

**MENLO COLLEGE ASSAULT VICTIM** leaves hospital;  
alleged assailant leaves school. Page 10

# The Almanac

THE HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER FOR MENLO PARK, ATHERTON, PORTOLA

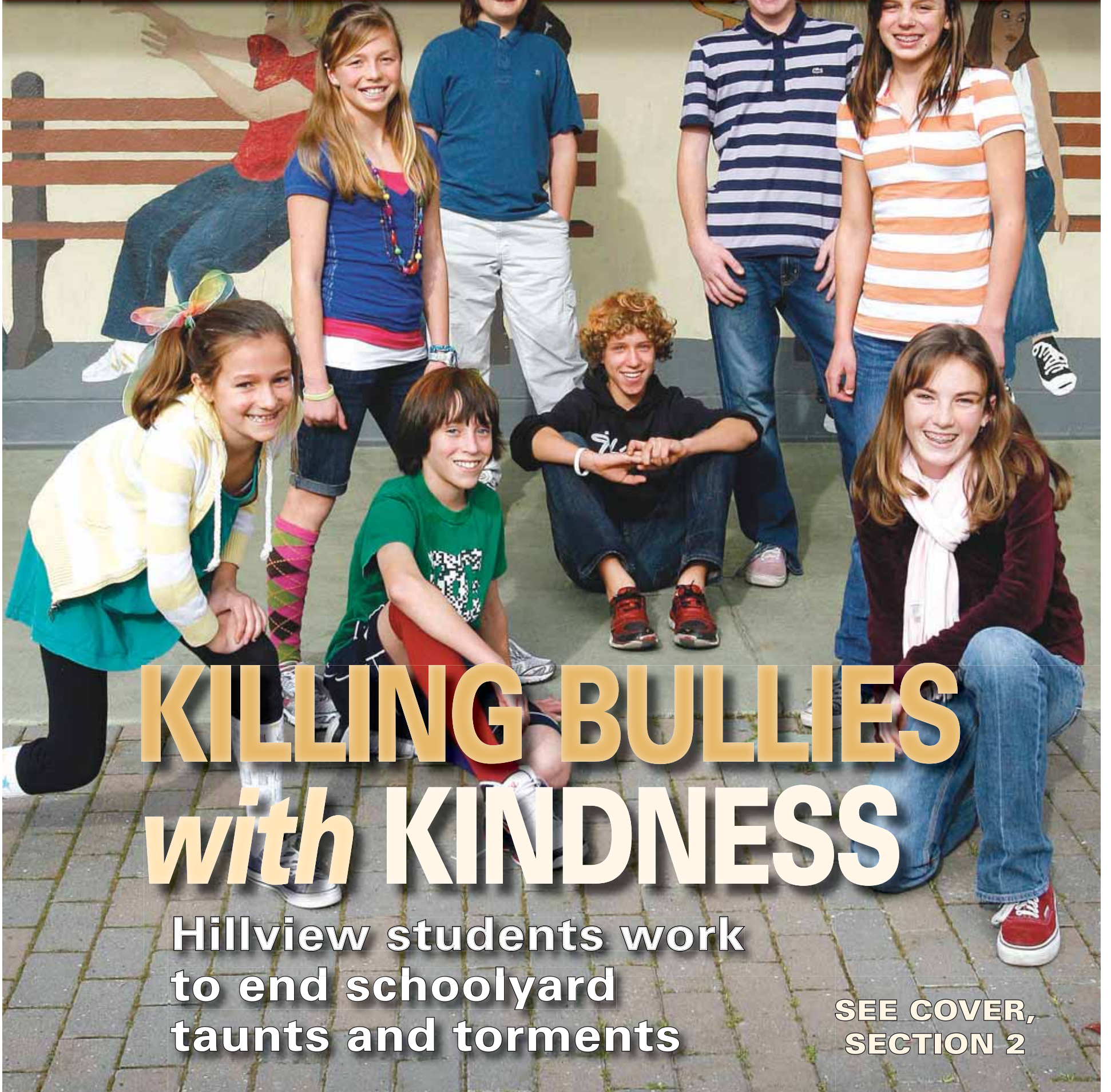
VALLEY AND WOODSIDE

FEBRUARY 11, 2009

[www.TheAlmanac.com](http://www.TheAlmanac.com)

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VOL. 44 NO. 24



## **KILLING BULLIES** *with* **KINDNESS**

Hillview students work  
to end schoolyard  
taunts and torments

SEE COVER,  
SECTION 2

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# Inside

This week's news, features and community events.

## FIRST SHOT



Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

### Looking for work

Job seekers apply for positions with the Rosewood Hotel in Menlo Park, set to open April 2. Nearly 1,000 people turned out to a job fair held by the hotel at the Burgess Recreation Center on Sunday, Feb. 8. For more, see Page 5.

### Atherton

■ Elizabeth Lewis tops in campaign spending for council seat. **Page 9**

### Menlo Park

■ Top vote-getter Fergusson outspends fellow council candidates by huge margin. **Page 9**

### Portola Valley

■ Town's natural history inventory reveals eclectic collection. **Page 23**

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■ Town may toughen building code to reduce fire risks. **Page 22**

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### On the cover

Hillview Middle School students are working hard to end bullying at their Menlo Park school. Pictured are seventh-graders in the Kindness Campaign Club. In the front row, from left, are: Annalise Deal, Harrison Shane and Kelley Eason. In the back row, from left, are: Samantha Henze, Andrew Aufdemberge, Leo Berez, Bobby Roth and Nicole Zanolli. Photo by Michelle Le. Story begins on the Section 2 cover.

### CALLING ON THE ALMANAC

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

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 ■ E-mail news photos with captions to: **AlmanacNews@gmail.com**  
 ■ E-mail letters to the editor to: **letters@AlmanacNews.com**

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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  
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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/amasoftball/index.cfm>

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

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## Roberts Tip of the Week

### Whetting the Appetite

If you have a beautiful dinner planned for guests, there is no better way to begin the proceedings than by serving aperitifs. The word "aperitif" comes from the Latin "aperire," which means, "to open," which describes the light, dry, and modestly alcoholic beverage that is intended to kindle the appetite without overwhelming the senses. Served before dinner, an aperitif may be as simple as a glass of dry white wine or Champagne. However, a true aperitif, like Campari or Vermouth, has more flair and sophistication. Campari is the ruby red Italian drink whose closely guarded recipe has been a secret since 1860. Vermouth (widely known as an ingredient of Manhattan) is a delightful herb infused drink.

An additional benefit of serving aperitifs before dinner is that guests have time to relax and shake off the day prior to sitting down for a meal. What type of aperitif should you serve at your dinner party? At ROBERTS MARKET, we are your local wine source. We can help you find the perfect wine. Our wine department is the most extensive in the area, more than most liquor stores. Don't forget fresh cut flowers from our floral department to grace your table.

*HINT: The bitter flavor of Campari is often offset by the addition of soda*

## 10% Wine Discount on 6 Bottles

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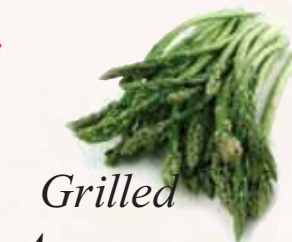
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## DELI

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**BONELESS LEG OF LAMB**

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16 oz - Also Habanero - Guajillo - Verde

**\$2.49**

**PILLSBURY SUGAR COOKIES**

16oz - Also Chocolate Chip

**\$2.39**

**C&H POWDERED SUGAR**

1lb box - Also Golden - Dark Brown

**69¢**

**MIGHTY LEAF CHAMOMILE CITRUS TEA**

15 count - Also Green - Jasmine - Vanilla Bean

**\$5.49**

**NANCY'S QUICHE FLORENTINE**

6oz - Also Cheese Trio

**\$1.99**

**ARM & HAMMER CLEAN SHOWER DAILY CLEANER**

32oz

**\$2.29**

**Survey says...**

The results are in of a city survey on how residents feel about Menlo Park. Apparently, people like living here.

Ninety-five percent of the residents who responded to the survey rated quality of life as “good” or “excellent,” and 91 percent approved of the city’s “overall direction,” Cherise Brandell, the city’s community engagement manager, said at a special meeting of the City Council Feb. 2.

Residents gave high marks to the city’s image and appearance. They were not as pleased with the lack of affordable housing and affordable child care services, two hot-button issues.

They approved of the city’s police department, the library, parks, and the quality of the drinking water. They complained about issues relating to storm drainage, street cleaning and repair, land use planning, and economic development.

**Paint with Cohen**

Waiting for a chance to express a long-hidden artistic talent?

Menlo Park Councilman Andy Cohen will teach four classes on “Nature Journaling” at the Little House Activity Center in March, from 1 to 3 p.m. in the art studio at Little House on 800 Middle Ave. A number of Mr. Cohen’s paintings are currently on view at Little House, most of them landscapes.

The fee for the class is \$40 for members and \$50 for everyone else. For more information, call 326-2025.

**Just foolin’!**

A few weeks ago, Rosewood Hotel officials announced that the new hotel and resort on Sand Hill Road near Interstate 280 in Menlo Park would open April 1.

In recent days, however, they have made a slight adjustment — the “official” opening date is now April 2, a spokeswoman said.

She declined to say whether the fact that April 1 is April Fools’ Day had anything to do with change in dates.

**Everest offered shared space in East Palo Alto**

■ Community reaction mixed over district’s plans to house charter high school.

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

The murmur of voices singing hymns, on a recent afternoon, floated across the rolling grass field at 763 Green St. in East Palo Alto — a site that soon may be the home of Everest Charter High School.

The Sequoia Union High School District, facing a Feb. 1 state deadline to offer Everest facilities, on Jan. 26 proposed four classrooms in portable buildings to be installed on the field, which includes a couple of large trees and is surrounded by homes and the Tokaikolo Christian Church.

The district bought the site in September to expand the Redwood City-based adult school, district spokeswoman Bettylu Smith said.

Its charms notwithstanding, Green Street is reportedly a speedway, and the welcome

extended to both the charter and the adult schools by the neighboring church’s deacon is at odds with some residents’ views.

If Everest’s charter is approved, it would open in September and be modeled on the popular and regularly over-subscribed Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City. Summit’s founders are also leading the effort to establish Everest.

The Sequoia district board rejected Everest’s charter petition, as did the San Mateo County Board of Education, but a panel recommended it to the state board in a 9-0 vote on Feb. 3. A decision is expected in March.

A fourth of Summit Prep’s students live in the Almanac’s circulation area. Everest has received more than 200 applications for its 100 freshman seats, spokeswoman Diane Tavenner has said.

