

PLAYING FIELDS: Kelly Park renovation plan clears council; city staff eyes Flood Park. Page 7

The Almanac

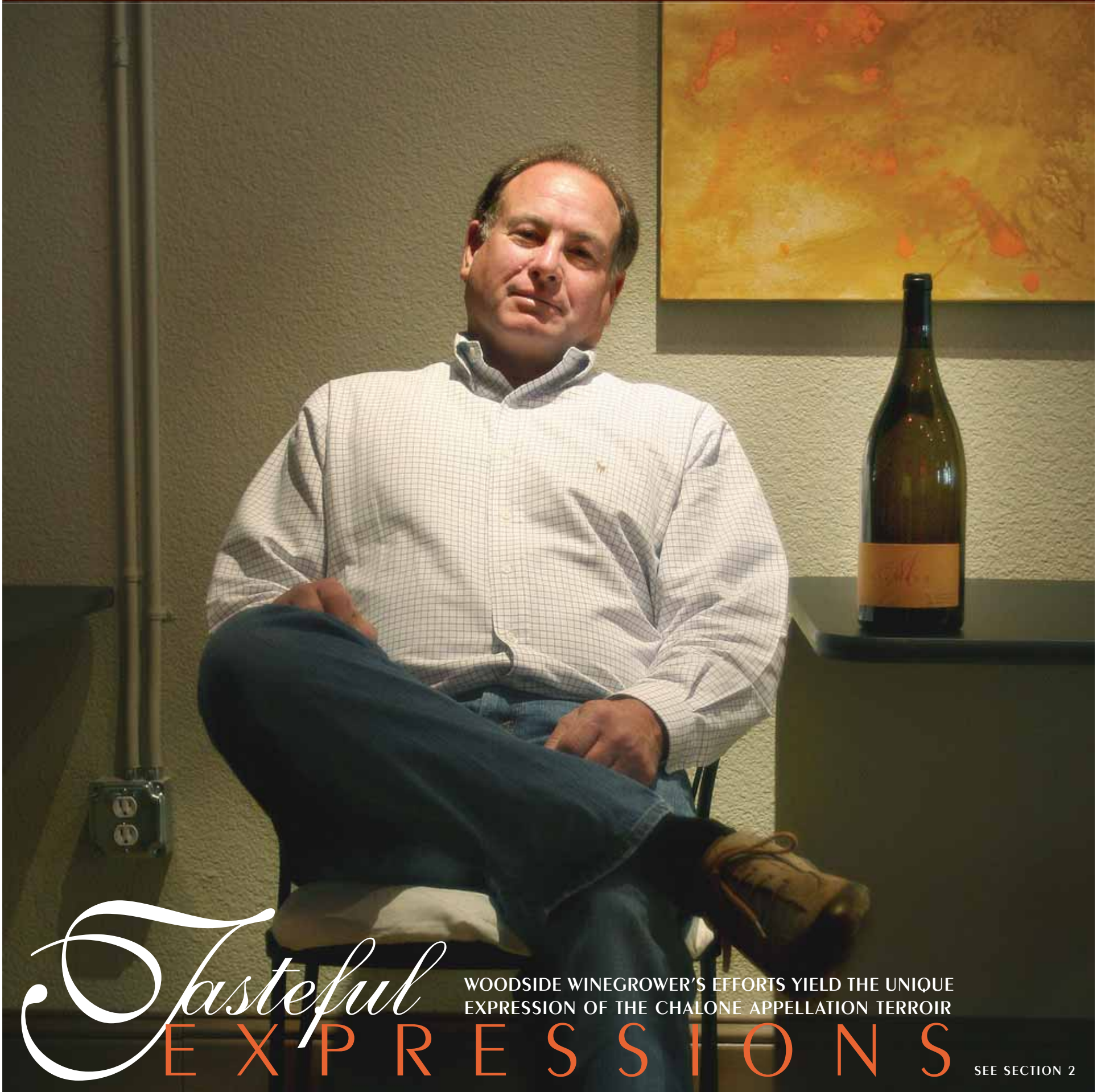
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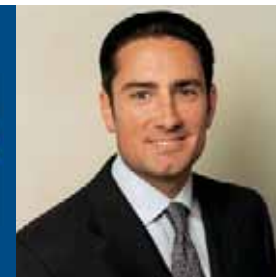


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Inside

This week's news, features and community events.

FIRST SHOT



Come see our school

Woodside Elementary School kindergarten teacher Sonja Virgallito teaches kitchen safety and basic math skills with a gingerbread-baking project. Parents of incoming kindergarteners can get a tour of classrooms, meet teachers and hear from specialists at an information meeting at the school on Tuesday, Feb. 10. For more information, see Page 16.

Menlo Park

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On the cover

Michael Michaud of Woodside sits for an interview at GC's Tasting Cafe in Menlo Park, where he has poured his wines for tasting events. Michaud Vineyard, which produces pinot noir, chardonnay, syrah and other wines, is in the rugged, remote Chalone appellation, where growing wine grapes can be a challenge. Photo by Michelle Le. See story, **Section 2 cover**.

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Roberts Tip of the Week

Character Assessment

Those who fancy white wines could hardly be blamed if they were to dismiss Soave as being rather non-distinctive. After all, this cold, crisp, white wine from the Veneto region of northeastern Italy is regarded more as a quaffing accompaniment to food than a stand-alone wine to be savored. However, all that has begun to change as Italian vintners have increasingly abandoned large-scale production techniques that favored quantity over quality and have embraced the idea of producing wines with more character and intensity. By focusing their attention on the Garganega grape, which has been the most interesting of the Soave blend, winemakers are now producing flavorful, appealing wines that deserve attention.

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Hint: According to legend, the famous Italian poet Dante gave Soave its name (meaning "smooth") because of its mildness.



Local News

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Here's to you, Mr. Robinson

Is Menlo Park Mayor Heyward Robinson a poster child for the troubles that plague the American economy?

Forbes.com columnist Peter Robinson seems to think so.

In a Jan. 16 column, columnist Robinson skewered Mayor Robinson for lobbying members of Congress to fund several local causes, including a project to prevent flooding along San Francisquito Creek, during his trip to Washington, D.C., for the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Menlo Park is one of America's richest cities, Peter Robinson wrote, so why should its mayor be "begging" for a slice of the bailout pie on Capitol Hill?

Mayor Robinson said that the columnist hadn't done his homework.

"We weren't asking for a bailout," he said, but rather for funding through the \$819 billion stimulus package proposed by the Obama administration. (Menlo Park has asked for \$6.9 million for a variety of projects).

He noted that the creek project has already been approved for federal funds, and that it would primarily benefit low-income communities in East Palo Alto.

"It's kind of interesting that he starts out his article by saying, 'Let me introduce you to Heyward Robinson,' when he's never talked to me," Mayor Robinson said. "Does he not have bigger fish to go after?"

For more on Mr. Robinson's trip to Washington, see page 9.

Keep on tickin'

Tim Hanretty, the assistant superintendent of the Woodside Elementary School District, got a token of appreciation at a recent board meeting in honor of his 10 years of service. Mr. Hanretty, who filled in as interim superintendent when Dan Vinson retired in June, was thanked for keeping the administration running smoothly during a time of transition. The board gave him a clock inscribed with the words, "On time and on budget."

Stimulus money coming to local towns?

■ Menlo Park goes after federal funds for creek, other projects.

By Sean Howell

Almanac Staff Writer

Assuming that the massive economic stimulus package gets approved by Congress, will any of that money be headed to the Midpeninsula?

Officials in Menlo Park aren't leaving anything to chance, while other towns in The Almanac's circulation area are taking a wait-and-see approach.

An \$819-billion-plus stimulus package, which includes tax cuts and funding for infrastructure projects, was approved Wednesday by the U.S. House of Representatives and is under consideration in the Senate. President Barack Obama said he hopes to

have the stimulus bill on his desk for signing by Feb. 20.

Menlo Park

The city of Menlo Park is asking for stimulus money for a variety of projects, from solar heating to street resurfacing. The city has already submitted requests for five specific projects, totaling \$6.9 million, according to Public Works Director Kent Steffens.

The city asked for \$5.5 million to resurface streets across the city, and for \$900,000 to connect a pedestrian underpass under the Bayfront Expressway at the end of Willow Road to public streets and the trail system.

The city requested \$60,000 for a solar hot water heating system

Mr. Robinson went to Washington. Page 9

for the Belle Haven Pool, and \$200,000 to install a solar photovoltaic system at the city's corporation yard on Burgess Drive.

The city also asked for \$250,000 to complete funding for a passage for steelhead trout in a portion of the San Francisquito Creek, near the southern end of Alma Street.

"As the stimulus package becomes more defined, we'll continue to look for opportunities," Mr. Steffens said.

He said there might be other projects involving energy conservation that Menlo Park could fund through the stimulus package, including the idea of converting streetlamps along the downtown stretch of Santa Cruz Avenue to run on light-emitting

diodes (LEDs).

The city also is in the process of drafting a letter to Rep. Anna Eshoo, D-Menlo Park, asking for funding on behalf of the Clara-Mateo homeless shelter, located on the Menlo Park Veterans Affairs campus off Willow Road. A decline in donations over the past three months has forced the shelter to cut its capacity from 100 beds to 60. CEO Christine Burroughs said that a recent boost in donations will enable the shelter to stay open through March, but that its future is uncertain after that.

San Francisquito Creek

During his recent trip to Washington, D.C., Menlo Park Mayor Heyward Robinson lobbied federal representatives for

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Donors withdraw pledges on town projects

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

With the crash in financial markets, two donations — one of \$1.4 million to Portola Valley's new Town Center complex and one of \$75,000 to the project to restore part of Sausal Creek — are being withdrawn, according to Town Manager Angela Howard.

As a result, the Town Council appropriated another \$1.2 million for the projects at its Jan. 14 meeting. This means the council is breaking its promise to spend no more than \$3 million in town money on the \$19 million complex that includes a new library, Town Hall and community hall. Instead the town will spend \$4.2 million, including \$296,200 on the creek.

For the complex, residents donated \$15.5 million, Ms. Howard said in a memo. Other funding sources included interest earned on the millions donated and about \$49,000 raised for the new playground.

Residents donated \$920,000 for a separate \$1.2 million project to free, or unbury, a 280-foot-long stretch of Sausal Creek

Woodsider named outstanding horseman

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

When a tree falls across an equestrian trail in a Woodside forest and no one is around to remove it, those in the know call Rick DeBenedetti, a one-man public works department, more or less.

"He takes care of most things himself, though sometimes (he) asks to be dropped off at the top of a trail and picked up several hours later at the bottom," said his wife, Kerry DeBenedetti.

"He may need someone to hold the flashlight when he has to spray ground bees after dark; drive the dump truck while he shovels rock onto a trail on Thanksgiving morning; or help carry tools down a trail to fix a gate," she added. "That 'someone' is often me because Rick has a way of making it sound like an invitation to an adventure. Or a date!"

Ms. DeBenedetti was talking to Bill Wraith, a member of the Mounted Patrol of San Mateo County and the 2001 recipient of the award. The Patrol gathered Jan. 17 at the Stanford Faculty Club



Photo courtesy of Howard Boone

Rick DeBenedetti, longtime rider and benefactor of Woodside's horse trails, was named Outstanding Horseperson-Citizen by the Mounted Patrol of San Mateo County.

See page 6

See PLEDGES, page 6

Stimulus money coming to towns in this area?

STIMULUS

continued from page 5

funds in the range of \$7 million for flood control along the San Francisquito Creek, in his role on the Joint Powers Authority board that oversees the creek. The creek flooded in 1998, causing around \$28 million in damages to 400 homes and businesses in Palo Alto, East Palo Alto and Menlo Park.

The creek project has already received federal funding through the Army Corps of Engineers, but the federal government has been slow to release that money, said Len Materman, president of the creek JPA. The stimulus package presents an opportunity to get the project moving faster.

