, they can either use crosswalks or ride half a mile to the south, use the bridge to Palo Alto and then travel up Sand Hill Road. The city doesn't need a bike tunnel or the expense of studying it, again.

Pat White
Santa Cruz Avenue,
Menlo Park



Portola Valley Archives

Our Regional Heritage

Teacher Fannie Alford, front row, right, poses with the 1948 students of Portola School, the building that is now called Portola Valley's Historic Schoolhouse. Anyone who can identify any of the students is invited to call 851-1700, ext. 10, with information.

No need for another bike tunnel study

By Steve Schmidt

In light of Menlo Park's anticipated \$1 million deficit for the 2008-09 budget year, the recent City Council decision to spend \$41,000 on a study for a bicycle under-crossing is a \$41,000 mistake.

Another study is the last thing we need. Since 1994 this project has been identified in our general plan as a badly needed addition to the city's transportation infrastructure. Over the years several sites have been studied, all of which revealed well-documented costs and benefits.

Authorizing another expensive and redundant study appears to be another example of substituting words for action. Studying a concept is not the same as implementing a project. The city has

recently added transportation staff that could dig up the history on this project and determine where the suitable locations are and the nature of their constraints.

In opposing the study, council member John Boyle contends that we should wait until the El Camino visioning is complete; resident Sue Kayton wants to wait for Caltrain to remodel before funding a study.

What's to study? Everybody knows that the tracks are a barrier for residents traveling between homes, schools, jobs and shopping. The tracks create insur-



GUEST
OPINION

mountable safety problems for school children and are a major cause of traffic congestion at Hillview Middle School and Menlo-Atherton High School. Twice a day, parents are justifiably forced to chauffeur their kids from home to school and back. One or more under-crossings will enable us to actually have bona fide safe routes to school and offer everyone more viable alternatives to driving around Menlo Park.

Let's not speculate on Caltrain's future plans in order to delay Menlo Park's progress. Caltrain's improvements, which are not likely to look much different than what we have today, can be designed in harmony with what we build. A developer will want to design an El Camino project around an under-crossing to take advantage of the pedestrian and bicycle access from either

side of the tracks that will enhance the "European Village" ambiance.

Since 2002 Menlo Park city councils have alternately used the under-crossing concept as an election season political football or a green-washed talking point. It's time to stop fooling around and get something done.

I urge the four council members who voted for the \$41,000 study last week to reconsider their votes and put our well-paid staff to work and accomplish something. Fourteen years is a long time to fulfill a fundamental element of the general plan. It is disingenuous for the city to conduct the 18-month Green Ribbon Citizens Committee exercise and then use a study so that no one has to reveal a position before the November City Council election.

Steve Schmidt lives on Central Avenue and is a former council member and mayor of Menlo Park.

Mourning the loss of Oak Knoll trees

By Carol Taggart

This summer, most likely in mid to late June, six heritage trees at Oak Knoll School in Menlo Park will be destroyed.

During the span of 150 to 450 years, their roots have hugged the earth and through them sent nourishment up through massive trunks into far-reaching branches and leaves. In turn, the canopies of these trees — four oaks, a pine, and a Joshua tree — have provided shelter and food for a myriad of birds and squirrels.

For the many children who have played there, the trees have provided shelter from the sun and rain, and for all of us, beauty. Soon, these mighty oxygen-producing trees will be gone, and for four of those trees a grassy soccer field, with demands for water, will be their replacement.

During the 24 years I taught at this school, the trees were always a delight for scavenger hunts, bird identification and, in the fall, observation of the gathering of acorns pounded into the oaks' individually drilled holes, carved out perfectly by acorn woodpeckers. In the spring there was always the joy of watching birds carrying material to nests, and it would be impossible to count the many times baby birds, accidentally fallen from their nests, were brought into my classroom for rescue.

I agree with Kent Steffens, director of public works for the city of Menlo Park, who stated in a letter to the Menlo Park City School District, "The school district is encouraged to use every reasonable effort to

preserve heritage-sized trees at Oak Knoll School."

To do so, in planning for the new buildings, a soccer field, and parking lots at Oak Knoll School, the school board could have made the decision to adopt the Menlo Park Heritage Tree Ordinance, thereby saving the trees and planning around them. Instead, they chose to exempt the school from that city ordinance. In addition, the board could have chosen to do a full-blown non-partial environmental impact report, as they did at Encinal School. They chose otherwise.

What the board did choose was to adopt the negative declaration report, and voted for its passage the evening of May 8, which states in part that there will be no negative impact resulting from disposal of the six heritage trees.

In order to conclude that there would be "no impact" by the removal of heritage trees, to my knowledge the school board or their lawyers have never requested any advice or information from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Audubon Society, or any other environmental organization. I have spoken with high-ranking personnel of several of these organizations, and they concur there has never been any communication regarding the trees with the school district.

Incredibly, the report states

that removal will not "interfere with movement ... of native residents ... or use of native wildlife nursery sites" because, it claims, "There are no natural habitats within the vicinity that would attract native residents or migratory species." One has only to walk under and in the vicinity of the trees to see the many woodpecker holes used by numerous cavity-nesting bird species, and to watch bird flight and activity among the trees. One of the oaks slated for removal is used as a granary tree for acorn storage in the fall and winter by native woodpeckers.

The report further declares that the project would have impact upon biological resources if there's "substantial direct or indirect effect on species identified as a candidate ... by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or any species protected under provisions of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act." The response is "No Impact." The burrowing owl is given as an example, which leads me to believe there has been some confusion between the Endangered Species Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act on the part of the authors of the negative declaration. It is indeed correct to say that there are no endangered birds on the Oak Knoll School campus, but it is completely false to claim that there are no bird species on this property protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Additionally, the "no impact" conclusion is faulty in that it fails to mention the six heritage trees planned for removal, and amazingly makes no mention

Three oak trees, foreground, and a Joshua tree are four of the six trees that will be cut down to make way for a soccer field and other expansion planned at Oak Knoll School.

Photo by Veronica Weber/
The Almanac



of any bird activity at all. The numerous native species of birds that live and migrate between and within the six heritage trees are fully protected under the migratory bird act. The report also concludes that "there are no unique habitats within the property." I guess that depends on one's definition of "unique." When the time comes to take down these magnificent trees, I am terribly concerned about possible harm or disposal of nesting birds. The acorn woodpecker, for example, may have two or even three broods in a season, which makes it very possible there could be nesting throughout this summer.

Once these trees are gone, they will be gone forever. Some of them date back to the time when the Pilgrims first arrived on our eastern shores. I can't help but think, years from now when photographs and stories are shown of the massive trees

that once stood at the Oak Knoll School site, people will wonder, "What were those people thinking to have destroyed so much beauty and wildlife right in their own backyard?"

I wonder how we can teach the children of today, Earth's guardians of tomorrow, the importance of conservation and caring for our Earth when we, the adults, choose to dispose of our irreplaceable trees and diminish habitat for other living creatures.

Destroying these magnificent trees that have given so much for so long is an indescribable tragedy. If there were a magic wand that would change the hearts and minds of those who have made what I believe to be a horrific decision, I would welcome it with extreme joy!

Carol Taggart is a retired Oak Knoll School teacher who lives in Menlo Park.

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