The Sequoia district is on the hook for facilities because of the terms of a series of ballot measures it sponsored, starting in 2001: It proposed \$323 million in bond measures that voters were able to approve with

less than the normal two-thirds majority required for tax increases. One tradeoff for the lower threshold: Districts must provide facilities for charters.

Some \$4 million would go to this project, much of it already spent to acquire the buildings and the land.

Everest’s four classrooms would be shared with the adult school, as would the on-site office space and bathrooms. The charter school would occupy the buildings during the day, the adult school, at night.

It would be a “starter campus” for Everest’s first two years, Assistant Superintendent James Lianides told the Sequoia board before its unanimous vote approving the offer.

**Reaction**

“I think it’s going to be a really good idea to have an adult school and a high school here in East Palo Alto,” church Deacon Pulusila Bloomfield said in an interview.

See **EVEREST**, page 7



Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

**Carl Payne** signs in at a job fair for the Rosewood Hotel in Menlo Park on Feb. 8. Mr. Payne recently returned to Menlo Park after moving to Houston because he thought there would be more opportunities here for his family, he said.

**Nearly 1,000 turn out for job fair**

Some 975 people turned out for a job fair on Sunday, Feb. 8, seeking positions at the soon-to-open Rosewood Hotel on Sand Hill Road, near Interstate 280.

Applicants lined up at the front of the Burgess Recreation Center in the Menlo Park Civic Center complex to sign in. They filled out applications at a bank of laptop computers, watched a video about the features of the new hotel, and waited for their names to be called for individual interviews at tables

set up in several rooms at the recreation center.

The hotel promises to add new jobs to an economy that has seen unemployment rise at historic rates. Rosewood officials were looking to fill openings for desk clerks, concierges, housekeepers, food servers and line cooks, among other positions.

After the interview process, successful applicants were called into yet another room to receive formal job offers, and to fill out paperwork. These

included Cara Nonnenberg of Menlo Park, who will work at the new hotel’s front desk; and David Carrahan, also a Menlo Park resident, who landed a job as a locker room attendant.

All told, Rosewood officials offered positions to 75 of the applicants. Rosewood representatives will conduct follow-up interviews with other job seekers to fill some of the 125 positions that are still open, a hotel spokeswoman said.

The hotel is set to open April 2.

**Menlo Park district braces for cutbacks**

By Andrea Gemmet

Almanac Staff Writer

The Menlo Park City School District is facing some unpleasant belt-tightening measures that are likely to result in larger class sizes next fall.

Dwindling property tax revenues, increasing numbers of students, uncertainty over state budget cuts and losses from Lehman Bros. investments are making for a grim financial outlook for the K-8 school district that encompasses much of Menlo Park and Atherton.

On top of that, contributions to the school foundation, which typically donates money amounting to 8 percent of the district’s annual budget, are running about 20 percent below last year’s level, said Superintendent Ken Ranella.

Mr. Ranella outlined the expected shortfall in revenues over the next 18 months at a special three-hour study session meeting with the school board on Feb. 3.

The board didn’t take action, but did direct Mr. Ranella to refine a plan that divides potential budget cuts into three tiers, ranging from least to most painful. Board members did not favor spending down the district’s reserves as a short-term budget fix.

See **CUTBACKS**, page 8



**KA'APEHA: SURVIVED AN UNPRECEDENTED 80 HOURS WITHOUT A LIVER CURRENTLY: LEAVING THE MEDICINE TO MOM.**

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Visit [www.lpch.org](http://www.lpch.org) for more information.

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# State panel endorses Everest charter with unanimous vote

By Dave Boyce  
Almanac Staff Writer

Backers of Everest Charter High School got a significant boost in Sacramento Tuesday, Feb. 3, with a unanimous vote by the nine-member state Advisory Commission on Charter Schools (ACCS) recommending that the school be chartered and open in September.

The ACCS vote, combined with a strong recommendation for Everest in a staff report from the Department of Education, was good news for Everest spokeswoman Diane Tavenner as the charter petition now heads to the state Board of Education for an up or down vote in March.

Everest would be modeled on Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, a popular school in its sixth year 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 an ethnically diverse student body chosen by lottery.

Ms. Tavenner represented Everest at the 45-minute meeting, and split her 15 minutes with four students from Summit Prep.

She said in an interview that she was "a little bit surprised" by the outcome, having heard that one panel member regularly voted against charters. "To get

the 9-0 (vote) was really incredible," she said. "Really, this looks very promising."

The Sequoia Union High School District board rejected the Everest petition on a 4-1 vote in September, as did the San Mateo County Board of Education on a 5-2 vote in December.

Petition opponents who spoke included Sequoia district Superintendent Pat Gemma, Trustee Lorraine Rumley and county Superintendent of Schools Jean Holbrook.

Ms. Holbrook, in an e-mail, called the trip "worthwhile" in that petition opponents could "voice our concerns about the potential impact of the school on the Sequoia students and schools. Perhaps our efforts will plant the seeds for some needed charter school law reform."

Asked whether the trip was worth it, Mr. Gemma replied: "Absolutely. No question. I had never been to one of those before."

Mr. Gemma was critical of the process, saying that the staff report's author, charter school consultant to the Department of Education Michelle Ruskofsky, "sets the stage so that the commission will approve every charter that comes before them," Mr. Gemma said.

After the vote, one commissioner added for the record that the law should be changed to allow consideration of a charter's financial impact on a school dis-

trict, Mr. Gemma said.

Commissioners questioned both sides, including the Sequoia district on its claim that Summit Prep's college-prep program didn't serve low-performing students, students learning English, and special education students, Ms. Tavenner said. The exchanges were "pretty validating," she added.

"The commission members really pushed back on the district and asked them to clarify that and whether that's really what they believe," she said. "I don't know that (the panel) really got an actual response to that."

Asked to comment, Mr. Gemma said Everest's data was flawed since the district had not yet validated it. "Frankly," he added, "I felt good about the questions."

Ms. Tavenner said the commissioners discussed training for school districts on how to handle charter petitions, given Everest's two rejections, and a similar case earlier that day. "I think they were recognizing a little bit of a pattern," she said.

Ms. Ruskofsky confirmed Ms. Tavenner's account.

"Some members expressed concern that the districts/counties that appeared before the ACCS on Feb. 3 in general don't appear to be reviewing charter petitions with the same criteria that the ACCS and state board uses, following statutory and regulatory guidelines," she said in an e-mail. ■

## East Palo Alto space for Everest

### EVEREST

continued from page 5

Two Green Street residents weren't as enthusiastic. They told The Almanac that traffic can be hazardous on this straight, narrow, unmarked two-lane roadway. Speeds of 60 mph to 70 mph are not uncommon, they said.

A Feb. 2 community meeting, called by the district, did little to change the impression that the schools are being "rammed down our throats," Green Street neighborhood representative David Winsberg said in an interview.

Everest spokeswoman Diane Tavenner knocked the agreement's lack of detail on the sharing of space with the adult school if Everest students are there, as is planned, until 5 p.m.

Referring to requirements that charter facilities be "reasonably

equivalent" to what's typical in a district, she added: "Four classrooms, one with a sink, does not make a comparable facility with what other students are in. ... We're concerned that it's not an appropriate offer."

District spokeswoman Smith replied: "Clearly, the initial offer letter does not address every small detail. The process that will unfold in the weeks ahead includes a March 1 deadline for Everest to respond to the letter the district sent."

A Ladera parent whose son has applied to Everest, reacting to the choice of the site, said safety was her first priority, followed by concerns about where students would have lunch and relax.

"Our first concern always, for every student, is safety," Ms. Tavenner said, but added that there are many unanswered questions. "We don't even have a remotely clear picture of what this site would look like," she said.

Superintendent Pat Gemma addressed the safety concerns. "I think you'd have to talk to Everest about that. I'm sure they're going to have adequate plans for safety," he said.

Maria De La Vaga, superintendent of East Palo Alto's Ravenswood City School District, told The Almanac that she doesn't feel unsafe in the East Palo Alto area. "I believe we have a strong police force and a community very, very interested in keeping its citizens safe."

But crime, she noted, isn't a problem for East Palo Alto alone. "I have also read in the papers regarding recent robberies in Palo Alto. It would concern me as well, so it is understood if parents are asking these questions."

"This is a very strong community with wonderful children and young adults. Unfortunately, like any community, there are a few that ruin it for others." ■

## REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Gloria Darke



### Retirement

**Q: We will be retiring soon and we are not exactly certain where we want to go. We have several choices, can a local agent help us get information on these areas?**

— M/M Greene

**A: Dear Mr. & Mrs. Greene,** Haven't quite figured out where you want to live when you retire? Do you find the city more convenient, or would you prefer country solitude, or perhaps the seashore? According to statistics most retirees stay in the same geographic location, often moving to a smaller home. But, many stay in the same residence.

If, however, you've always

dreamed of moving to an exciting new location, you'll have lots to do. This is where an experienced real estate agent can help. As a member of a national real estate relocation network, your agent can provide much of the information you'll need on a variety of locations. They will even provide references on experienced agents in these locations.

With two agents working in tandem, you'll be able to market your current residence, while looking for a home in your new city. Think of the stress and confusion this approach eliminates. Your local realtor can maximize the sale of your current residence, while the other agent finds the best homes in the location of your choice.

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

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Aging Well for 40 Years

# Electricians picket Ladera club over non-union wages

By Dave Boyce  
Almanac Staff Writer

On most weekday mornings, there's now a crowd of men clad in orange safety vests at the entrance to Ladera Oaks Swim, Fitness & Tennis Club on Alpine Road. They're unemployed union electricians, and they're picketing the major renovation going on there because the electricians are getting wages that are lower than the going rate.

Fremont subcontractor Mission Electric did not return a call requesting comment. The picketers carry signs, shout slogans occasionally when passing cars honk their horns, and march in a circle, often around another picketer dressed in a gray-and-black rat costume.

Almanac.

Mission Electric did not return a call requesting comment.

The picketers carry signs, shout slogans occasionally when passing cars honk their horns, and march in a circle, often around another picketer dressed in a gray-and-black rat costume.

If the subcontractor begins to pay union rates, the protests will stop, Mr. Nolan said. The picketing tends to start at 7 a.m. and end shortly after noon.

What about the rat? Is it a demeaning reference to non-union electricians who cross picket lines? It is not, Mr. Nolan said, adding: "It more draws attention to the protest than anything else."

As people enter and leave



**Unemployed electricians** are picketing the Ladera Oaks Swim, Fitness & Tennis Club, claiming that electricians there are working for wages and benefits lower than the going union rate.