"It's been 11 years since the flood, and the residents in the community meetings I go to don't see why it takes 11 years to start construction to solve a flooding problem," Mr. Materman said. "And I agree with them."

The clock is ticking on the project — construction must begin within the two-year window stipulated by the stimulus bill, a deadline Mr. Materman said the JPA will just be able to meet.

The agency is in the process of choosing a specific project along a discrete segment of the creek to focus on. The JPA would likely be required to provide matching funds for whatever money it receives through the stimulus package, culled from the cities within its jurisdiction, along with San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

Woodside

Asked if the town of Woodside is lining up for federal help, Town Manager Susan George said in an e-mail that if no-strings-attached funding is available to towns not suffering from financial troubles, Woodside is interested.

"We are interested in whatever funds may be included for local public works projects, such as road rehabilitation, and any funds that may be included for 'green' projects," she said. "The bottom line for me is that Woodside will attempt to secure a share of whatever funds it may qualify for under the terms of the federal legislation."

The overall financial picture for the town is good, she said. Tax revenues for Woodside are looking favorable. Revenues from property taxes are at expected levels and sales taxes are "outperforming projections," perhaps by as much as \$10,000 to \$25,000

by the end of the fiscal year, Ms. George said at the Jan. 27 Town Council meeting.

Portola Valley

Portola Valley has not had to reduce services due to financial troubles and so will not be seeking federal funding, Town Manager Angela Howard said.

The one exception is the town's Public Works director's efforts with his counterpart agency in San Mateo County to obtain help for local public works projects, she said.

Atherton

The town of Atherton is expecting no more than \$250,000 in stimulus money, said Public Works Director Duncan Jones. The original list of projects the town requested from Caltrans totaled about \$7 million, but now it appears that the entire county will get only \$10-\$13 million for transportation projects, he said.

The town is working with C/CAG, the City/County Association of Governments, to get a modest road repair project on Atherton Avenue funded, he said. It would cost \$3.6 million to repave the entire street, so he's focusing on the worst segment, between Selby Lane and Elena Avenue, he said.

"If we can get more money, we'll go farther," Mr. Jones said.

The project is shovel-ready, with the Caltrans forms filled out and environmental clearances done, Mr. Jones said. The project will go to the City Council for pre-approval later this month. "We're just waiting for them to say go, and we can have a contract in about 60 days," Mr. Jones said.

Private sector

Local companies specializing in clean technology (or "green tech") might also be in line to receive a significant chunk of stimulus funds.

Steve Levy, director of the Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy and a resident of Palo Alto, said he was struck by the emphasis Mr. Obama placed on science, technology and renewable energy in his inaugural address.

"This is a favored area for the new national agenda," Mr. Levy said at a meeting of the group Sustainable Menlo Park on Jan. 28. "How can that not be good for (Silicon Valley)?" ■

Almanac staff writers David Boyce and Andrea Gemmet contributed to this report.



Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

Taking the oath

Menlo Park swore in new officers for its police force Jan. 27 in the city council chambers. From left, they are police officers James Luevano, Reggie Williams and Jeff Cooley; reserve officer Sammy Eagan; and communications officer Antoinette Gutierrez.

Woodsider named outstanding horseman

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to swear in new officers and recognize Mr. DeBenedetti's efforts with the 2008 Outstanding Horseperson-Citizen of the Year award, Mr. Wraith said in a statement.

The award recognizes equestrians whose personal qualities include an active role in the community; recognized leadership in a profession or charity; and/or "outstanding" contributions to equestrian trails, facilities and horse-riding in San Mateo County in general.

"Rick will postpone his own projects to check on reported problems with a gate or trail, on his way to work or home, before, after or instead of dinner, on holidays, whenever, usually responding within a day," past Patrol president Howard Boone said to Mr. Wraith.

"People call Rick regularly to report problems or ask questions, including calls from riders lost on trails, (with him) talking them back into familiar territory," Mr. Boone added.

PLEDGES

continued from page 5

at Town Center. Ms. Howard's memo is available at tinyurl.com/ahbkoz.

The infusion of town money is less than the amount of the withdrawn pledges because the town managed to reduce total costs on both projects, the complex and the creek, and both came in under budget, Ms. Howard said. Council members hope to

An ideal place

Mr. DeBenedetti, 56, went to Woodside elementary and graduated from Woodside High School, where he met his wife, he said in an Almanac interview. They have two grown children.

As a boy in the 1950s, he rode local trails along Canada Road in the pre-Interstate 280 era. These early experiences inform his riding to this day, he said.

He has a bachelor's degree from Cal Poly and a master's degree from Kansas State University, both degrees in animal sciences. He taught and worked in animal research until returning to Woodside in 1980, where he boards horses and manages commercial property, he said.

Mr. DeBenedetti described his maintenance routines as "preserving the trail system as my predecessors have done. I just pursue that constantly."

Given his love of riding, would he have preferred to live in a century with fewer transportation alternatives? No, he said. Woodside is ideal for its trails as well as its proximity to Palo Alto,

San Francisco and the ocean.

"I feel so fortunate to be able to live where we are and be able to ride a horse," he said. "This, (speaking) for myself, you can't get any better."

Asked to name an important equestrian issue, he noted the trail user fee in Woodside. The town charges \$50 per horse per year, but some owners are not paying, he said. Notices may be being thrown away because they're addressed to previous owners, he said.

A better way of funding? Recognize the beneficial atmosphere that equestrians create in both Woodside and Portola Valley and charge \$10 annually to all residents of both towns, he said.

And his message to equestrians? "Get out there and use the trails. Remember that we are so fortunate to be able to ride at the generosity of property owners."

And don't go looking into the windows of those property owners as you pass by, he added. "It's just so important to respect their property rights and stay on the trail." ■

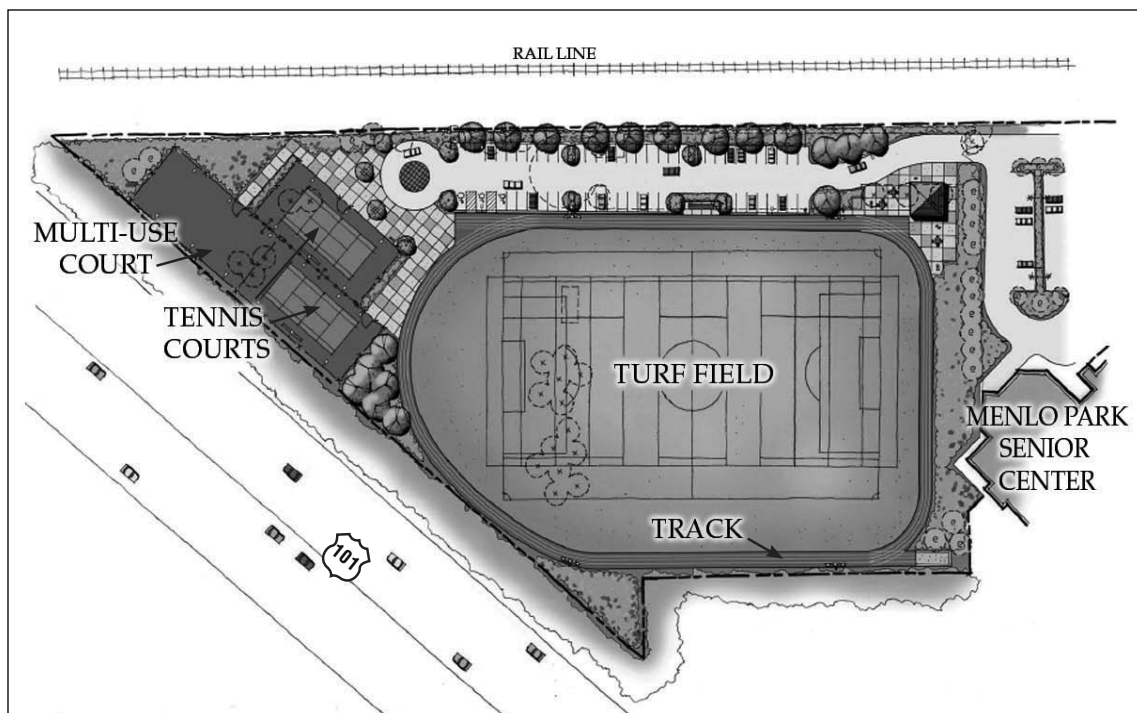
recoup some lost pledge money when the financial markets recover. "I think there is a very high likelihood that we will receive something from both of (the donors who withdrew their pledges)," Councilman Ted Driscoll said at the Jan. 14 council meeting.

In a 5-0 vote, the council approved a transfer of \$1.163 million from the general fund — \$296,200 for the creek project, and \$867,000 for the Town

Center complex.

Councilman Steve Toben justified his vote on the likelihood of a market recovery, the difficulty in predicting its downturn, and the town's remaining \$2 million reserve, which is about where it was when the council made its promise, he said.

"We're really lucky. We're really lucky," Mr. Driscoll said of the fundraising effort's timing in coming to an end before the crash. ■



Courtesy of the city of Menlo Park

Preliminary plans for an overhaul of Kelly Park would add tennis courts, a track, and a field made of artificial turf. The park is located in the Belle Haven neighborhood just east of U.S. 101, near the Menlo Park Senior Center.

Kelly Park renovation plan clears council

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

If everything goes according to schedule, Kelly Park will have two tennis courts, an outdoor court that could be used for basketball, a running track, and a coveted full-sized soccer field made of artificial turf by the summer of 2010.

At its meeting Tuesday, Jan. 27, The Menlo Park City Council approved the design and authorized the city to hire a landscape architect for the \$4.5 million overhaul of the park, located in the Belle Haven neighborhood.

In addition to putting a dent in the city's playing field shortage, the renovation will lead to more community use of the park, city officials said. The current 8.3-acre park was built in 2001

for about \$1 million, but poor planning and design restrictions led to the construction of an undersized, sparsely used baseball field, and an undersized and slanted soccer field.

The Menlo Park branch of the Strikers soccer club applauded the addition of the full-sized field. Due to the city's lack of space, the club has been forced to rent field time from local high schools.

"We are absolutely desperate to get space," spokeswoman Jeanine Morgan said at the council meeting. She added that the club welcomed the inclusion of artificial turf in the plans, which will allow local teams to use the field during the rainy season.

The tennis courts were added to the design at the request of the East Palo Alto Tennis and Tutoring program, a mentoring

group that matches Stanford students with East Palo Alto children. Earlier plans for a new baseball field were scrapped due to space constraints and a lack of demand.

Belle Haven resident Matt Henry suggested several alterations to the plans at the council meeting, including expanding the track from three to four lanes, adding a separate gate for pedestrians to enter the park, and installing bleachers around the entire field. In an interview, Mr. Henry said he was pleased that the council directed city staff to consider his suggestions, but that he was worried the field would be over-scheduled.

"My question is, who are these fields going to serve?" Mr. Henry said. "A lot of the groups here just play pick-up games, they don't really have organized sports. I'm concerned that all these different groups are going to come over and use the field, and the youngsters here won't have time to play."

Mr. Henry also noted that the park will likely be built with funds from the re-development district, which encompasses Belle Haven and some of the city's industrial zone east of U.S. 101. While the new park should certainly be open to the entire city, he said, those funds are intended primarily to benefit residents who live within the district.

Kent Steffens, the city's public works director, confirmed that there are sufficient funds in the re-development pool to pay for the park's construction in full. ■

Field shortage: Is Flood Park the solution?

Menlo Park city staff revealed at the Jan. 27 City Council meeting that they might have found a long-term solution to the city's field shortage: Flood Park, which is currently operated by San Mateo County.

County representatives have been enthusiastic about the idea of operating the park jointly with Menlo Park, according to Lisa Ekers, the city's engineering services manager. The council directed staff to continue discussions with the county.