Photo by Michelle Le/  
The Almanac

the club, they're offering "a lot of support," he said. "A lot of people (passing by) are honking their horns," he added.

A call to the club for a comment was not returned.

Local 617 celebrated its 100th year in 2008, Mr. Nolan said.

The union is active in the community, including donating some 65 scoreboards to schools in San Mateo County.

Scoreboards at Woodside High School and Canada College, and probably the one at Menlo-Atherton High School, are cour-

tesy of Local 617, he said.

The union also runs a 60-year-old apprentice training program in San Carlos, where students recently built a trailer equipped with solar panels as a mobile demonstration of their craft, Mr. Nolan said. ■

# Council to consider fee policy at children's center

To what extent, if any, should the city of Menlo Park subsidize the city's children's center? How much of the burden should parents shoulder?

This is one of the issues the City Council will take up when it considers its policies on setting fees for city services at a study session, set to begin at 7 p.m. in the council chambers on Tuesday, Feb. 10. The council chambers are located in the Civic Center, between Laurel and Alma streets.

The city has long used informal guidelines to set fees, according to city staff. In general, the city tries not to subsidize fees associated with the planning department, for example, while it subsidizes nearly all the operations of the police department.

There has been less clarity, however, about the city's policy for setting child care fees. The issue provokes a contentious

## MP WATCH

debate among residents nearly every time the council considers upping fees at the children's center — usually once a year.

Several residents have expressed outrage that parents are asked to cover only about three-quarters of the cost of the center, while the city picks up the bill for the remainder — an expense of over \$300,000 per year, according to a recent study on the cost of city services.

But parents have been equally vociferous in their opposition to fee increases, arguing that it puts an unfair burden on families with two working parents, especially in the current economic climate.

The city's informal policy on fees at the children's center has been to gradually increase

See MP WATCH, page 10

# District braces for cutbacks

## CUTBACKS

continued from page 5

First-tier cutbacks would reduce opportunities for professional development for teachers, charge field trip participants for use of the district bus, postpone updates to computer and technology equipment, and increase class sizes in grades 4-8 through teacher attrition.

"Professional development is clearly going to go away," Mr. Ranella said.

If the state budget leaves class-size-reduction funding intact, it should protect primary grade classrooms from increasing beyond 20 students per class.

If the district tried to boost class size in kindergarten through third grades, it would actually lose more money than it saved, Mr. Ranella said. The upper grades are a different story. Bigger classes in grades 4 to 8 mean fewer teachers' salaries to pay,

and no loss of state funding.

The more painful third-tier cutbacks under consideration would reduce elective programs at Hillview Middle School; reduce music, art, physical education and Spanish for elementary grades; reduce remedial education services; and eliminate some supervisory and administrative positions.

"These are more draconian," Mr. Ranella told the board. "It means a tsunami is happening economically."

The district is facing a March 15 deadline to notify teachers of layoffs, if necessary. In the meantime, district officials are hoping that decisions will be made on both the federal economic stimulus plan, which could include education funding, and the state budget crisis. Gov. Schwarzenegger is proposing a \$300-per-student midyear budget cut, with bigger cuts to follow in the 2009-10 school year.

"We had anticipated some sort

of cut, but never in our wildest dreams did we think it would be \$300 per child," Mr. Ranella said.

It's still unknown how such cuts would affect basic aid districts like Menlo Park, which keep a larger share of local property taxes in exchange for per-pupil funding from the state. Enrollment in the Menlo Park district has grown 19 percent in the past 5 years, to 2,409 students, Mr. Ranella said.

Board member Laura Rich said she didn't want to see important education programs "decimated" until the scope of the budget problem becomes clear.

"We worked really hard developing the programs we developed," she said.

With so many variables in the district's revenues, Mr. Ranella warned the board against making decisions on budget cuts too soon.

"I don't want to have to go into a public interaction on cuts until we know we have to make them," he said. ■

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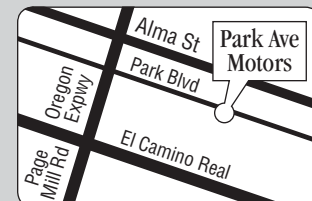
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## Top vote-getter Fergusson outspends fellow council candidates by huge margin

■ Cohen files late; Ciardella's report incomplete.

By Sean Howell  
Almanac Staff Writer

You've got to spend money to make money, or so the saying goes. Those who would modify the phrase to apply to elections — You've got to spend money to get votes — might have felt vindicated by the final spending reports from the recent race for two seats on the Menlo Park City Council.

Kelly Fergusson, by far the leading vote-getter in the election, was also by far the biggest spender. She more than doubled each of her counterparts' expenditures, putting \$34,193 toward mailers, lawn signs, campaign events, and other efforts in her re-election bid, according to campaign finance statements due Feb. 2.

Andy Cohen spent \$13,508; Rick Ciardella, \$14,741.

Ms. Fergusson received 8,918 votes. Mr. Cohen was also re-elected, with 7,355 votes. Mr. Ciardella got 6,012 votes in his unsuccessful bid.

Though Ms. Fergusson was by far the leading fundraiser in the election, as well, she may be forced to dig into her own pocket to cover her costs: Her campaign was \$4,890 in the hole at the end of 2008.

Mr. Cohen turned in his campaign finance statement a week late, and Mr. Ciardella failed to specify the recipients of the \$12,119 he spent in the two weeks preceding the election. There is no penalty under either state law or the city's code for making reporting errors or failing to meet the

### ■ MENLO PARK

deadline, according to City Clerk Margaret Roberts.

#### Who contributed?

Much has been made of the role of special-interest groups in Menlo Park politics. Labor unions tend to support one slate of candidates, while developers tend to support the other.

This election was no exception. Land use interests lined up behind Mr. Ciardella, while unions backed Ms. Fergusson and, to a lesser extent, Mr. Cohen.

According to Ms. Fergusson's statements, she received a total of \$4,200 from trade unions or advocates of unionized workers — 14.7 percent of the \$28,617 she raised in total. Mr. Cohen, who has said that he refuses donations from any union that might come before the council during his term, took in \$1,300 from unions or union representatives — 7.9 percent of the \$16,420 he received in contributions.

Mr. Ciardella received \$4,100 from 17 developers, building professionals, real estate interests and commercial landlords — 27.8 percent of the \$14,741 he raised over the course of the campaign. Thirteen of those contributors are also Menlo Park residents, including former planning commissioner and council candidate Lorie Sinnott, and Henry Riggs, chair of the Planning Commission.

#### Final reporting period

During the campaign's third and final reporting period, from Oct. 19 to Dec. 31, Ms. Fergus-

son reported taking in \$6,469; Mr. Ciardella, \$3,941; and Mr. Cohen, \$1,905.

Of Ms. Fergusson's haul, \$500 came from the Regional Council of Northern California Carpenters, with \$1,000 coming from the Plumbers & Steamfitters Local 467, bringing that union's total contributions to her campaign to \$2,000. She also accepted \$300 from the Building and Construction Trades Council of San Mateo County, a group that advocates for better working conditions and salaries for construction workers.

Menlo Park Councilman Rich Cline, a member of the council "majority" that also includes Mr. Cohen and Ms. Fergusson, gave \$300 to each of his colleagues' campaigns during the reporting period. Former councilman Chuck Kinney donated \$100 to both Mr. Cohen and Mr. Fergusson, and former councilman Paul Collacchi gave \$250 to Ms. Fergusson.

Menlo Park resident Bob Ekedahl gave \$250 to both Ms. Fergusson and Mr. Cohen (\$500 to each over the course of the campaign). Menlo Park resident Bob English gave Ms. Fergusson \$300.

Ms. Fergusson also received small contributions from Clark Kepler, owner of Kepler's bookstore, and Atherton Mayor Jerry Carlson.

Rick Ciardella took in \$500 from the Lincoln Club of Northern California, a Political Action Committee dedicated to putting Republicans in office, and \$100 from former Menlo Park councilman Nicholas Jellins. Ralph Oswald, former owner of the Village Pub in Woodside, gave Mr. Ciardella \$450. ■

## Lewis tops in campaign spending

By Andrea Gemmet  
Almanac Staff Writer

Elizabeth Lewis not only won a seat on the Atherton City Council in November, but she blew away the competition when it came to fundraising and campaign spending. Ms. Lewis raised \$12,000 more than her nearest competition, incumbent Kathy McKeithen.

In the four-way race for two seats on the council, Ms. Lewis was the second-highest vote-getter, behind Councilwoman McKeithen.

According to the year-end campaign finance statements, covering fundraising and expenditures made between Oct. 19 and Dec. 31, Ms. Lewis raised \$12,150 in donations and loans, for a total of \$32,548 for the Nov. 4 election. She reported expendi-

tures of \$12,299 for the period, including an \$8,000 payment to campaign consultant Lisa Jensen of San Jose.

Her major contributors for the period were developer Duncan Matteson, who gave \$500; The Lincoln Club of Northern California, a Republican party political action committee, \$500; Globalstar chief operating officer Thomas Colby of Atherton, \$500; and retired developer James P. "Skip" Law of Atherton, \$500.

Ms. Lewis, who also ran unsuccessfully for a council seat in the special June election, raised \$72,507 in 2008, the combined total for both election campaigns.

The next biggest fundraiser for the November election is Ms.

McKeithen, who raised \$2,695 in cash and non-monetary contributions during the final reporting period, for a total of \$19,580 for the year. She spent a total of \$20,390 during the campaign.

Ms. McKeithen's biggest contributors during the final reporting period were Atherton residents Isobel and Herman Christensen, who each donated \$350. The Christensens donated a total of \$1,250 each over the course of Ms. McKeithen's campaign.

Ms. McKeithen's biggest expenditures during the final reporting period were three payments totaling \$3,233 to American Speedy Printing of Menlo Park.

Architect and candidate David Henig raised \$1,078 during the final reporting period, bringing his total for the year to \$14,017, including a \$5,000 loan. In all,

See SPENDING, page 10

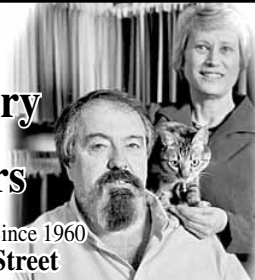
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# Cohen blasts 'action' minutes, Boyle

■ Councilman calls action minutes the "antithesis" of open government.

By Sean Howell  
Almanac Staff Writer

Menlo Park Councilman Andy Cohen has changed his mind about the truncated form of meeting minutes the City Council recently approved on a trial basis.

At the council's Dec. 16 meeting, Mr. Cohen had joined his fellow council members in approving the use of "action" minutes, which don't recap the council's discussion of an issue, as the previously used "summary" minutes do. Instead, the "action" minutes just report any actions taken and the vote.

Since that meeting, Mr. Cohen has called "action" minutes "the very antithesis of open and transparent government process," blasting Councilman John Boyle for "squelching" a discussion of whether the council should reconsider its original decision.

"It's black and white," Mr. Cohen said in an interview. "There is less transparency with 'action' minutes."

At its Jan. 13 meeting, he asked the council to consider reviewing the decision, saying that several of his political advisers had researched the efficacy and availability of existing technology to stream video of council meetings, and found it to be lacking. (Council members had cited the video record of each meeting, which can be found on DVDs at the library or through files stored on the city's Web site, as an adequate replacement for the more thorough minutes.)

Mr. Cohen said he is convinced that the technology is too complicated for many in the community to use, and that it doesn't work on every operating system.

Even if he were satisfied with the video technology, Mr. Cohen said, he no longer favors the abbreviated form of minutes. He "did not have enough facts" to make an informed decision the first time around, he said.

Mr. Cohen's motion to reconsider at the Jan. 13 meeting failed to get a second. The council will

consider whether to permanently adopt "action" minutes in March.

## Dispute with Boyle

At the Jan. 13 meeting, Councilman Boyle seemed irked that Mr. Cohen wanted to revisit the vote. Mr. Boyle argued that under Robert's Rules of Order — a guide to conducting legislative meetings — a request for reconsideration can be submitted only during the meeting at which the decision was first made, or the day after that meeting. City Attorney Bill McClure responded that city policy allows for reconsideration to be discussed at the next regular meeting. (The council hadn't met since Dec. 16, when the council voted to adopt the trial.)

"It is interesting that John Boyle claims he is for open and inclusive government," Mr. Cohen said. He added that he sees "major inconsistencies" between Mr. Boyle's advocacy for more transparency in closed sessions, and his dis-

couragement of a re-vote on the minutes issue.

Mr. Boyle disagreed with Mr. Cohen's assertion that "action" minutes are necessarily less transparent than "summary" minutes.

"I don't agree that it's black and white," Mr. Boyle said in an interview, arguing that he has pushed for transparent government "as much or more than anyone else on council."

He maintains that "summary" minutes can distort the record,

because they don't capture the subtleties of conversation and "often will mislead you as to (council members') intent because of their incompleteness."

Video provides a more precise record, he said. He added that it's relatively easy to scan the video files of council meetings on the city's Web site to find a particular moment in the meeting, now that the city is indexing the video with more detail.

Of Mr. Boyle's explanation

"It's black and white," says Councilman Andy Cohen. "There is less transparency with 'action' minutes."



Andy Cohen

## Menlo College assault victim leaves hospital

By Sean Howell  
Almanac Staff Writer

Donte Snyder, the Menlo College student who was assaulted by a member of the school's football team and another man early on the morning of Thursday, Jan. 29, has been released from the hospital.

The Menlo football player charged in the assault has withdrawn his enrollment from the college, according to school officials.

Mr. Snyder, a senior pitcher on the baseball team, was released from Stanford Hospital over the

weekend following the assault, but was forced to return on the morning of Monday, Feb. 2, said Detective Jeff Vasquez of the Menlo Park Police Department. He has since been released again, according to a spokeswoman for the college.

Police had described Mr. Snyder's injuries as "potentially life-threatening."

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 com-

mit a crime.

Mr. Snyder and several other men had been followed by another group of men, allegedly including Mr. Kain-Williams and Mr. Willis, from a local restaurant to the intersection of Glenwood Avenue and Garwood Avenue in Menlo Park, police said. Detective Jeff Vasquez of the Menlo Park Police Department said it was unknown whether the assailants had specifically targeted Mr. Snyder.

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. ▀

## Efforts to 'save the bay' get under way

Restoration efforts are under way at a former salt pond at the western edge of the Dumbarton Bridge in Menlo Park, east of Bayfront Park.

Volunteers for the environmental nonprofit Save the Bay have started to remove trash and non-native plants at the pond, the group said, laying the ground for a long-term project to restore the 1,600 acres as tidal marsh and managed ponds.

The land is part of 15,100 acres of former salt ponds in the South Bay scheduled to be restored by a state agency.

Save the Bay picked the site by the Dumbarton Bridge to kick off its work on the salt ponds because of its high visibility to drivers, said Darcie Collins, the organization's habitat restoration director.

"Our goal is to really get the community engaged in the greater salt pond restoration project," Ms. Collins said. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service plans to make the marsh more accessible to passersby by building a viewing platform and creating trails.

Initial clean-up efforts at the site will take about three years, according to Ms. Collins. After

that process has been completed, and levies at the site have been knocked down to allow water to flow back into the salt ponds, volunteers will plant native grasses and other marsh-friendly species.

The long-term hope is that shorebirds and other pond species — especially the threatened snowy plover — will return to the area, Ms. Collins said.

## INFORMATION

Want to pick up trash and rip out plants to help clear the way for a restoration of Menlo Park salt ponds? To volunteer with Save the Bay, call (510)452-9261 or visit [www.saveSFbay.org/bayevents](http://www.saveSFbay.org/bayevents).

## SPENDING

continued from page 9

he spent \$10,773 campaigning for a council seat.

His biggest donor for the final reporting period was Susan Lebow of Los Angeles, who contributed \$250, followed by David Morse of Santa Monica, who gave \$180.

Mr. Henig's biggest expenditure was \$2,848 to Prodigy Press of Palo Alto for campaign literature.

Retired former Atherton police chief and city manager Richard Moore raised \$700 during

for his opposition to "summary" minutes, Mr. Cohen said, "That's no answer."

"The idea that detailed minutes are not accurate is clearly an inadequate reason for supporting ('action' minutes)," he continued.

Mr. Boyle denied that he had single-handedly blocked Mr. Cohen's request for reconsideration.

"It's not my fault," he said. "Nobody seconded it."

Though the council approved the streamlined form of minutes for only a three-month trial, Mr. Cohen said he submitted the request for reconsideration because he was "not even willing to allow a trial period." He cited concerns about transparency, as well as the potential cost to the city of retroactively preparing "summary" minutes, should the council decide to revert to that system in March.

That's an insufficient reason to revisit the topic, according to Mr. Boyle.

"We made a decision, it's not life and death, and it's one of those rare decisions that's completely reversible," he said. "I respect the fact that Andy changed his mind, but the idea that we should reconsider it because a handful of people who have Andy's ear complained to him ... we should be spending our time on bigger issues, not this." ▀

the final filing period, bringing his total for the campaign to \$8,380. His biggest donor for the period was the California Real Estate political action committee, with \$500. His biggest campaign expenditure was a \$200 donation to the California Peace Officers Memorial Foundation.

The campaign finance statements are available at the Town Administrative Offices, 91 Ashfield Road. Copies cost 10 cents per page, or the statements can be viewed for free. Call 752-0500 for information. ▀

## Meeting on El Camino planning process

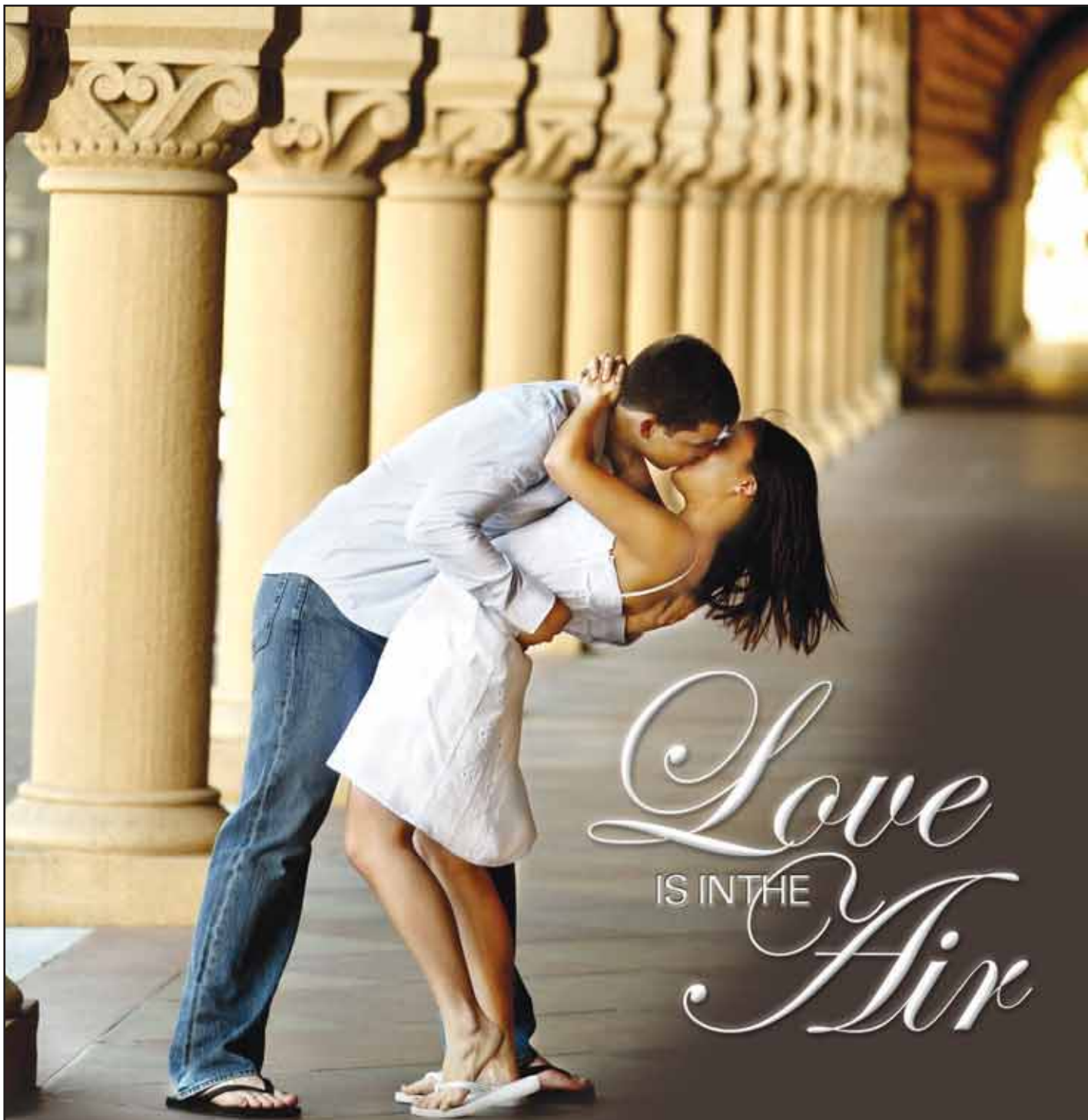
Prior to the regular City Council meeting at 7 p.m. Feb. 10, the council will meet with the committee appointed to oversee the planning process for El Camino Real and the city's downtown area.