Flood Park — located just south of Kelly Park, on the

opposite side of U.S. 101 — currently contains a baseball field, a softball field and a tennis court, along with tree-shaded open space.

City engineers said the trees and tennis courts could be cleared to make room for two full-sized soccer fields, in addition to the baseball fields.

Part of the field is scheduled to be torn up in either the winter of 2010 or 2011 to install a new pipeline to bring water from the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir to local communities, and any overhaul would likely not begin until after that.

REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman



Buying in this Market

Q: My instinct tells me that this may be the perfect time to buy a home. But I am hesitant because of the uncertainty about jobs and the economy in general. What is your advice?

A: No one knows when the economy will improve and right now the financial and employment news is bleak. When economic downturns occur, and this is the worst downturn in two generations, it is never easy to know when the bottom has been reached. But house prices have come down from the highs of last year and interest rates are lower than they have been in decades.

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On both sides of the camera

TV journalist explores Parkinson's disease, and tells his own family's story

By Rebecca Wallace

Palo Alto Weekly

They were the slightest of symptoms: a tingling in the leg, an arm not quite swinging the right way during a jog. Other people might not have noticed, but Dave Iverson of Menlo Park paid attention to these sensations in his limbs.

It made sense that his "antenna was up," as he puts it. His late father, Bill, had suffered from Parkinson's disease. In 1992, his brother Peter was told he had the same degenerative neurological disorder. In 2004, Dave was also diagnosed.

"By the time you notice symptoms, the disease is well on its way. It's often quite subtle," he says. "It's a disease that sort of inches up on you."

Mr. Iverson, 60, is smiling, open and even matter-of-fact as he talks in his Menlo Park house. He says he feels fortunate to be active and energetic, with minimal symptoms. And ever the journalist, he found a story in all this.

A veteran radio and TV host who can regularly be heard on KQED's "Forum," Mr. Iverson decided after his diagnosis to make a Frontline documentary on Parkinson's disease. The film, "My Father, My Brother, and Me," interweaves the Iversons' stories with the science and politics surrounding Parkinson's. It premieres on local television on Feb. 3, a co-production of Frontline and the Independent Television Service.

When Mr. Iverson started developing the idea for the film, he enlisted Michael Schwarz, president of Kikim Media in downtown Menlo Park, as co-director and co-producer. The two saw Parkinson's disease as a natural topic for the public policy-oriented Frontline series, given the political and moral debate over whether research should be conducted with human embryonic stem cells.

"Parkinson's is a window into both science and society," Mr. Iverson says. "What for me was personal also had social relevance."

The timing of the film's release may be relevant, too. While stem-cell research had appeared promising in treating Parkinson's, the practice was stalled in this country when the Bush administration heavily restricted funding for the research in 2001. George W. Bush is shown in the film announcing his veto of legislation that would have freed up more funding, saying: "This bill would support the taking of innocent human life

INFORMATION

"My Father, My Brother, and Me" is set to air on KQED (Channel 9) at 10 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 3, and 4 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 4. Other showings are scheduled on PBS digital channels. For details, film clips and blog postings by Dave Iverson, go to www.pbs.org/frontline.

in the hope of finding medical benefits for others. It crosses a moral boundary that our decent society needs to respect."

In contrast, President Barack Obama is expected to soon end the Bush-era restrictions on the federal funds. (Note: On Jan. 23, Geron Corp. in Menlo Park announced that the Food and Drug Administration had approved a clinical trial to use

'Parkinson's is a window into both science and society. What for me was personal also had social relevance.'

PBS CORRESPONDENT DAVE IVERSON

human embryonic stem cell therapy for patients with acute spinal cord injury.)

Mr. Iverson, who was raised as a Catholic, says he personally supports stem-cell research but understands its opponents. "It's tricky if your faith tells you one thing and your body tells you another," he says.

In the film, he talks to both proponents of the research, such as actor Michael J. Fox and writer Michael Kinsley, who both have Parkinson's; and opponent Charles Krauthammer, a syndicated columnist with a spinal-cord injury.

Mr. Kinsley says in the film: "Embryonic stem-cells research uses embryos that are fewer than 200 cells. You can't even barely see them without a microscope. ... There is hope, you know, real hope (for those with Parkinson's), and much of it comes from stem cells."

Mr. Iverson notes that many scientists are not convinced that stem-cell research will be the magic bullet. Parkinson's disease is hard to diagnose and difficult to treat, and can cause a wide range of symptoms.

It is generally agreed that Parkinson's is caused by the loss of brain cells that produce a neurotransmitter called dop-

amine. Typical symptoms can include tremor, stiffness of the body or arms and legs, and difficulty walking. But the condition affects people in so many different ways. Some lose their sense of smell; others are constipated or have trouble sleeping. It's hard to discern what each symptom means, Mr. Iverson says.

"It's going to be a long, long trip before that final cure is found," he adds slowly.

For his father, Bill, the worst part was losing his voice. Bill also had a flair for the spoken word; he worked on the original "Lone Ranger" radio show and later became a Stanford professor in the school of education, focusing on children's literature.

In 1971, Bill started showing physical symptoms, holding his hand in an unusual way while walking. Mr. Iverson's mother, Adelaide, says in the film: "He was mostly concerned about his voice because he did have a good voice and that deteriorated gradually. Toward the end, he really couldn't talk."

Later in the film, Mr. Iverson interviews his brother, Peter, a reserved person who nonetheless speaks with a candid air. "It's one of the first things you think about in the morning and one of the last things you think about at night and it says to you to take advantage of the time you have," Peter says of Parkinson's.

Dave Iverson says it was an unusual but enjoyable experience interviewing his family for the film. These days he spends even more time with his 96-year-old mother: He recently moved from San Francisco back to his childhood Menlo Park home to care for her.

Scientists traditionally didn't think Parkinson's could run in the family. It's only in the last decade or so that researchers have been looking into genetic mutations as a possible cause of the condition. In the film, Mr. Iverson interviews the Mayo Clinic's Matt Farrer, a geneticist who is working on drugs to fix those mutations.

"The genetics provides molecular clues, rational clues as to what's going on in the disease process," Mr. Farrer says.

Ex prisoners of war to hold reunion

The Bay Area Civilian Ex-Prisoners of War Association will celebrate 64 years of freedom at its liberation reunion the weekend of Feb. 13-16 at the Fremont Marriott Hotel.

All civilian and military pris-

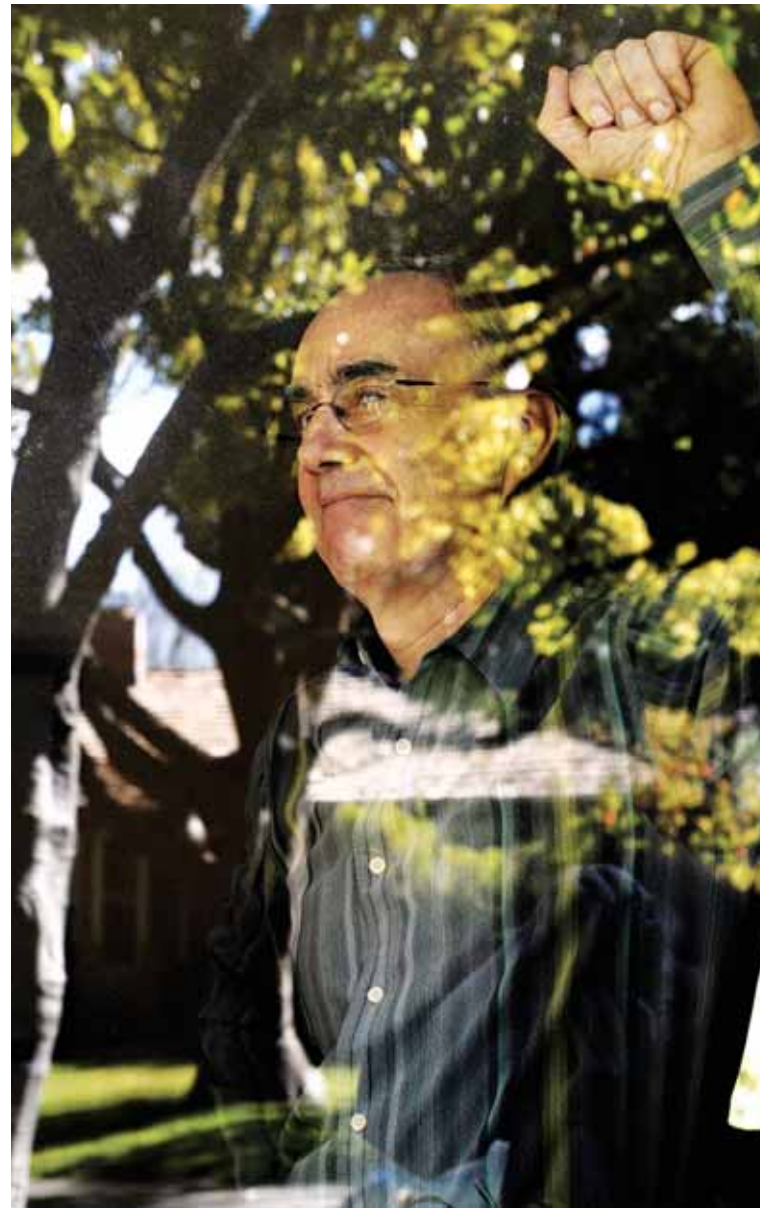


Photo by Dana Ullman

Dave Iverson of Menlo Park, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2004, has just completed a Frontline documentary on the disease for PBS. It will be shown on KQED (Channel 9) at 10 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 3, and 4 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 4.

But since Parkinson's usually appears without a family connection, scientists have been pursuing many other avenues of research. The documentary also follows Stanford neurologist Bill Langston, who has studied environmental toxins as a disease trigger.

Other research has given Iverson particular hope. Some studies indicate that regular exercise may slow the progression of Parkinson's disease, perhaps through increasing proteins called growth factors that support the brain.

One of the most upbeat images of the film is 75-year-old Tom Manning taking part in a Maryland study, running happily on a treadmill. He believes exercise helps his

Parkinson's and allows him to feel more in control of his body.

Mr. Iverson, too, is a regular jogger, and goes to the gym three times a week. Parkinson's, he says, is "fabulous motivation."

He plans to continue studying the condition, speaking at Parkinson's groups and perhaps doing a story on how dance can help people with the condition. And he tries to keep his hopes tempered, agreeing with researchers who say that the realistic aim right now is not finding a cure for Parkinson's, but discovering a reliable way to slow its progression.

"If my progression could be held to where it is now," Mr. Iverson says, "that's enough for me." ■

oners of war from the Philippines and the Far East during World War II are invited to attend, according to group spokeswoman Marjorie Wagstaffe of Menlo Park.

The program will include

an all-day speakers forum on Feb. 14, followed by a reception and cocktail party with exhibits and presentations. A banquet luncheon will be held Feb. 15. For more information, call Sascha Jansen at 530-795-0411 or Marjorie Wagstaffe at 324-3086.

Mr. Robinson went to Washington

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

Menlo Park Mayor Heyward Robinson traveled to Washington, D.C., the weekend before the presidential inauguration in a city-sponsored trip to lobby federal representatives to fund local projects through the stimulus package.

He attended the Conference of Mayors, held from Jan. 17 to Jan. 19, and stuck around to watch as Barack Obama was inaugurated as the country's 44th president. During the conference, he met with Rep. Anna Eshoo, D-Menlo Park, as well as an aide to Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California, to talk about issues concerning Menlo Park — and to ensure that the representatives keep the city's interests in mind.

"One of my take-aways was that we need to be a little more active in promoting issues for our city," Mr. Robinson said. "We need to make sure that our elected representatives are really aware of what our needs are, and that they know directly what we're asking for in the stimulus package."