The meeting will begin at 6 p.m. in the lower level of the library at 800 Alma St. It is intended mostly as an informational overview of the planning process, including the role of the committee, and of city commissions.

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## Do-your-own wedding fairs set 2009 trend

*'Wedding universities' spawn creative ideas, seminars for savvy brides and grooms*  
by Susan Robles

In a down economy, it may take boosting one's wedding I.Q. to get what couples want on a recessionary budget.

The trend in bridal fairs this year, at least locally, is toward educating rather than inundating, bridal experts said.

On March 1, the "DIY Wedding" (Do It Yourself) will take place at the Palo Alto Crowne Plaza Cabana Hotel. The fair will include perennial wedding fair staples such as a fashion show, food tastings and vendor booths. But, a panel of experts will

teach couples how to do some of the work themselves while maintaining their budget — and their sanity.

The event was put together with the help of Stacie Tamaki, of the Flirty Guide online wedding site, who enlisted experts to share some of their information.

The fair will also focus on "green" weddings, and a custom-cocktail creation lounge by Square One Organic Spirits and Cort Event Furnishings. Floral ideas, music, transportation, cakes and other wedding necessities will be shown to help couples create the perfect wedding.

Another day-long interactive educational affair, "The Wedding University," took place on Feb. 8 at the Four Seasons Hotel Silicon Valley in East Palo Alto. The brainchild of local wedding planners Jean Marks and Jubilee Lau, The Wedding University featured three different "classrooms" offering seminar topics, including the secrets of designing a beautiful and personalized wedding; the impact of music at a wedding and the first dance instruction; what to consider with photography and videography; how to select the perfect wedding

(continued on page 16)



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# Bachelorettes party hearty

*From 'Wedding Bell Bingo' to stripper policemen, women party wild before wedding*

by Kris Young

The “stag party” may be notorious in wedding lore, but contrary to popular belief, it’s the ladies who get into the prenuptial ritual, professional party planners said.

Men engage in an eve of revelry at the local pub, but women party with hors d’oeuvres and specialty drinks. There are tiaras, glow sticks, feathery boas and diamond rings that light up, and even risqué, certain-parts-of-the-human-anatomy-shaped cakes.

Cassandra Feriante, an event planner for My Party Planners in Palo Alto, has yet to be commissioned for a bachelor party, but typically, a bride’s friend or family member will want to organize a detailed bachelorette party, she said.

Feriante has coordinated a weekend trip in Carmel for six of the bride’s guests; a spa day for 40 located at Pinkies nail salon in Los Altos (with specialty drinks, hors d’oeuvres, quiz games and salon treatment); and a stretch-Hummer excursion for 15 to the VIP room at the Paradise Lounge nightclub in San Francisco.

She recommends planning around the personality of the bride or groom. A bachelorette party should be “something really memorable; something fun and outside the formality of the wedding,” she said.

Diddams party store in Palo Alto carries novelty items specific to bachelorette parties, but there’s no demand for bachelor-party items, Sandy Ramirez, manager, said.

The store carries eye-catching props, such as leis, “bride to be” or “bride in training” sashes, tiaras, light-up diamond



The bachelorette section of Diddam's features a variety of party favors (above and right) for the “girls’ night out.”

rings and bachelorette-themed games such as “Wedding Bell Bingo,” Truth-or-Dare and blow-up dolls.

Ramirez has attended 40 bachelorette parties.

“There’s a lot of little games, jokes and novelty things because you have to plan that space in between and to stir

conversation for people who don’t even know each other,” she said.

Many of the parties she has attended or organized have varied in size, theme and location.

“My best recommendation is to host it at a house where it’s in a controlled environment,” she said.

At one stand-out party, they hired a fireman stripper who was also a real fireman — for her 70-year-old aunt. But it doesn’t always have to be wild, she said, mentioning that once they surprised the bride-to-be by hiding the groom in a furniture box.

Whether throwing a bash with strip-

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LOVE IS IN THE AIR



Veronica Weber

pers or an intimate evening with friends, sex-themed pastries are often the food-table centerpieces, Kathy Luzzi, owner of Kathy's Kreative Kakes, said. Kathy Adams, the business' original owner and a teacher there, has made many for the San Mateo police department. She once had a counter girl quit in 1981 over an X-rated order, she said.

When they first started making risqué cakes, the orders were raunchier. But "now it's more ... if you could call it ... sophisticated," Luzzi said.

"I think it's a great centerpiece, a conversation piece. A lot of the women take it on a limousine when they go bar hopping in the city," or even take the cakes as far as Las Vegas, Adams said. ■

Sometimes you just have to choose . . .



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## LOVE IS IN THE AIR



Photo courtesy of Linx Dating

*Linx Dating founder Amy Andersen found her match in entrepreneur Alex Gould. The couple married June 14, 2008.*

## 'Linxing' up

*Matchmaker to Silicon Valley's superstars makes her match*

by Sue Dremann

It can be lonely out there. Just ask Amy Andersen, Palo Alto's matchmaker and owner of Linx Dating LLC, a company that links Silicon Valley's eligible bachelors with similarly accomplished women.

A few years ago, Andersen was recuperating from a painful breakup, moving from Palo Alto to San Francisco to put space between herself and bad memories.

She was attractive, young and successful, but she was alone for the first time in her life, she said.

"It was a critical time to understand what it's like struggling in the dating scene. I had reached a point where I was not finding my match," she said.

Ironic for the matchmaker to the Bay Area's most eligible.

Andersen hatched the idea for her match-making business before the breakup, while living in Palo Alto in 2000. She worked in high tech and was in a relationship, but many of her boyfriend's buddies were not. They had

high-powered careers, were high achievers with advanced degrees and fat paychecks, but the question they kept asking her was: "Where are all the women?" she said.

In San Francisco and Marin County, Andersen's network of equally high-powered women friends had the same lament. There weren't any eligible bachelors. So Andersen decided to bridge the gap. She put together her business plan, immersed herself in research and set up Linx in 2003.

"Everyone I talked to said they'd be my first client," she said.

Linx clients are a rarified group, however. Prospective clients are carefully vetted, undergoing a rigorous application process and face-to-face interview, she said. Memberships are tiered, ranging from \$6,000 for eight introductions in 24 months to \$30,000 for matchmaking in cities across the country, she said. Old World matchmaking is combined with networking and concierge services that can include everything from wardrobes to grooming and confidence coaching.

The business has 700 active clients ranging in age from 23 to 67, with a median age of 33 for women and 39 to 40 for men. Most are professionals — in health care, technology, private equity and entrepreneurs — "creative types," she said.

The rules are traditional: the man has five days to call his match, introduce himself and strike up a phone conversation. He asks the woman out to a casual location — for sushi or to a bistro — and he pays for the dinner.

"We stick to the ideas of courtship. (We live in a time when) chivalry fell by the wayside," she said.

She develops the matches from multiple factors, but it's also part intuition, she said.

Andersen met her match on May 20, 2006 — through a mutual friend. She had moved back to Palo Alto and hired a professional trainer, changed her diet and boosted her confidence. Their first date lasted for nine hours; by the second date, they became exclusive. He proposed 9 1/2 months later, she said.

She married Alex Gould, 37, a Palo Alto entrepreneur and Stanford economics instructor, on June 14 2008."

As entrepreneurs, we get each other. He gets my long hours and I get his crazy schedule," she said.

The company had two engagements among clients last fall. There have been a few marriages, but Anderson doesn't keep track of those things, she said.

"A certain number of clients don't tell us when they hit it off. ... Some view us as a service and never have us be part of the excitement with their journey," she said.

"If we do our due diligence, we've made a match." ■



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Trends for 2009 weddings

Compiled by Lillian Bixler

**Wedding dress:** Creme and ivory dresses, colorful, funky shoes, and waist-accentuating sashes; daring colors — rich yellow, bold green or silver; chocolate in combination with pink and blue.

**Food:** Food stations, sushi bars, small tables for personal sit down dinners; ethnic foods and openness to new customs.

**Flowers:** Unlikely color combinations and use of unexpected material and texture; adding crystal, ribbons, and heirloom pieces to orchids, peonies or mini calla lilies.

**Green weddings:** Having a ceremony and reception in same venue to help cut down on the carbon footprint; fair-trade diamonds. Locally grown or organic food, cakes; locally grown flower arrangements.

**Hair, make-up:** Soft, natural face coverage with bold red lips or smoky eyes. Romantic curls and bohemian styles.

**Honeymoon:** Spain, Costa Rica, Belize, the Caribbean Island of St. Lucia, Maui, Paris

Sources: [www.byreonly.com](http://www.byreonly.com), [www.weddingsolutions.com](http://www.weddingsolutions.com), [weddings.about.com](http://weddings.about.com), [www.yourweddingcompany.com](http://www.yourweddingcompany.com)



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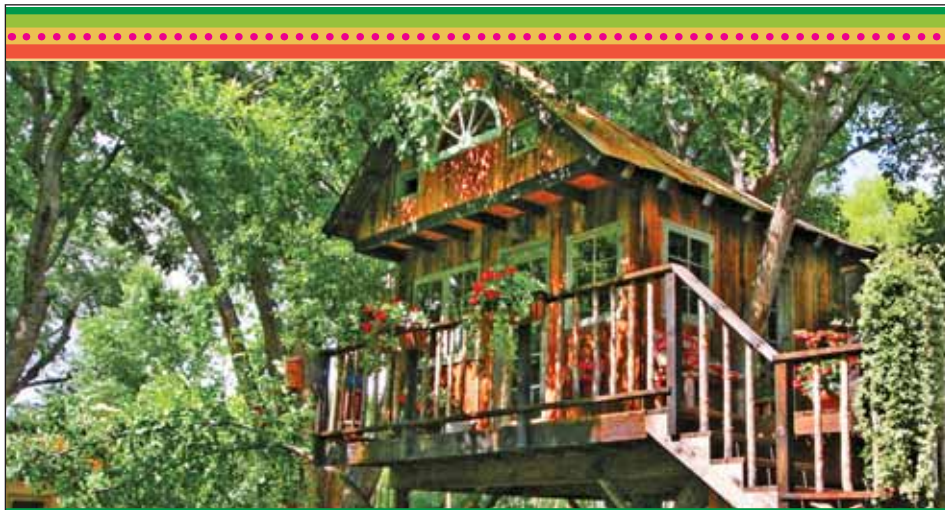
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## LOVE IS IN THE AIR

### Do-your-own wedding

(continued from page 11)

gown and accessories; learning to manage a wedding budget and event flow; and keys to designing a delectable wedding menu.

Presenters discussed tough economic times and what that means for engaged couples trying to budget a wedding.

"It's unique in the idea of focusing on educational seminars rather than having (the bride-to-be) feel overwhelmed," Marks, founder of Jean Marks Weddings in Palo Alto, said.

Added Lau, "The number one question I get asked is, 'How much is my wedding go-

ing to cost?' The reality is that it's different for every couple." ■

**What:** DIY Wedding

**When:** March 1, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Where:** Palo Alto Crowne Plaza Cabana Hotel, 4290 El Camino Real, Palo Alto

**Cost:** Free with RSVP

**Info:** Call 650-857-0787 or visit [weddingfairpress@cabanapaloalto.net](http://weddingfairpress@cabanapaloalto.net).



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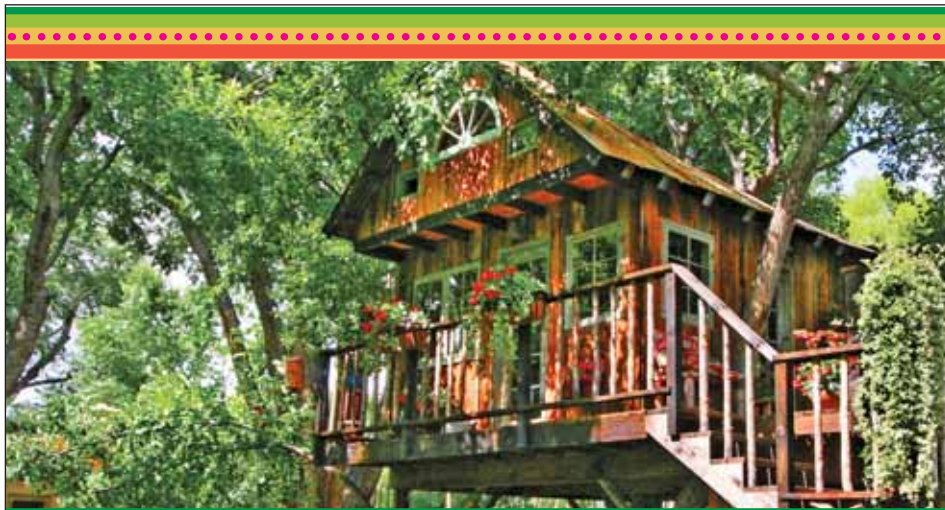
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# End of an era: De Modderman retires

Longtime business manager had 38-year career in Las Lomitas and Menlo Park school districts

By Marjorie Mader

Almanac Correspondent

De Modderman, who guided the financial ship of both the Las Lomitas and Menlo Park elementary school districts as business manager for 22 years and for five more years at Las Lomitas, retired Dec. 30.

Unflappable, conscientious and dedicated, Ms. Modderman became a legend in the Bay Area for her knowledge of California school finance, trends, and the intricacies of school district budgets.

"De has helped our Las Lomitas district to weather the many ups and downs of the economic cycles," says Superintendent Eric Hartwig of the Las Lomitas district.

"She has developed enviable skills in a wide variety of areas such as construction, debt financing, transportation, labor negotiations, contract management—all in addition to the ever-important responsibilities of budget development and maintenance," Mr. Hartwig says.

"De, a person of the highest integrity, is one of the most dedicated and conscientious people with whom I've ever worked," says Mary Ann Somerville, Las Lomitas district superintendent from 1996 to 2006.

"I relied on her advice and had great confidence in the accuracy of her projections and calculations," she says. "I was regularly impressed when she managed the finances of the two school districts with her ability to recall details of our Las Lomitas accounts—never confusing nor mixing the specifics of one district with the other."

Lee Anderson, who completed 12 years on the Las Lomitas School Board in December, notes, "During my tenure on the board, I took great comfort in knowing that De's knowledge, expertise and good memory were always available to us.

## Flip of a coin

Ms. Modderman is modest about her contributions to the two K-8 districts. "I've enjoyed the challenges, the people, and doing what I did although it wasn't the work career I trained for," she says.

She recalls how a flip of a coin led her to the Peninsula. The coin was tossed while she and her husband Vern were driving from Iowa, where they had their roots. It determined that the Moddermans would head west to California instead of south to Houston.

Ms. Modderman landed a job in the Menlo Park district in the fall of 1970 as a library clerk, working

at Encinal School. She had considered going into teaching after graduating with a degree in home economics from the University of Northern Iowa.

"I took the job as a temporary move," she says, "but the wonderful people in the district office played a huge part in my continuing to stay in the district." She filled a variety of increasingly important positions, and moved into the district's business office.

She continues to credit Franklyn White, legendary superintendent of the Menlo Park district, and John Richert, the district's business manager, as her mentors. They encouraged her and guided her "on the job training."

In 1978, the Menlo Park and

Las Lomitas districts combined resources and formed a joint business office, based at the Las Lomitas district office. Ms. Modderman moved up to the office at 1011 Altschul Ave. in Menlo Park. She became business manager for the two districts in July 1981.

Twenty-five years later, the two districts went their separate ways. Changing financial conditions in school finance and the increasing complexity and work load for the business office were cited as reasons for dissolving the joint business office. Ms. Modderman accepted Las Lomitas' offer to continue as that district's business manager.

Looking back, she agrees school finance has become more complex with the advent of parcel taxes, school bond elections, school construction and renovation projects, and the ups and downs of the

school financing system.

School districts now face the possibilities of mid-year cuts, she says. While enrollment is growing in the Las Lomitas district, there's no additional money coming to the district for the new students.

In order to maintain this year's \$17 million budget, she predicts the district needs to have close to a 5 percent increase in property tax revenue, the biggest portion of district funding.

## In the future

Ms. Modderman looks forward to having more free time to explore volunteer opportunities, such as being involved in a reading tutoring program, and making quilts for babies in local shelters.

She also wants to catch up on

See **MODDERMAN**, page 21



Photo by Marjorie Mader/The Almanac

**De Modderman** shifts into retirement after a remarkable career as business manager for the Las Lomitas and Menlo Park school districts.

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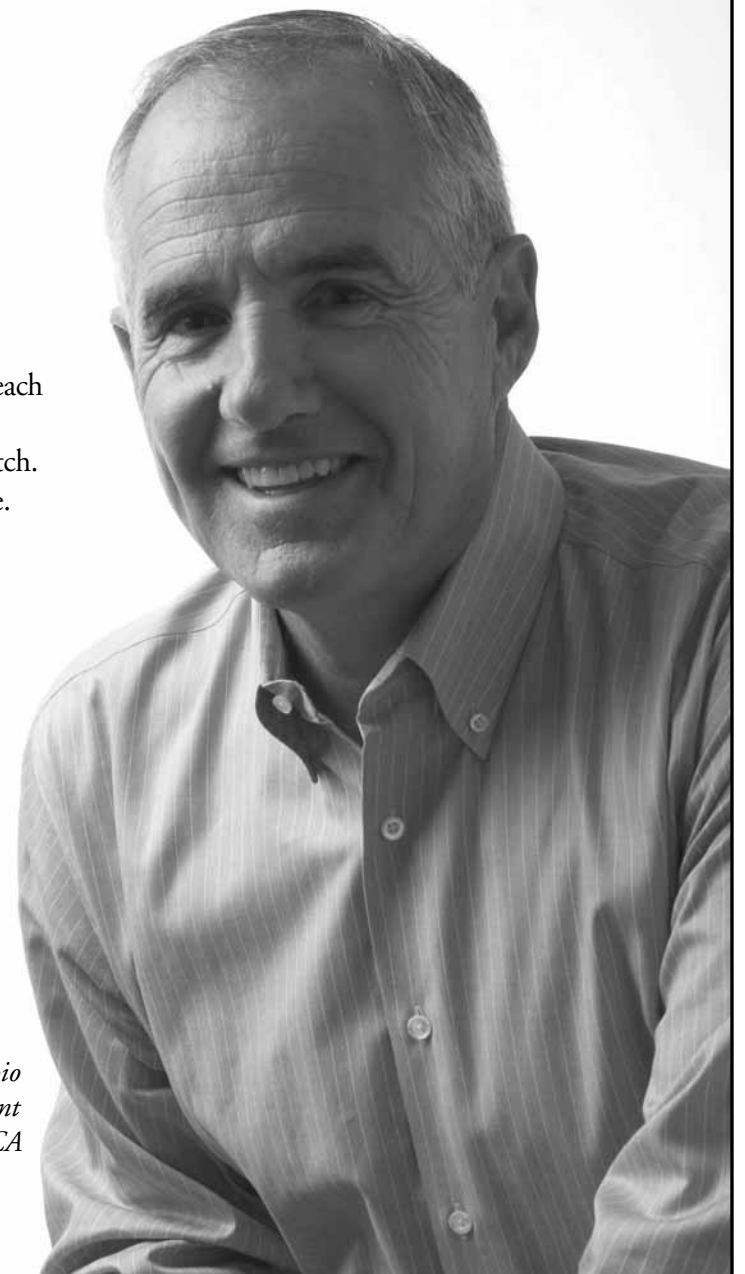
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# Local author disputes the decline of America

Alexander Kugushev sees this country as the 'comeback kid'

By Jane Knoerle  
Almanac Lifestyles Editor

The 6 o'clock news leads with its daily dose of misery. Foreclosures are soaring. Stores are closing. Thousands are out of work.

Is our economy finished? Does this mean the end of the American Dream?

Alexander Kugushev says no. In his new book, "Resilient America," the Menlo Park author looks at America's condition in these critical times and sees cultural resilience and vitality. He's optimistic about the citizens of this, his adopted country. He sees their commitment to hard work, to responsible behavior, to morality and tolerance, as positive signs.

As a student of history, he notes that the United States has gone through many cycles. His observations of everyday, can-do Americans suggest that the complainers lack a sense of history.

"The historical record demonstrates steadiness, with variations and fluctuations within a narrow range," he says. "From that emerges a story of continuity and adaptation, with optimism consistently prevailing over pessimism."

Mr. Kugushev views the American scene as an outsider, although he has spent nearly 50 years in the U.S. and is an American citizen. Born in Nice, France,

to Russian parents, he spent his early years in Yugoslavia, Austria, and Switzerland. As a boy and in his early teens he lived in Europe through World War II. At age 17, he and his mother immigrated to Argentina.