Menlo Park has already submitted requests for funding



File photo

Menlo Park Mayor Heyward Robinson sounded optimistic that stimulus money would be available for such causes as "weatherizing" homes across the city to make them more energy-efficient.

for several projects through the Army Corps of Engineers, moving quickly because the federal government plans to release half the money for corps projects in the first 120 days, Mr. Robinson said.

He sounded optimistic that money would be available for a number of other causes, as well, including funds to "weatherize"

homes across the city and make them more energy-efficient.

The city of Menlo Park paid Mr. Robinson's travel and hotel costs, as well as registration fees at the conference — a sum of \$3,551, according to Mr. Robinson, who stayed with friends for several nights to save money. But the opportunity for face time with representatives and administration officials was well worth it, he said.

"The question is, 'How exactly does (the stimulus money) get from Washington to me?' How is this going to work?" Mr. Robinson said. "They're making it up as we speak. There was good reason to be there at this time — not everything is all set in stone right now."

The mayors urged government officials to direct the money straight to the cities, rather than through the state, Mr. Robinson said. He believes the state of California would likely "skim money off" to help reduce the state deficit if the funds pass through Sacramento first.

As for the inaugural? "There was a feeling that this is a recommitment to service, that we're all in this together," he said. "There was a real buzz. Change was in the air." ■

Football player arrested on assault charges

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

A football player at Menlo College has been arrested in connection with a potentially deadly assault on another Menlo College student. The incident took place at the intersection of Glenwood Avenue and Garwood Avenue in Menlo Park early on the morning of Thursday, Jan. 29, Menlo Park police reported.

Benjamin Kain-Williams of Atherton, the Menlo College football player, and Darrell Willis of Wheatland, California, were arrested and charged with assault resulting in great bodily injury, and conspiracy to commit a crime, police said.

One of the two victims was taken to Stanford Hospital with what police described as potentially life-threatening injuries. Menlo College has identified that man as a student there.

The Menlo College Web site lists Mr. Kain-Williams as a

sophomore linebacker on the football team.

"We are a small and very close community of students, faculty and staff at Menlo College, and we are deeply upset by this incident," said Timothy Haight, the college's president, in a press release. "Menlo College will continue to stress the importance of responsible behavior, not just among our students, but to local establishments who serve or sell alcohol to college students in their communities."

The two men who were assaulted were part of a larger group that had exchanged words at a restaurant with another group of men earlier that night, according to preliminary investigations by police.

"The libations were flowing, and so was the testosterone," said Detective Jeffrey Vasquez. "They had some words, and that was that."

The group that included the men who were assaulted left the

restaurant to get "soda and chips for the road" at a "nearby establishment," Detective Vasquez said. It appears that the other group followed them there, meeting them in a parking lot, he said.

The groups dispersed and met up again further down the street, where the dispute escalated into a physical confrontation, according to Mr. Vasquez.

Mr. Vasquez said it is still possible that the police department will press charges against some of the other people involved in the fight, including the man who is currently in the hospital. Mr. Vasquez visited the hospital and spoke with the man on the afternoon of Jan. 29. As of the afternoon of Friday, Jan. 30, he said he would still describe that man's injuries as potentially life-threatening.

The police department asks those with information on the incident to call the department at 330-6300, or the department's anonymous tip line at 330-6395. ■

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NEWS RELEASE

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Menlo Park, CA – Residents of Menlo Park, Redwood City, East Palo Alto, Atherton, Portola Valley and Woodside may take household hazardous waste to a special drop-off location in Menlo Park on Saturday, February 7, 2009. There is no charge. To participate, residents must make an appointment by calling (650) 363-4718 (24 hours a day) or visit www.smhealth.org/hhw. Appointments are limited – register early! If the city and date is not listed when you call, the event is already full and an alternate city and date may be chosen. Acceptable items for drop-off include paint, thinners, motor oil, batteries, fluorescent lamps, pesticides, herbicides, pool and photo chemicals, drain openers, and cleaning solvents. No business waste, explosives, infectious or radioactive waste is allowed.

Published in THE ALMANAC on January 28, February 4, 2009.

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Ridge Vineyards president found dead

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

When he was hired in the late 1970s by former Portola Valley mayor Sue Crane and her husband to drive a tractor and grape truck at Ridge Vineyards in Cupertino, Donn Paul Reisen had bumped up against his life's calling, though he may not have known it.

Mr. Reisen, a Menlo Park resident, soon left the fields to come inside, where he reorganized the bottling operation, then moved to sales and, in 2001, to Ridge's presidency, where he combined remarkable emotional warmth with salesmanship, a deep knowledge of wine and a diplomatic firmness with distributors, said Paul Draper, Ridge chief executive and winemaker, in an interview with *The Almanac*.

"He was one of the most competent and most human and relational and humorous people of anyone in that position in the fine-wine industry in America," Mr. Draper said.

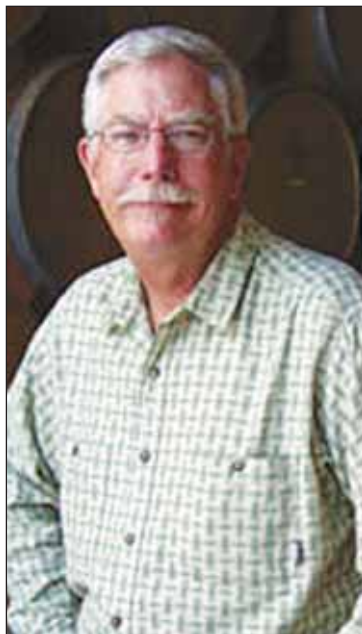


Photo courtesy of Ridge Vineyards
Menlo Park resident Donn Paul Reisen, 60, was found dead of an apparent suicide at Portola Valley's Ford Field on Jan. 26.

"There are very few people who combine that competence with the humanity he had."

Deputies from the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office found Mr. Reisen, 60, at about 10:45 a.m. Monday, Jan. 26, dead of a gunshot wound in his vehicle in the parking lot of Ford Field. The baseball diamond sits at the corner of Westridge Drive and Alpine Road in Portola Valley and is up the road from Mr. Reisen's home in Stanford Weekend Acres.

County Coroner Robert Foucrault told *The Almanac* that there were no indications that

Mr. Reisen's death was not a suicide.

"I'm very affected by what happened," Ms. Crane, a Ridge co-founder, said in an interview.

An e-mail message of condolence went out to 12,000 people, Mr. Draper said. At a wine-related gathering in San Francisco after Mr. Reisen's death, Mr. Draper said he received hugs from "literally hundreds of people."

Mr. Draper said he and his colleagues at the winery had been worried about Mr. Reisen. A severe bicycle accident on Alpine Road several years ago, in which he might have died had not Stanford Hospital been so close, had left him with lingering problems, Mr. Draper said.

"We sensed that he did not have the enthusiasm and so on and that something was troubling him," Mr. Draper said. "He was not his feisty self."

Apart from his work with fine wine (Ridge Vineyards is renowned for its Monte Bello cabernet and its zinfandel), Mr. Reisen liked to fish, including fly-fishing and bone-fishing, both of which require skill in presenting the bait to the fish, Mr. Draper said.

Mr. Reisen and his wife Marilyn did not have children, but it was as if they did, Mr. Draper said. "He was so great with kids. He had many children who called him Uncle Donn."

The funeral is private but a memorial service is planned. *The Almanac* will provide details when they are available. ■

Local girls earn kudos for efforts in science

Two local high school students, Maya Mathur of Woodside and Julia Ransohoff of Atherton, were among 16 Silicon Valley semi-finalists in Intel Corp.'s annual national search for science talent.

On Jan. 28, Ms. Ransohoff, who attends Menlo-Atherton High School, was declared one of 40 finalists nationwide in the Intel Science Talent Search program.

She was recognized for her exploration of whether gender is a factor in donated stem cells used to repair cardiac tissue damaged by a heart attack, according to her contest application provided by an Intel spokesman. Her conclusion: stem cells from female donors alert the recipient's immune system to a "markedly" greater degree than previously thought.

Ms. Mathur, a student at Castilleja School in Palo Alto, used an investment game and game theory to examine trust in human-robot interactions. Trust can be a factor, for example, when a human in danger is relying upon a robot to perform a rescue, she said.

She concluded that subtle changes in the expressions of robots with human-like faces can "dramatically decrease" the level of trust that humans place in them, according to her contest application.

Three hundred semi-finalists were chosen from among thou-



Maya Mathur of Woodside, left, and **Julia Ransohoff** of Atherton

sands of students nationwide, an Intel statement said.

Finalists receive an all-expense-paid trip in March to Washington, D.C., where they will present their research to the public and scientists from the National Academy of Sciences. During their week's stay, they meet and exchange ideas with other finalists and with "prominent members of the scientific community," the statement said.

Contest awards include laptop computers and scholarships ranging from \$5,000 to \$100,000, which are awarded to the top 10 finalists at a black-tie dinner on March 10.

The Science Talent Search began in 1942 as a "national stage for America's best and brightest young scientists to present original research to nationally recognized professional scientists," the statement said.

Santa Clara-based Intel took over corporate sponsorship from Westinghouse Corp. in 1998.

Chip Huggins named CEO of Caminar

Charles "Chip" Huggins of Woodside is the new chief executive officer of Caminar, a nonprofit agency providing support for people with disabilities and mental illness since 1967.

Mr. Huggins succeeds Barry Shea, who will retire from the San Mateo-based organization on Feb. 1 after serving more than 25 years.

Mr. Huggins joins Caminar from Second Harvest Food Bank, where he held the position of chief executive officer. Before joining Second Harvest, Mr. Huggins worked for more than 25 years in management at See's Candies and Joseph Schmidt Confections.

He has also held leadership roles in nonprofit organizations, including the Peninsula Community Foundation, Coyote Point Museum, Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula, and the Easter Seals Society.

With an annual budget of more than \$16 million, Caminar

■ BRIEFS

is located in two states and four regions, and has more than 400 employees.

Charlotte Diamond returns for concert

Singer and composer Charlotte Diamond returns to the Peninsula for a family concert on Sunday, Feb. 8, in Smithwick Theatre at Foothill College in Los Altos Hills.

The concerts at 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. are a benefit for Music for Minors, which brings music to children in elementary school classrooms in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

Linden Tree Children's Records and Books in Los Altos sponsors the event, recommended for children 3 years and up.

Tickets are \$15 per person and are available at the door or online at www.lindentreebooks.com.

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City may sell land to Beechwood School

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

The Menlo Park City Council will adjourn to closed session following the regular meeting Tuesday, Feb. 3, to discuss its negotiating strategy in the possible sale of land on Terminal Avenue in the city's Belle Haven neighborhood.

The agenda identifies the land in question as "Beechwood School property." Beechwood is a K-8 private school in Belle Haven.

The city currently owns the land on which the school sits, but the Palo Alto-based California Family Foundation, which operates the 170-student school, has said it was prepared to pay "fair market value" for the 635,000-square-foot plot of land used by the school at 50 Terminal Ave.

In February 2008, the council voted unanimously to consider selling the land to Beechwood, asking staff to have the land appraised.

The council will also discuss the "possibility of initiating litigation in two separate matters" in closed session at the meeting, according to the agenda.

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

Job fair for Rosewood hotel

As California's unemployment rate creeps upward, a new hotel in Menlo Park promises to add 250 jobs to the local economy.

Menlo Park residents can get a look at upcoming job openings during a job fair for the Rosewood Sand Hill hotel. The job fair will be held Sunday, Feb. 8, at the Burgess Recreation Center in the Menlo Park Civic Center.

The hotel, located near the intersection of Sand Hill Road and Highway 280, is slated to open April 1, according to project manager Mike Casey.

The job fair will be open exclusively to Menlo Park residents from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. The fair will open to everyone from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The hotel has spots for desk clerks, concierges, housekeepers, food servers and line cooks,

according to a press release.

City to revisit Draeger's intersection

At its Jan. 27 meeting, the City Council told staff to go back to the drawing board to figure out how to improve pedestrian safety at an intersection near Draeger's market where a woman was killed while crossing the street in 2003.

City staff suggested a raised crosswalk across Menlo Avenue at University Drive, along with increased wattage to the streetlight at the corner.

The council agreed with the plan to crank up the wattage.

But while Councilwoman Kelly Fergusson and Mayor Heyward Robinson favored the plan for raised sidewalks, calling it a relatively cheap solution that would increase safety, a majority of council members wanted city staff to take a harder look at the issue.

Rich Cline was skeptical that a raised crosswalk would improve the situation. Andy Cohen suggested a lighted crosswalk. And John Boyle, noting that there hadn't been any accidents at the intersection since the installation of striping and better signage in 2005, asked staff to poll Draeger's and residents in the area for their suggestions.

Sidewalks on Woodland Avenue

Willows residents have been waiting a long time for sidewalks on Woodland Avenue — so long, in fact, that one resident wept while thanking the City Council for approving a plan to install sidewalks along a stretch of the thoroughfare.

At the council's Jan. 27 meeting, residents also raised concerns about aging lateral water pipe connections from the street to houses. As those pipes deteriorate, residents must foot the bill to replace them — and that cost might increase, if they're also forced to tear up and replace the new sidewalks to get to the pipes, they said.

Staff will prepare a preliminary design for a sidewalk from Euclid Avenue to Menalto Avenue. The total cost of the project is estimated at \$220,000. ■

An abandoned farmhouse, painted by Menlo Park Councilman Andy Cohen during a vacation in Switzerland.



Courtesy of Andy Cohen

Councilman reveals his artistic side

Local residents will recognize many of the locales depicted in a set of paintings hanging in the Little House Activity Center in Menlo Park: landscapes of the Sierra Nevada, Bayfront Park, the foothills above Stanford.

They might also recognize the painter: Menlo Park Councilman Andy Cohen. A reception will be held for Mr. Cohen to celebrate the first public presentation of his work Thursday, Feb. 5, from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

The 30-odd works span 25 years. There's an early ink-and-

watercolor copy of an Edward Hopper painting, several still lives, and a lot of landscapes — many of which feature places Mr. Cohen visited on day hikes and backpacking trips.

"I love what I know about the circumstances of what was going on when I was painting these, what I was thinking," he says.

Though painting provides a respite from Mr. Cohen's time on the council, political considerations aren't completely absent from his work. A painting of Bayfront Park, complet-

ed in 2006 amidst a debate over whether the land should be developed or restored, depicts a waste processing plant in the foreground of an otherwise idyllic rendering.

INFORMATION

The Little House activity center in Menlo Park will hold an artist's reception for Andy Cohen on Thursday, Feb. 5, from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. Little House is located at 800 Middle Ave., behind Nealon Park.

Church seeks expanded use of meeting hall

Menlo Park Presbyterian Church is looking to expand its use of a space in the back of the building that houses the ACE hardware store at 700 Santa Cruz Ave.

In 2005, the city agreed to allow the church to use the space as a meeting hall on Tuesday and Wednesday nights, as well as Sunday mornings and evenings. The church's request for a revised use permit, set to be considered by the Planning Commission at its meeting on Monday, Feb. 9, would allow the church to use the

space in the morning as well as the evening, seven days a week.

The church is also requesting a five-year extension of the permit (the current permit is set to expire this year).

"We would open (the space) up for community events, and we'd also use it for some of our programming needs," said Bill Frimel, the church's business manager.

Before the 2005 agreement, the church had asked the city for use of the entire space, but city representatives were leery of allowing a

non-retail operation to occupy a prominent downtown storefront. The city and church struck a compromise, allowing ACE Hardware to occupy the storefront.

Mr. Frimel said that morning events in the meeting hall would bring potential shoppers downtown, though he acknowledged concerns of local business owners about the availability of parking. In response to those concerns, the church has agreed to limit the attendance at morning events, he said.

Campaign finance reports for Atherton, Menlo Park

Wondering how much city council candidates raised for the November election? Year-end campaign finance reports were due at 5 p.m. Monday, Feb. 2.

The statements for the Atherton City Council race are available at the Town Administrative Offices, 91 Ashfield Road. Copies cost 10 cents per page, or the statements can be viewed for free.

The statements for the Menlo Park council race are available to view or purchase at the City Hall in the Civic Center, between Laurel and Alma streets. Electronic files of the statements can be obtained for free through City Clerk Margaret Roberts by e-mailing MSRoberts@menlopark.org.

■ BRIEFS

Check TheAlmanacOnline.com for news and updates.

School budget issues

School finances will be facing challenging days ahead, and officials with the Menlo Park City School District are set to discuss the topic at a public school board study session meeting beginning at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 3. The meeting will be held in the board chambers at the district office, 181 Encinal Ave., Atherton. To view the meeting agenda, go to TheAlmanacOnline.com.



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Menlo Park may see hike of 24% in garbage rates

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

Menlo Park residents and businesses might be in line for a hike in garbage collection rates of as much as 24 percent.

The city is currently in the process of notifying residents and businesses of the proposed increase, and the City Council is set to hold a public hearing to consider the new rates on March 24, the city said. Under the maximum rate increase, collection fees for a single-family residence with a 32-gallon can would jump from \$12.55 to \$15.56 per month.

City officials noted that even with the maximum rate hike, Menlo Park's collection rates would be the fourth lowest of the 12 local jurisdictions served by Allied Waste. The city currently has the lowest rates among the 12 jurisdictions.

Allied Waste attributed the increase to rising labor and disposal costs.

The collective contract between Allied Waste and 12 local government jurisdictions is set to expire at the end of 2010. The company that looks poised to take over that contract, San Francisco-based Norcal Waste, has said that the average collection rate across the 12 jurisdictions would increase approximately 10 percent over current levels by Jan. 1, 2011.

There was no immediate word on whether Norcal's estimate has changed. In lobbying for the contract, Allied Waste said it would increase the average rate less than 7 percent over current levels by 2011.

In March 2008, Menlo Park raised its collection rates on a sliding scale between 5 and 14 percent, designed to hit the biggest dumpers hardest and encourage recycling and composting. The new rates would go into effect on July 1 for single-family residences, and would be retroactive to Jan. 1 for businesses, apartments and condominiums. ■

Everest offered facilities in East Palo Alto

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

As required by law, the Sequoia Union High School District governing board has made an offer of facilities to the petitioners for Everest Charter High School: four portable classrooms on what is currently an empty lot at 763 Green St. in East Palo Alto.

If the state Board of Education approves the petition in March, Everest would open in September for about 100 freshmen. With scant comment, the Sequoia board voted unanimously on Jan. 28 to approve the proposal prepared by Assistant Superintendent Jim Lianides.

The board acted ahead of a Feb. 1 state deadline requiring the district to offer facilities to a charter school that could open in September, even though the board itself rejected Everest's petition in September 2008.

The campus would double as a branch of the district's adult school in the evenings, Mr. Lianides said, adding that the site would be "a starter campus" for Everest to see whether the school is successfully launched.

"I think it meets the needs of our broader community," Trustee Gordon Lewin said. "It will create a different mix of students enrolled than if it were somewhere else."

Everest would be modeled on Summit Preparatory Charter High School, the six-year old charter in Redwood City that has many more applicants than available seats each year, a four-year-college acceptance rate of more than 95 percent, per-student spending lower than the district's, and a student body that is 10 percent less Hispanic and 14 percent more white than the district's student population, according to state data.

The district owns the land and the six or seven portables to be

installed there, Mr. Lianides told The Almanac.

Everest spokeswoman Diane Tavenner had no comment at the meeting, but in an earlier interview, she said she was troubled by the formula used to calculate the school's annual payment of \$20,400 to the district to maintain the buildings.

The Sequoia district board turned Everest down on a 4-1 vote on Sept. 17. Their reasons included a lack of community support and Everest's potential to attract white students who might otherwise attend undersubscribed charters in East Palo Alto.

The San Mateo County board rejected the petition on 5-2 vote on Dec. 8. ■

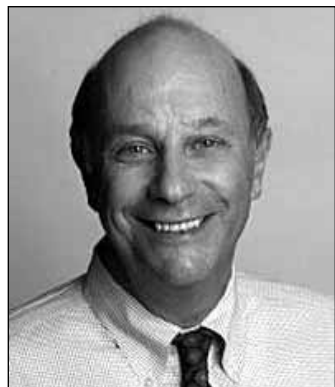
Cafe Scientifique: Probing planets, stars

Gary Glatzmaier will speak on "Probing the Interior Dynamics of Planets and Stars" from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 10, at Cafe Scientifique in the dining room of the International Building at SRI International in Menlo Park, located on Middlefield Road at Ringwood Avenue.

Mr. Glatzmaier is a pioneer in the development of computer

models used to study magnetohydrodynamics. He will lead a discussion probing the internal physics of planets and stars.

Cafe Scientifique events are open to the public and free of charge. No reservations are necessary. Complimentary coffee, tea and biscotti will be served. For more information, visit www.cafescisv.org.



Len Tillem, Esq.

Host of KGO's "Legaltalk"

Len Tillem & Associates

KGO's Len Tillem & Michael Gilfix

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Menlo Park companies offer several medical advances

By Earl Shelton

A recent health care conference in San Francisco, sponsored by the financial giant J.P. Morgan, attracted hundreds of investors and industry executives from around the world who came to hear the latest news from leading companies in the health care industry, including some based in Menlo Park.

One speaker, Uwe Reinhardt, professor of economics and public affairs at Princeton University, masterfully capsulized the atmosphere by using a "humor of the absurd" style. He contrasted the seemingly impossible economic outlook for meeting health care demands as the Baby Boomer generation moves into retirement, with the great potential for both fundamental cost-saving changes in health care delivery as well as for revolutionary medical advances.

Examples of the types of changes that offer hope were provided by two private Menlo Park companies, which presented updates on their products.

The replacement of risky and expensive surgery to repair heart valves by a medical device was described by President and CEO Ferolyn Powell of Evalve Inc. (www.evalveinc.com). The company's MitraClip device, commercially available in Europe, is under investigation for FDA approval.

The device is placed within the heart by doctors in a catheterization lab in order to treat mitral valve regurgitation, the most common form of heart valve disease in the United States. Patients generally recover quickly and may have improved quality of life while still preserving future use of surgical options, such as valve repair or replacement.

Acclarent Inc. (www.acclarent.com), another medical device company, is dedicated to treating conditions of the ear, nose and throat with less invasive novel alternatives to conventional endoscopic surgical approaches.

One condition anyone suffering from a cold or sinus headache can relate to is chronic sinusitis, a persistent and painful blockage of the sinus passages. William Facticeau, president and CEO, used videos of actual endoscopic procedures to illustrate how the Balloon Sinuplasty system, already approved by the FDA, uses small, flexible instruments to avoid the loss of healthy normal tissue that often accompanies present surgical procedures. This translates into a less painful

About the author: Earl Shelton of Menlo Park, formerly a scientist at Syntex Research, is a business development consultant at BioTechnology Partners.

and faster recovery for patients, now numbering over 50,000.

DNA sequencing

In a conference that found most companies focusing on their financial viability and staying power in an uncertain economy, it seemed fitting that a company with seemingly "unbelievable" and not yet commercialized technology would present its story at the last hour on the final day.

Yet Hugh Martin, chairman and CEO of Pacific Biosciences (www.pacificbiosciences.com; PacBio), spoke to a packed room about the company's technology, called Single Molecule Real Time DNA sequencing.

The eventual goal of this 220-person startup is to allow sequencing of individual genomes as part of routine medical care with the hope it could enable more effective health maintenance, disease prevention and tailored medical treatments.