He worked days and attended journalism school at night, "but

*'Driving across the Western states, I thought this is America. When I saw San Francisco I knew this is where I wanted to live.'*

ALEXANDER KUGUSHEV

I always wanted to come to America," he says.

That dream came true in 1960 when he was sponsored by an elderly uncle living in New Jersey. Although he had no money or job, he was optimistic. "I wasn't scared. I was a young strong guy and this was America."

After a stint as a stevedore, he found work teaching French and Spanish at St. Vincent College in Pennsylvania.

The move west came a few years later, after a cross-country trip. "Driving across the Western states, I thought this is America. When I saw San Francisco I knew

this is where I wanted to live."

After taking evening classes at San Francisco State and holding a series of jobs, ranging from picking vegetables to production manager, he went to work for Wadsworth Publishing Co. in Belmont.

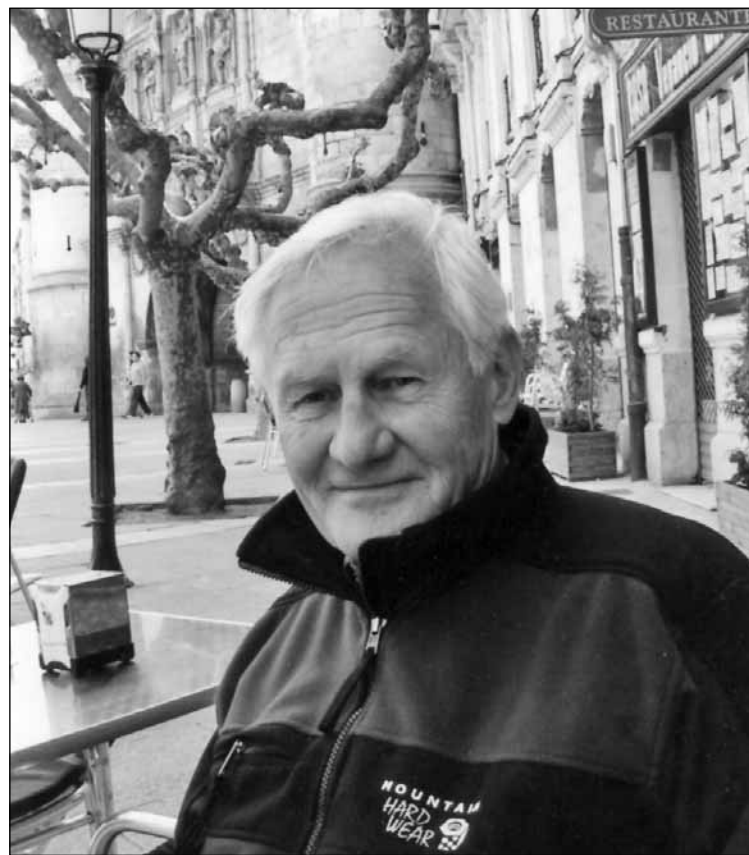
He has published educational materials in the United States for more than 40 years in print and on the Internet. He founded and served as CEO of CyberGnostics, an online education publisher.

Mr. Kugushev moved to Menlo Park in 1966. He is married to Mimi Kugushev, a well-known community volunteer who has served as president of the Peninsula Volunteers and co-chairman of the annual fundraiser for the MidPeninsula League of the San Francisco Symphony.

The book, "Resilient America," came about after Mr. Kugushev sold his company four years ago. "The first thing I did was go to Santiago (Spain). I spent five or six weeks by myself and walked 500 miles."

Camino de Santiago, or the Way of St. James, is a 1,000-year-old pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Legend has it that St. James found his way to the Iberian Peninsula and preached there. Thousands make the pilgrimage each year.

Mr. Kugushev started in France and walked over the Pyrenees mountains, staying in "cheapie hotels" on the way. His wife joined him when he reached Santiago.



Alexander Kugushev of Menlo Park photographed in Santiago, Spain.

The author says the walk was a multi-faceted experience. "It gave me time to think about what being an American means to me."

Some of his thoughts are:

■ People in this country consider themselves poor, although they drive a car and have a television. That's not poor to most of the world.

■ This is a country of second chances. In other societies, "You make a mistake and you're fin-

ished. In this country you can learn from your mistakes and not be punished for it."

■ "Americans have worried since the country's earliest days, yet the resilient republic marches on, adapting, evolving, changing, at times in ways we don't recognize. Optimism consistently prevails over pessimism."

■ America as a serial "comeback kid" finds its latest embodiment in President Obama.

"Resilient America" took three years to write and involved "700 to 800 drafts." Mr. Kugushev says the hard work on his book will be worth it if it helps people to realize "what a great country this is."

"Resilient America," \$21.50, is available from Trafford Publishing and [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). ■

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Help determine the best conceptual design for a potential bicycle/pedestrian undercrossing at the Caltrain tracks between Ravenswood Avenue and San Francisquito Creek. This is an opportunity to share your opinions, ask questions and receive additional information about the process being used to develop a plan for the possible undercrossing. If you have any questions or comments in the meantime or are unable to attend the meeting, please contact Randolph Craig, Project Engineer, at (650) 330-6772 or by email at [rmcraig@menlopark.org](mailto:rmcraig@menlopark.org)

[www.menlopark.org/undercrossing](http://www.menlopark.org/undercrossing)

Published in THE ALMANAC on February 11, 25, 2009.

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## Caltrain to add bike capacity

Caltrain has made a concession to commuters who have long complained about the lack of space for bikes on trains, pledging to add room for eight bicycles to each train.

Under the plan — which Caltrain expects to implement before summer — bike capacity would increase from 32 to 40 in standard trains, and from 16 to 24 in the newer “Bombardier” trains. The new bike racks will replace seats in each bike car.

The trains’ lack of space for bicycles sometimes forces conductors to bar riders from bringing their bikes onto trains during rush hour. Caltrain estimates that 6 percent of its weekday customers bike to the train.

In a press release, the agency said it considered several methods for adding bike space, but settled on this plan because it would not cause as much disruption in service as some of the other options. It promised to “continue the active, engaging and passionate dialogue with the bicycle community.”

Caltrain officials estimate that the process of adding two bike racks to each car will cost \$200,000.

In the past, officials have bristled at the idea of removing seats. “To remove seats and replace them with bike racks would mean giving up paying customers with non-paying bicycles,” the agency writes on its Web site. “This is counterproductive.”

For more information on the agency’s bike policies, visit <http://tinyurl.com/BikeFAQ>.

### MODDERMAN

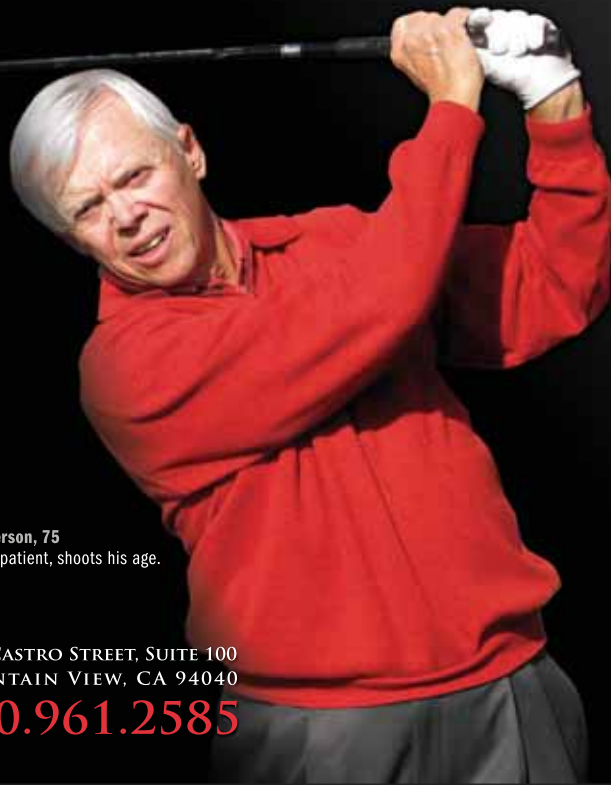
continued from page 19

her reading list and do some traveling. She’s planning to take a historical trip to Washington, D.C., and check in with a friend from her hometown in Iowa, who is now a congressman. Now she will be able to make frequent trips to visit her brother and family in Iowa and stay longer. She plans to continue living in Redwood City.

“De won’t be spending all of her retirement time volunteering, golfing or knitting,” says Mr. Hartwig. “She’s agreed to provide consulting services for the district to assist with the extraordinarily, challenging budget issues we are facing this year and help launch her successor, Carolyn Chu.”

Ms. Chu has worked with Ms. Modderman since being hired in September 2007 as business office technician, handling payroll and accounts payable. ■

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# Town may toughen building code to reduce fire risks

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

## WOODSIDE

Woodside's precise definition of the term "new building" will be a discussion for another day, but the Town Council did more or less agree that the rules for new buildings should be amended to incorporate fire resistance in materials and landscaping.

The council's consensus at its Jan. 27 meeting did not involve a vote, nor does it have the standing of a regulation, yet. But town staff now has guidance in crafting fire-safe amendments to the building code that would apply town-wide to all new construction.

By giving staff the guidance of the council's thinking on the amendments, the council is taking a tentative approach.

"We could put it out there and see what the response is," Councilman Ron Romines said, adding that a town-wide approach eliminates the need to justify why some neighborhoods might have stricter rules than others.

"I think there's a lot of merit in consistency," Councilwoman Carroll Ann Hodges said.

The amendments may well incorporate all of the state's fire-resistance regulations, known as Chapter 7A. This set of rules already applies for new construction in the unincorporated areas of San Mateo County.

The council also seemed open to restrictions on some remodeling and home maintenance projects, such as requiring fire resistance in replacement roofs, windows and perhaps decks.

A tempered glass window will shatter "into a million pieces" and be "safer all around," including when a firefighter needs to smash it with an axe, said Councilman Dave Tanner, a builder. He added that he likes the idea of 7A, but not all of its restrictions.

Fire resistance is a package, he noted before telling of seemingly fire-resistant homes with stucco exteriors and tile shingles whose roofs "just exploded" after the framing beneath them ignited;

the ventilation ducts weren't designed to keep out embers.

Chapter 7A requires "exterior windows, window walls, glazed doors, and glazed openings within exterior doors" to resist ignition for at least 20 minutes. Councilman Dave Buraw advised caution on the 20-minute rule for remodels, saying it might be "too onerous."

### Landscaping and fire

The council seemed open to giving a lot of discretion to Denise Enea, fire marshal with the Woodside Fire Protection District, in interpreting building code regulations on fire-safe landscaping.