PacBio plans to launch a first-generation product for large research centers in 2010 that could transform the ease and cost of sequencing complex individual genomes, from viruses to mammals.

The original Human Genome Project took about 13 years and cost \$3 billion to reach completion. PacBio, first funded in 2004 and now headquartered in Menlo Park, was awarded an Advanced Sequencing Technology grant of \$6.6 million from the National Institutes of Health to develop technology that could lead to a cost of only \$1,000 per individual genome.

A proof-of-concept research paper appeared online in the journal *Science* (www.sciencemag.org) in December. PacBio was recognized by *Fortune* magazine in October 2008 as "Silicon Valley's hottest startup" after it completed a \$120 round of venture funding.

'Valuable forum'

The conference is a "great opportunity to get a snapshot of what the issues are in health care, and what is on the horizon to address them," said Bob Reed, a biotechnology consultant based in Woodside.

Among other local participants was Steve Sawyer, a Menlo Park resident and an insurance broker with Woodruff-Sawyer & Co. The conference, he said, is a "valuable

'Shop local' message takes hold, Kepler says

■ But bookstore's revenue is down, and it's in the process of cutting costs.

By Sean Howell

Almanac Staff Writer

"Big box" chains and independent retailers alike saw a decline in sales during the 2008 holiday season, but Clark Kepler sees a silver lining for businesses like his. Mr. Kepler, owner of Kepler's bookstore, believes that the "shop local" mantra is taking hold.

During the recent holiday season, Mr. Kepler said, "I was delighted and amazed at the comments from people who would seek me out on the floor and tell me they were shopping here because we're an independent bookstore."

His sense that more consumers are becoming aware of the impact their dollars can have on locally owned businesses seems to be borne out by a recent national survey. The survey found that independent retail-

ers saw less of a decline in sales from December 2007 to December 2008 than the nationwide decrease of 9.8 percent in retail spending, as reported by the U.S. Commerce Department.

The survey of 1,142 independent businesses across the United States, conducted by several groups that promote the concept of "shop local," found that independent retailers saw only a 5 percent decline in sales over the same period.

And groups such as Hometown Peninsula, an organization founded by Mr. Kepler to promote the idea of shopping locally, seem to have been successful in influencing shopping patterns, according to data obtained through the survey. In cities with organizations like Hometown Peninsula, independent businesses reported only a 3.2 percent sloughing off in December sales.

Kepler's cutting costs

Still, Kepler's is in the process of cutting costs, Mr. Kepler said. The bookstore slashed its hours of operation from 90 to 80 per-

week, as of Feb. 1.

He described the new hours as "seasonal." Asked to clarify, he said, "We do it every time the economy goes really bad and we need to reduce our costs."

Mr. Kepler said he decided to cut from the beginning and ends of the day because he's found that foot traffic is slowest at those times. Though sales during the holiday shopping season were better than he had anticipated, revenue was off by double-digit percentage points from the fall of 2007.

"We're looking at every area where we can expand our revenue and go out into the community and sell books, but we still need to keep our costs down," Mr. Kepler said.

It made sense to cut hours now, he said, because February, March and April are typically the store's three slowest months.

Membership in the Kepler's Literary Circle program, which entitles its subscribers to certain extra benefits, fell short of expectations in December, Mr. Kepler said. ■

Man sentenced in Menlo Park robbery

A 38-year-old man accused of snatching a woman's purse in Menlo Park before attempting to rob another woman in Palo Alto pleaded no contest to the Menlo Park robbery on Jan. 28 in Santa Mateo County Superior Court.

Jeffrey Owen Smith, a Palo Alto resident, was sentenced to one year in county jail for robbing a nanny who was waiting for a bus around 7 p.m. on Nov. 18 on Middlefield Road in Menlo Park, according to Chief Deputy District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe. The woman was talking on a cell phone when Mr. Smith approached her and forcibly stole her purse.

Police from Palo Alto and Menlo Park apprehended Mr. Smith with the aid of information provided by witnesses to the attempted robbery in Palo Alto.

Mr. Smith has not yet been charged in Santa Clara County,

but Palo Alto police have connected him to at least a few of a spate of robberies in Palo Alto that began in June 2008, according to police agent Dan Ryan.

Mr. Smith had initially been charged with felony robbery, felony possession of stolen property and misdemeanor drug

possession, but he accepted a plea deal of just the robbery charge. The judge sentenced him to one year in jail, followed by three years' probation. Mr. Smith was also ordered to pay \$3,040 in fines and fees.

Prosecutors had sought two years in state prison.

Mr. Smith has been in custody since his Nov. 18 arrest.

TOWN OF WOODSIDE

INVITES APPLICATIONS FOR ARCHITECTURAL AND SITE REVIEW BOARD

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

Meetings are held on the first and third Monday of each month, 4:30 p.m. Appointments are for a four-year term.

Interested residents may request information and applications Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m.-12 noon and 1:00-5:00 p.m. at Town Hall, 2955 Woodside Road, by telephone at (650) 851-6790, or through the Town's web site at www.woodsidetown.org. Deadline for applications is Friday, February 13, 2009, 5:00 p.m.

Published in THE ALMANAC on January 21, 28, February 4, 11, 2009.

WEDDINGS

Preimesberger-Avilla

Courtney Anne Preimesberger and Joel Peter Avilla were married Oct. 11 at Valley Presbyterian Church in Portola Valley before 200 friends and family members.

The Reverends Mark and Cheryl Goodman-Morris officiated. Music was provided by keyboard/harpist Barbary Grant, trumpeter Larry Blake, and singers Melissa Golden and Chris Preimesberger, father of the bride.

A dinner-dance reception was held at MacArthur Park in Palo Alto.

The bride is the daughter of Chris and Becky Preimesberger of Redwood City. A graduate of Menlo-Atherton High School and Chico State University, she is a preschool teacher at the Roberts School in Menlo Park.

The bridegroom is the son of



Courtney Preimesberger and Joel Avilla

Mike and Jan Avilla of Portola Valley. He is a graduate of Woodside High School and Chico State University. A graduate of the California Culinary Academy, he is a chef at the Jones Gulch YMCA Conference Center in La Honda.

Megan Preimesberger, sister of the bride, and Pepa Paniagua served as maids of honor. The bridesmaids were Nicole Fraser, Kelly Knapp, Ellen Preimesberger, Lorianne Putnam, Lauren Rosenthal and Jenny Rosenthal.

Greg Avilla was his brother's best man. The ushers were Ryan and Andrew Preimesberger, Cody Dwight, Steven Johnson, Peter Jones, Scott Remke, Mike Vernazza and Jon Wayman.

After a honeymoon in Hawaii, the couple is living in Menlo Park.

Avelino-Elliott

Kori Avelino and Logan Elliott were married Oct. 4 at St. Mar-

tin of Tours Catholic Church in Los Angeles. The reception at Mountain Gate Country Club brought together 200 friends and family members from 12 states and Canada.

The bride is the daughter of Adrian and Pat Avelino of Escondido. She is a graduate of Sacred Heart Prep in Atherton and UCLA. She met her future husband at the UCLA School of Law, where she graduated in 2008.

The bridegroom is the son of Don and Jan Elliott of Menlo Park. He is a graduate of Menlo-Atherton High School and Princeton University. He will graduate from UCLA School of Law in 2009 with degrees in both law and public policy.

Both Kori and Logan plan to work at law firms in Los Angeles.



Kori Avelino and Logan Elliott

POLICE CALLS

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

ATHERTON

Residential burglary report: Orchard Hills Ave., Jan. 23.

Auto burglary report: Middlefield Road, Jan. 23.

MENLO PARK

Rape report: Jorge D. Reyes-Pena, 21, of Menlo Park arrested and booked into county jail on charges that included rape and forced oral copulation, main police station at 701 Laurel St., Jan. 23.

Burglary arrest reports:

■ Anthony Stabile, 29, of Menlo Park arrested and booked into jail on burglary charges, 600 block of Santa Cruz Ave., Jan. 24.

■ Kyle Schwab, 18, of Menlo Park arrested and booked into jail on burglary charges, 700 block of El Camino Real, Jan. 22.

Robbery report: Three unarmed men assaulted and robbed 31-year-old man leaving grocery store, and stole wallet and cell phone, 1200 block of Willow Road, Jan. 19.

Commercial burglary report: Laptop stolen from office, InCube Labs at 1390 Willow Road, Jan. 16.

Residential burglary reports: ■ Golf cart stolen, then crashed into fence, with no damage to fence or cart, 1200 block of Willow Road, Jan. 16.

■ Residential break-in. Camera, gold bracelets and Apple computer stolen, first block of Lorelei Lane, Jan. 19.

■ About \$300 in cash stolen, 1200 block of Crane St., Jan. 25.

Auto burglary reports:

■ Clothing stolen, 100 block of El Camino Real, Jan. 19.

■ Navigation system stolen, 1300 block of University Drive, Jan. 20.

■ Vehicle broken into and navigation system stolen, Live Oak Ave. and El Camino Real, Jan. 20.

■ Vehicle broken into and CD case stolen, 100 block of Chester St., Jan. 22.

■ Window smashed and laptop computer stolen, Oak Grove Ave. and Maloney Lane, Jan. 23.

■ Window smashed and navigation system stolen, 1100 block of Noel Drive, Jan. 24.

■ Car stereo system stolen, 200 block

of Durham St., Jan. 25.

■ Vehicle broken into and golf clubs stolen, 400 block of Falk Court, Jan. 25.

■ Forced entry into vehicle and navigation system stolen, 300 block of Sharon Park Drive, Jan. 28.

■ Window removed and navigation system stolen, 2200 block of Sharon Road, Jan. 29.

■ Window smashed and navigation system stolen, 300 block of Sharon Park Drive, Jan. 29.

■ Window smashed and purse stolen, 1600 block of Marsh Road, Jan. 29.

Fraud reports:

■ ID theft after lost wallet, main police station, Jan. 17.

■ Embezzlement of \$17,000, Exponent Corp. at 149 Commonwealth Drive, Jan. 24.

■ ID theft, 200 block of Elm St., Jan. 24.

■ Two cases of check fraud, 100 block of Jefferson Drive, Jan. 28.

■ Social Security number used to open unauthorized cell phone accounts, 1300 block of Willow Road, Jan. 22.

■ ID theft, 1400 block of Bay Laurel Drive, Jan. 22.

Grand theft reports:

■ Computer stolen, Menlo Park Public Library at 800 Alma St., Jan. 27.

■ Laptop computer stolen, JobTrain at 1200 O'Brien Drive, Jan. 20.

Child Protective Service referral reports:

■ 1300 Sevier Ave., Jan. 22.

■ 1100 block of Henderson Ave., Jan. 24.

■ 1100 block of Madera Ave., Jan. 28.

Spousal abuse report: 1400 block of Middle Ave., Jan. 17.

PORTOLA VALLEY

Peeping Tom report: Male in blue pickup truck spotted possibly looking into girls' dorm with binoculars or monocular from Gambetta Lane, Woodside Priory School at 302 Portola Road, Jan. 21.

WEST MENLO PARK

Residential burglary report: Window pried open and TV, laptop computer and safe stolen at total value of \$2,900, 1900 block of Camino de los Robles, Jan. 16.

Fraud report: Bad checks totaling \$1,200 passed in Turlock, California, and Pinole, California, 300 block of Stanford Ave., Jan. 21.

Woodside School hosts kindergarten tour

Parents of incoming kindergarteners can get a tour of classrooms, meet teachers and hear from specialists at an information meeting at Woodside Elementary School from 8:45 a.m. to 10 a.m. Tuesday, Feb. 10, in the Wildcats Room.

Kindergarten registration is open to children who will be

BRIEFS

See photo on Page 3.

5 years old on or before Dec. 1, 2009. Registration packets will be available at the school office beginning Feb. 2. Woodside requires a birth certificate, proof of residency, an immuni-

zation record and a physician's report for enrollment.

To reserve a space at the parent meeting, call the school office at 851-1571, extension 0. Woodside school is located at 3195 Woodside Road in Woodside.

Menlo School recalls peanut cookie dough

A Menlo School official said that no one has reported suffering any ill effects from cookie dough linked to the national recall of tainted peanut products. Spokesman Alex Perez said Santa Clara-based Dough-To-Go brand cookie dough was part of a precautionary recall linked to a nation-wide salmonella

outbreak.

The cookie dough as sold as a fundraiser for the Atherton private school's chorus trip, he said. The school collected all the recalled products and replaced

them, Mr. Perez said.

Information about the recall is available from the Food and Drug Administration at <http://tinyurl.com/8srctw>.

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Big League registration for Juniors and Seniors is still OPEN!

Please visit the League website for online registration and information, all divisions:
<http://www.eteamz.com/alpine/index.cfm>

REGISTRATION SCHEDULE:

- Juniors/Seniors/Big (ages 13-18): OPEN
- Pitching Machine (age 8): Registration closes March 2, 2009
- Coach Pitch (age 7): Registration closes March 2, 2009
- T-Ball (ages 5-6): Registration closes March 2, 2009

Alpine Little League also offers recreational girls softball for 5-14 year olds who live in Menlo Park, Portola Valley, Woodside and Atherton through AMA Softball. Please register for softball only at:
<http://www.eteamz.com/amsoftball/index.cfm>

Registration questions? Contact the Alpine Little League Registrar at: karenlucian@sbcglobal.net
(Please contact division commissioners with all non-registration related questions.)

EYE CARE NEWS

Presented by **Mark Schmidt**
Licensed Optician

UPON FURTHER EXAMINATION

According to a recent survey commissioned by the American Optometric Association, 81 percent of Americans utilize some sort of vision correction but 26 percent have not visited an optometrist or other eye-care specialist within the past two years. The fact is that every adult should undergo a comprehensive eye exam every two years, especially when they already have corrective lenses. All too often, people automatically assume that they only need a new lens prescription, when

in reality a more serious problem may be the source of their declining vision. Postponing comprehensive eye exams may preclude early diagnosis and treatment of a problem that could have been readily remedied. As with most health matters, prevention is the best approach.

Bring your eyewear prescription to MENLO OPTICAL at 1166 University Drive, on the corner of Oak Grove Avenue and University Drive. Locally owned, we emphasize quality service and products plus great prices. We carry a complete line of well-crafted fashion frames in the latest shapes, sizes, and colors, as well as contact lenses and cleaning supplies. You can reach us at 322-3900.

P.S. According to the American Optometric Association, many people incorrectly believe that eye damage can be caused by reading under dim light, sitting too close to the TV, or rubbing the eyes.

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

BIRTHS

Menlo Park

■ Stephanie and David Marcus, a daughter, Jan. 1, at Sequoia Hospital.

■ Lucy McFall and Francisco Ceja, a son, Jan. 9, at Sequoia Hospital.

■ Leticia and Ricardo Negrete, a daughter, Jan. 14, at Sequoia Hospital.

■ Lucy McFall and Francisco Ceja, a son, Jan. 9, at Sequoia Hospital.

■ Leticia and Ricardo Negrete, a daughter, Jan. 14, at Sequoia Hospital.

Portola Valley

■ Meena Ravella and Charles Seiber, a daughter, Jan. 2, at Sequoia Hospital.

LETTERS

Continued from page 19

which will help them meet their goals during this tough time.

The staff member who accepted the donation said that this was the largest donation he has seen from a group of individuals organized in this way, and said the donations came from Pacifica and Millbrae on the north, Mountain View on the south and Menlo Park, Palo Alto, Redwood City and other cities in between.

The Internet is an amazing organizing tool and I'm sure this kind of response would not have been possible without it; however, if it signals a way that we can all begin to give back to our communities, then surely it will continue.

I was grateful to be part of this amazing effort.

Karen Canty
Walnut Avenue, Atherton

In San Jose, salaries going up only 5 percent

Editor:

Thanks to the Almanac's editorial last week for pointing out the 30 percent wage hike to Menlo Park's police sergeants.

The City Council majority of Kelly Fergusson, Mayor Heyward Robinson, Rich Cline and Andy Cohen apparently justifies these actions by pointing to nearby pay rates. They used this same rationale for increasing police pensions (in an era where the trend is to eliminate pensions altogether).

The Almanac points out that at some point, we need to stop this pay escalation. According to radio reports today, San Jose is increasing their police salaries just 5 percent in view of the economic situation. Apparently, San Jose recognizes that "deserving" something and paying for it are not the same thing.

Joy Kosobayashi
Continental Drive,
Menlo Park

Owner not responsible for Park Theatre's condition

Editor:

Robert Brooks' letter to The Almanac last week blamed the Park Theatre's owner for its run-down condition. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The building's owner has asked Menlo Park repeatedly for approval to remodel or replace the building. The current no-growth majority on the City Council refuses to approve anything except use of the building as a movie theater — when such use is no longer profitable. If Mr. Brooks thinks he can operate the Park as a movie theater, then he should purchase it and attempt to break even.

I agree with Mr. Brooks that it's time for this eyesore to disappear. It's time for the City Council to grant the requested demolition permit, and then approve plans for a replacement building.

The city needs the revenue from property taxes and sales taxes that this building would generate. In its current condition, all it generates are letters to the editor.

Sue Kayton
Doris Drive, Menlo Park

What happened to city's cooperative spirit?

Editor:

In this era of change and hope that we are experiencing on the national level, it is sad that, once again, Menlo Park resorts to polarizing politics. It is surprising that our new mayor, Heyward Robinson, an active Democrat and generous contributor to President Obama's campaign, fails to see the importance of inclusiveness.

Mr. Robinson has appointed to the City Council's high-speed rail subcommittee the two council members who voted in a closed session for the city to join a lawsuit challenging the environmental review of the train's route between the Central Val-

ley and the Bay Area. It is disappointing that Mr. Robinson did not want to include John Boyle, the only council member who holds a differing viewpoint than that of Rich Cline and Kelly Fergusson.

It was worrisome enough that Mr. Cline and Ms. Fergusson committed the city to what may turn out to be a costly litigation, but our new mayor has made it worse by dismissing Mr. Boyle's contribution to the discussion. In sanitizing his subcommittee, Mr. Robinson is discouraging a dialogue between two viewpoints and denying the voice of the only person on the council who appears to represent the 57 percent of Menlo Park voters who are in agreement with high-speed rail.

This council might keep in mind that only three precincts in Menlo Park voted against Prop 1A and that Menlo Park is only one of two cities in the entire state to sue the high-speed rail authority.

Brielle Johnck
Central Avenue, Menlo Park

President's pay freeze: An example for sergeants?

Editor:

Menlo Park Police Chief Bruce Goitia has suggested that the sergeants' dedication to the job might have been in jeopardy if they had not received a substantial pay raise.

Had the City Council not approved the raise, Chief Goitia said, "I don't envision that I would have seven sergeants walk out the door, but I also don't envision that I will have their hearts and souls in the job."

One week later President Barack Obama vowed to forge a new era of government openness and froze the pay of his top staff members who earn more than \$100,000 to show Americans their leaders could also tighten their belts amid economic crisis.

"However long we are keepers of the public trust, we should

never forget that we are here as public servants, and public service is a privilege," President Obama said.

Is there is disconnect here?

Peter Carpenter
Larch Drive, Atherton

Water district collects taxes, delivers services

Editor:

Conservation, water use efficiency, fire safety for the community and the water delivery system and setting the cost of water are major pillars of the Los Trancos County Water District's mission.

Currently, 40 percent (in the past it was 100 percent) of tax revenues go to setting the price of water in cooperation with CalWater. Ten percent of the budget goes to conservation and water efficiency programs that permanently change water consumption through modern technology in appliances and fixtures.

The district board, based on community suggestions, developed a targeted incentive program that reduces the chance of wildfire before it happens — a wildfire that could attack homes, threaten lives and damage the water system. The board is also spearheading an effort to

make the main access roads to and from our community safe, allowing us to escape and fire trucks to come in if need be.

The leverage of these few tax dollars is very high, as the cost of the district's management and lots of direct labor is free, with very low overhead. This gets us hundreds of volunteer hours each month to work on local issues that are not delivered by other agencies.

The board has made the properties owned by the district safer from fire, even while continuing the search for permanent stewards. Perhaps this attention will help the open space managers see this in a different light and, speed up our quest.

The board exists and serves at the pleasure of the voters. The voters like what the district does, for the most part, and when they don't, they ask for change, and get it. If and when these services are not valuable, we'll fix them or dissolve. This is a democracy at the local level. Why throw all this away, just because it doesn't fit the standard mode of a water district? It is a bargain.

That's why I ran for, and now serve on the board. It is rewarding to help out the community.

T. Michael Ward, president
The LTCWD for 2009

MARY E. BRYAN

Mary E. Bryan, 89, died January 24, 2009, in Palo Alto. Her husband of 55 years, Henry C. Bryan, passed away in 1997 in Phoenix. Born in Newberry, S.C., Mary was the daughter of Bennett Avery and Amelia Klettner Dominick, last of Orlando, Florida. She was predeceased by her brothers, Bennett and Julian. Mary graduated from Orlando High School in 1938 and Judson College, Marion, Alabama in 1942, where she was a top student and active in a host of student leadership activities. Shortly after their wedding in 1942, Hank and Mary struck out from their Florida home and settled in Arizona, where she served as a court clerk in Tucson for Judge DeConcini for a time. They finally made their home in Phoenix, living there for more than 40 years, where Hank was in the real estate business and Mary supported him in his single-minded devotion to his business and to providing for his family, and raised their daughter. Mary is survived by her daughter and son-in-law, Mary and Doug Scrivner, of Los Altos Hills and by many nieces and nephews, principally in Orlando. Since 1999, Mary lived in Cupertino (at the Forum) and Palo Alto (at the Hyatt Classic Residence Assisted Living), near her daughter. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to Judson College (Marion, Alabama), El Camino Hospital Foundation (Mountain View, CA) or the charity of the donor's choice. The family would like to thank all of Mary's doctors and the personnel at Camino Medical Group and El Camino Hospital who helped her through a number of medical battles, the staff of the Hyatt, and the cadre of caregivers who have so enhanced Mary's life for the last 4 years, and especially Angelique Sarris, who has led the team and meant so much to Mary and her daughter. Mary Bryan was a true lady, of quiet faith, grace and resolve, who dedicated her life to her family. Condolences can be sent by email to maryscrivner@me.com.


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WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

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

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

Grand jury off base in Los Trancos

A water district that collects property taxes but does not provide water apparently was an item too juicy for the San Mateo County civil grand jury to pass up.

The case in the jury's cross hairs is the water district that serves Los Trancos Woods and Vista Verde, two small enclaves of some 250 homes in unincorporated San Mateo County in the hills above Portola Valley. In 2006, after a series of negotiations with county and state officials, the district decided to sell its water distribution system to California Water Service (CalWater).

EDITORIAL
The opinion of The Almanac

A key part of the deal was that prices would be pegged to a nearby district served by CalWater. And, although it would no longer officially deliver water, the district retained its taxing power.

The way district officials saw it, the deal accomplished several goals endorsed by homeowners in the area. For starters, all residents would receive water at reasonable rates, the deal would reduce the development potential and fire hazard on a small piece of district property, and, in return for conservation measures, the district could rebate a good portion of its tax monies to users via a 70 percent subsidy of CalWater's charges.

It was a sweet deal for Los Trancos and Vista Verde residents, but it did not escape the notice of the grand jury. The jurors saw a glaring injustice and issued a blistering report, charging that if the district was no longer providing water to its residents, it should lose rights to any taxing authority. The district should be dismantled, and the money shifted to other, needier agencies, the grand jury said.

This harsh assessment probably sounded good in county offices or in Sacramento, but a deeper look at what the district actually does with its revenue shows tax-paying residents are benefiting in virtually every respect.

For starters, when it signed the deal with CalWater, district officials made sure its rates would track those paid by nearby CalWater customers. In addition, households that install conservation measures receive up to a 70 percent rate subsidy, which uses about half of the taxes collected from the 257 households in the district. The rebate applies only to low and moderate water users.

Second, for years, Los Trancos and Vista Verde residents have been concerned about fire hazards, given the limited number of escape routes and low accessibility for fire equipment in the area, which includes steep hills and many winding roads. Now, a portion of the tax money pays for an effort to reduce fire risk, covering part of the cost to replace shake roofs and clear vegetation from around homes.

Former water district officials (see guest opinion, opposite page) strongly defend the decision to continue to collect the property tax and use the funds to keep water usage and fire hazards low. The plan is working and so far as is known, no resident has voiced opposition to current policies.

The assessments by the grand jury and other state and county agencies are well meaning, but misguided. In this case a small group of homeowners has found a way to use the water district tax to reduce the area's fire hazard and encourage water conservation. Perhaps more could be done, but at this time, there is no reason to take away the taxing authority of the Los Trancos Vista Verde Water District. ■

LETTERS
Our readers write

A spotlight on a difficult city issue

Editor:

Thank you for putting the spotlight on a difficult issue many would prefer to ignore.

With 70 percent of city costs going to employee wages and benefits and the paid retirement rolls just starting to snowball, this problem will sink our city and many others.

As for paying our police well, one must ask how much money is really needed to bring new officers to one of the nicest places to work in the world — we might instead market ourselves better to future employees. This is no time to raise taxes or fees on residents or businesses — it is time to establish a sustainable hiring policy.

Henry Riggs
Callie Lane, Menlo Park

Winery just adds to an already fabulous county

Editor:

Thank you for your coverage of the Clos de la Tech winery last



Photo by Ralph Oswald

Our Regional Heritage

Sixty years ago, in February 1949, a hard freeze gripped the Skylonda area and created an ice-skating rink in the reservoir behind what is now Alice's Restaurant. Menlo Park resident Ralph Oswald contributed this photo, which shows his sister, Norma Oswald, at left, with two unidentified friends enjoying an unusual opportunity to skate on the reservoir.

week. This is obviously a topic of tremendous local interest as evidenced by the comments of several individuals.

I was stunned, however, by the

closing sentence about our county. As a business owner I certainly appreciate Valeta Massey's enthusiasm for creating a product and business of which she and her fam-

ily can be proud. But as someone who has called San Mateo County home since 1955 (I am now 56)

See **LETTERS**, next page

LETTERS

Continued from previous page

I maintain that our county already has “renown.”

San Mateo County is home to and has made a name for itself with old-growth redwoods, multi-generational family-owned farms and ranches, world-class surfing and gorgeous beaches, thousands of acres of public land, private businesses that have operated in the area for decades, multitudes of tourist attractions, great schools and other educational facilities and opportunities, and much more.

Prosperous and sustainable businesses certainly can and do assist in strengthening the fabric of any community; but in my view it's important to keep one's role and contribution in perspective.

Georgia Stigall

Skyline Boulevard, La Honda

Happy to see Everest charter school advance

Editor:

Kudos to the California Board of Education staff for their recommendation of support for the Everest charter high school.

While the Sequoia Union High School District likes to talk about how they support charter schools, they always do everything in their power to undermine them.

First, they deny the petitions citing lack of community support.

More perspective on Los Trancos water district

By Stan Gage

I was president of the Los Trancos water district in 2005 when it was sold to CalWater, and in light of the recent grand jury report and Jan. 21 story in *The Almanac*, I believe some additional perspective is appropriate.

The original intent of the board was to sell the district and go out of business. However, the community expressed concern about losing control of district lands and did not want to see these properties turned into more housing.

At a meeting in January 2003 with a county supervisor and LAFCO (the county agency that oversees creation and dissolution of special districts), a plan was suggested for the district to stay in business and manage these lands until they could be turned over to some other agency. This approach was frequently discussed with, and supported by, all parties including county officials through and beyond the time of the sale in 2005.

Since 2003, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, the town of Portola Valley, and POST (the Peninsula Open Space Trust) have been approached to take these lands, along with some money,

if necessary, to guarantee that the lands remain as permanent open space. There has been no interest from these agencies.

The district plan to discount the cost of water to the former customers is modeled after a plan employed by the San Francisco water district. For the Los Trancos district, subscribers will receive the discount only if they have implemented substantial water conservation measures. The conservation plan is more advanced than in other districts in the area, and will reduce water use permanently and quickly.

Some people are concerned that lowering the cost of water encourages increased usage. However, recent studies have validated the common knowledge among water system managers that pricing has little or no effect on water demand over the long term. Changing to efficient appliances, toilets, shower heads and smart irrigation controllers does. What little effect that pricing does have on demand occurs among low- or fixed-income families.

The legislative analyst's office report on the sale noted that the district had yet to implement the state Legislature's goal of eliminating dependence on property taxes. The LAO director has written to me acknowledging that in 30 years most districts have made

little change in this dependency. She continues: “With regard to our report's discussion of the Los Trancos County Water District, please be assured that our intent was to highlight the extraordinary link between tax policy decisions of the 1970s and tax allocation policies of today. We did not mean to suggest in any way that the district was acting inappropriately.”

Through the leadership of the water district board, a tremendous leverage is achieved resulting in thousands of hours of volunteer effort with nearly all of the revenues devoted to actual implementation of programs like:

- Encouraging use of more efficient toilets, clothes washers, and improved irrigation controllers among nine water conservation programs;

- Removing brush and eucalyptus trees in the community to reduce the risk of wildfires, which will benefit our community, Portola Valley, and Palo Alto;

- Making the district lands into a community asset.

At the 2006 LAFCO review Supervisor Rich Gordon said that district tax revenues could be better used locally than by the county.

I agree!

Stan Gage was district board president when the water district was sold to CalWater.



Pure folly. In the rare instances that a charter school is approved, the district refuses to fund them as required by law.

District officials then provide the charter school with the most undesirable locations they can find and,

just to be difficult, they change the charter school's locations as often as they can. Truly shameful.

The other charter school, Summit Prep, gets more students into college on less money than any other school in the district. This remark-

able record of success — including the incredible parent involvement — should be the envy of our public schools. Instead of scorning them, the district should encourage and emulate these charter schools.

The parents and staff who orga-

nize charter schools should be congratulated and supported. I only hope the state Board of Education will agree with their staff's recommendation.

Paul Goeld
Cinnabar Road, Woodside

Making the case for the sergeants' raise

By Kelly Fergusson

Menlo Park recently gave a substantial pay raise to its police sergeants. This raise has been criticized by *The Almanac* and a number of residents.

The *Almanac* rightly points out that wage comparisons with other local cities are used when setting new police salary levels, and this leads to an upward spiraling effect as cities out-bid each other in a scarce labor market. Citizen concerns about this are understandable.

This is a real structural problem that must be solved, whether by regional or statewide action, or simply by evolving economic forces. However, in the absence of these fixes, no single city can resist wage escalation without suffering service level decreases, as Menlo Park did recently when low wages were the primary cause of high police turnover.

The *Almanac's* 2007 editorial cut to the chase: “Given the tough recruiting envi-

ronment — California faces a shortage of up to 13,000 police officers by 2010 — it is time to abandon the city's position of setting its wage standard in the mid-range of what is offered in the surrounding area. That strategy obviously is not working, and if the city is to catch up, it will have to ante up more dollars.”



We had lost 30 of 50 officers over a three-year period. Residents did not feel safe in their own neighborhoods. This was not a problem that could wait for region-wide or state-wide solutions. It was a real problem that demanded practical action, and political courage. The council knew that granting these very large raises would raise questions at any time, and particularly so in a down economy. But the situation required us to act, and we did.

Questions have also been raised about the openness and timing of the negotiations and the contract approval. In granting a raise to line officers last spring, council made it clear that the sergeants would be receiving a similar raise when their

contract expired at the end of 2008. This issue was discussed in setting the 2008-09 budget, and the budget approved in June 2008 had money to pay for the sergeants' raises.

The council held three closed sessions on the sergeants' contract negotiations. All were publicly noticed. No members of the public spoke during the public comment agenda item of any of these meetings. And breaking with the usual practice, the city placed the sergeants' contract as a regular business item on the Jan. 13 agenda (instead of as a consent item) in order to give the public and council the opportunity to raise questions about the negotiations and contract. Despite the great interest in this issue, only one member of the public chose to address council on this item.

With these new contracts, our police force is fully staffed and Menlo Park is safer. We just welcomed four officers to the force, including two highly rated transfers from Sacramento. They are happy to be in a community that values and appreciates its police. So am I.

Kelly Fergusson is a member of the Menlo Park City Council.

An uplifting experience on MLK day

Editor:

On Jan. 19, on the celebration of Martin Luther King's 80th birthday, President Obama called for people to participate in a day of service in their communities.

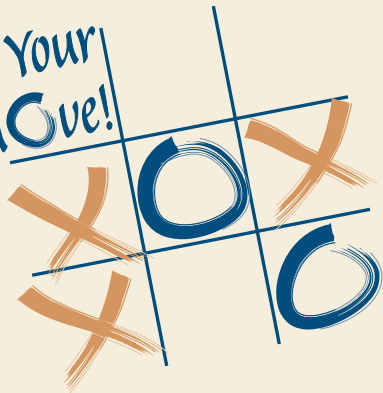
Lisa Altieri, who owns a recycling company in San Carlos, posted an event online at uservice.org, to benefit Second Harvest Food Bank. Two friends and I decided to participate in Lisa's event. We were asked to collect food from friends and neighbors and deliver the food to her on Monday, the 19th. The following is a part of her letter thanking us all for the contributions.

You all made this an incredible event, beyond what we could have imagined. We were flooded with food contributions and delivered a total of 9,546 pounds of food to Second Harvest! We also delivered \$285 in checks and \$30 in gift certificates. The Second Harvest staff was overwhelmed at our donations,

Continued on page 17

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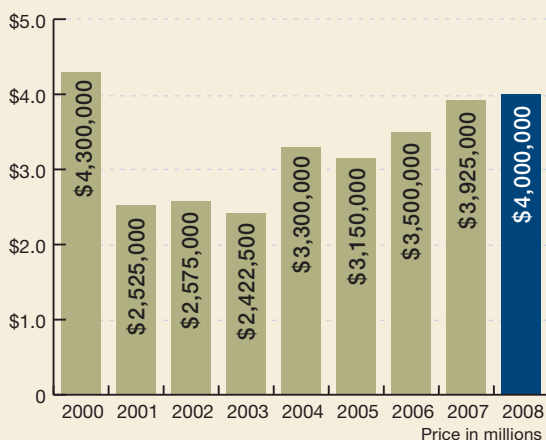
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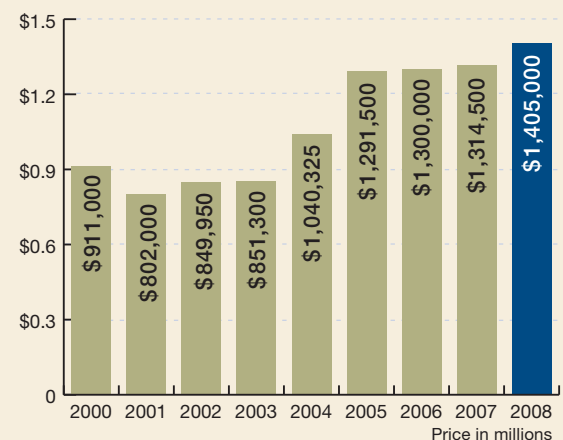
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Menlo Park Median Sale Price Comparison



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