The district does safety checks annually on vegetation-based fire hazards, though it does not examine every property every year, Ms. Enea said. Fire-safe landscaping is often a matter of removing brush that threatens to ignite tree canopies, she said.

Building code changes may have resonance in neighborhoods such as the Woodside Glens. The Glens is rated at "very

high" risk for vegetation-enabled wildfire, based on the water supply, accessibility for firefighting vehicles and topography, Ms. Enea has said. At similar risk are Greer Road east of Huddart Park, and Moore Road.

A Nov. 25 fire destroyed an unoccupied home at 223 Glenwood Ave. in the Glens. Had the weather been hotter with lower humidity and more wind, "there was certainly a potential for (wildfire)," Battalion Chief Ron Romero said at the time.

Ms. Enea asked the council in September to include these areas in the town's June 2008 list of very-high-risk neighborhoods, including Emerald Hills, and areas west of Kings Mountain Road and along and around Old La Honda Road.

The council declined, but agreed to look into expanding the number of parcels that would fall under a tougher building code requirements.

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Photo by Yvonne Tryce

The colors of this Rufous-sided Towhee collected by Yvonne Tryce are still vivid despite years in a freezer. With public space at a premium, the Portola Valley Town Council recently discussed the town's natural history archive and how to store it.

## Natural history inventory reveals eclectic collection

■ Council agrees to shelving in closet, but no additional display areas.

By Dave Boyce  
Almanac Staff Writer

Portola Valley's natural history collection has 201 items in it. The mounted songbirds include an American Goldfinch, a California Thrasher and an Oregon Junco.

A freezer holds 31 examples of 18 avian species, including five Hermit Thrushes, four Cedar Waxwings, three California Quail, two Rufous-sided Towhees and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, according to an inventory prepared by Yvonne Tryce, long a teacher of children's nature classes in town and chair of the Nature and Science Committee.

The archive includes 36 rocks, 25 mammals or parts of them, 12 pine cones, a Bushtit nest containing five eggs, and the wing of a penguin that died in a zoo.

The compilation is the result of an October request by the Town Council to the committee to catalog and photograph the collection and find an agreeable compromise as to what to do with it.

Mayor Ann Wengert urged the council to resolve the issue, and pressed Ms. Tryce for a display and storage plan, given space constraints in the community hall: a walk-in locking closet and a permanent display that consists of two aquariums, a display case and a bookcase.

The council voted 5-0 at its Jan. 14 meeting to recommend adding some high shelves to the closet. As to the collection, Councilman Ted Driscoll advised the committee to "do some triage with what you've got."

The collection's disposition is up to the council. Though Ms. Tryce and others have informally added to and maintained it over

### ■ PORTOLA VALLEY

the years, the necessary collecting permits are in the town's name.

It's a matter of space. In the new Town Center complex, storage space is limited, there's no available freezer, and the activity room set up for nature classes must also be ready for knitting circles, birthday parties or garden clubs. Ms. Tryce had agreed to sharing the space.

The room has a "very large" closet, but anything brought out for class and not in the permanent display must be re-closeted at the end of class, Assistant Town Manager Janet McDougal told the council.

"The next group that comes in might have a completely different function," she said.

In the past, it didn't matter. Ms. Tryce taught classes in the old complex — an old school with lots of space — amid a permanent collection that included a tarantula.

Meetings on non-scientific topics were sometimes held there, and people sat surrounded by the objects and creatures. "I thought it was always nice to have a meeting in that room and walk over and be able to see the tarantula," said Councilman Richard Merk, who was fine with letting Ms. Tryce use unused space.

She argued for a cabinet for nests stressed by wrapping and unwrapping. She asked about an empty alcove ideal for a small freezer. She proposed leaving a stuffed otter out on a high shelf; moving it is hard on it and people wouldn't notice it, she said.

Mr. Merk offered support. "Why are those cabinets there if they're empty?" he asked. "I don't see the problem with having an otter sitting up there."

The idea for closet shelving came from nature committee member and specimen preparer Andy Browne. "I'm a fixer-upper and I can make good use of this space," he said. ▀



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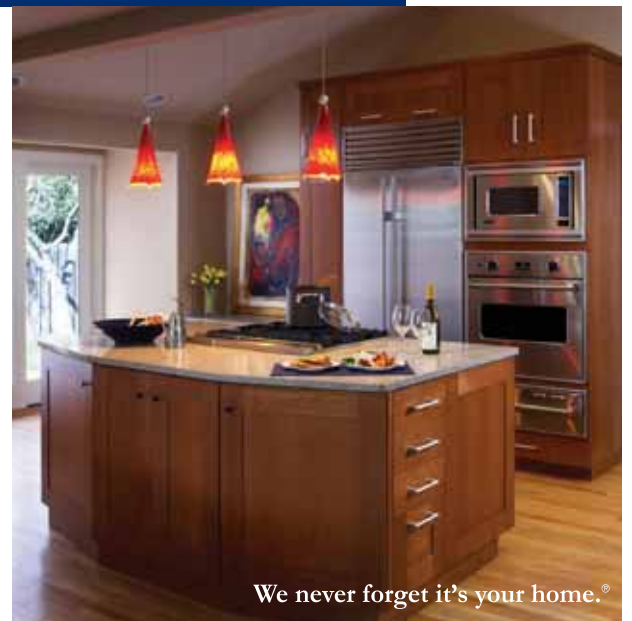
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## West Bay Opera performs Gluck's 'Orfeo ed Euridice'

West Bay Opera presents Gluck's "Orfeo ed Euridice" this month at the Lucie Stern Theatre in Palo Alto.

Performances are Feb. 20, 22 and 28, and March 1. Curtain time is 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, and 2 p.m. Sundays.

The production is directed by Jose Maria Condemí; Jose Luis Moscovich conducts the orchestra.

The opera is based on the Greek

myth of the death of Eurydice, and of Orpheus' journey to the underworld to retrieve her. He had been allowed to make the journey by the gods, who wept upon hearing him sing and play the lyre so mournfully after his wife's death.

The opera will be sung in Italian, with English supertitles.

For ticket information, call 424-9999. The Lucie Stern Theatre is at 1305 Middlefield Road.

## Camellia show

More than 1,000 blossoms will be on display at the San Francisco Peninsula Camellia Society's 48th annual Camellia Show and Sale to be held Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 14 and 15, at the Community Activities Building, 1400 Roosevelt Ave. in

Redwood City.

The show is a great opportunity to learn about caring for camellias and for purchasing rarely available camellia plants, according to club spokesman Caroline Beverstock of Atherton.

Hours are 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, and noon to 4 p.m. Sunday. Admission is free.

## OBITUARIES

### Michael J. Homer

Pioneering executive at Apple and Netscape

High-tech executive Michael J. "Mike" Homer died Feb. 1 at his home in Atherton after a two-year battle with Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, a rare neurodegenerative disorder. He was 50.

A leader in Silicon Valley for more than 20 years, Mr. Homer wrote the first business plan for Netscape Communications and created the marketing strategy for the young Silicon Valley company, which was founded in 1994. He was instrumental in marketing campaigns to convince the public that the Internet would succeed when few had heard of it, according to the financial data site, Bloomberg.com.

When Microsoft Corp. presented its own browser, Internet Explorer, in 1995, Mr. Homer helped Netscape temporarily out-

pace Microsoft as companies raced to develop new online features, according to Marc Andreessen, Netscape co-founder, as quoted in a Feb. 4 article in the

San Francisco Chronicle.

After leaving Netscape in 2000, following its acquisition by American Online Inc., Mr. Homer founded the technology



Mike Homer

company Kontiki, which he later sold to VeriSign. He also worked as an adviser to such companies as TiVo and Google, and was a director of Palm Inc, which made the original Palm Pilot.

Mr. Homer launched his career at Apple in the 1980s, where he was the technology adviser to then-CEO John Sculley. He also worked at Go Corp.

Born and raised in San Francisco, Mr. Homer attended St. Ignatius College Prep and earned a bachelor of science degree from UC Berkeley.

A boating and baseball enthusiast and San Francisco Giants fan, he also coached his sons' Little League teams. He was known for his extraordinary intellect, tenacity, fierce loyalty and his hearty sense of humor, say family members.

Mr. Homer and his wife, Kristina, started The Homer Family Foundation to fund education programs for the underprivileged.

Mr. Homer was a major donor to the Ronald McDonald House at Stanford, The Haas Center for Responsible Business at Berkeley, The Computer History Museum, and The California Institute for Quantitative Biosciences in University of California at San Francisco.

This past fall, Sacred Heart Prep in Atherton unveiled the Michael J. Homer Science and

Student Life Center.

Mr. Homer is survived by his wife of 10 years, Kristina; his children, James, Jack, and Lucy; his mother, Irene Homer of San Francisco; and a sister, Sue Homer, of San Francisco.

Services were held Feb. 5 at St. Raymond Catholic Church in Menlo Park.

Donations may be made to Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Foundation at [www.cjdfoundation.org](http://www.cjdfoundation.org).

### Linda McLaren Cristo

Former Menlo Park, Atherton resident

Linda Ann McLaren Cristo of Redwood City, who grew up in Atherton and Menlo Park, died Jan. 21 at the age of 52.

Ms. Cristo attended Sacred Heart and Hillview elementary schools. She attended Woodside High School and Canada College, and continued her studies in biology and nursing at Chico State University.

She was known for her compassion for the unfortunate and her love of animals, which led her to volunteer at a local animal shelter, say family members.

Ms. Cristo was a descendent of the Keyston Brothers, early San Francisco saddle and tack makers, and book and card publisher Edward H. Mitchell.

Elizabeth Downard, Mary Ann Deresinski, Kathleen Gooden, John Herbert and Sue Smith all gave their friendship and guidance to Ms. Cristo, according to her brother, Robert McLaren.

In addition to Robert, of Carmel Valley, she is survived by her brother William McLaren of Dublin. She was preceded in death by her parents, Gertrude Keyston McLaren and William McLaren.

Interment at Cypress Lawn Cemetery will be private. Donations in her name may be made to Pets in Need in Redwood City or St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room in Menlo Park.

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## POLICE CALLS

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

### ATHERTON

#### Auto burglary reports:

■ Window smashed and money stolen, Menlo-Atherton High School at 555 Middlefield Road, Feb. 4.

■ Window smashed and money stolen from wallet and purse, Menlo-Atherton High School at 555 Middlefield Road, Feb. 4.

**Child/elder abuse report:** Menlo-Atherton High School at 555 Middlefield Road, Feb. 5.

### MENLO PARK

#### Auto burglary reports:

■ Window smashed and satellite radio stolen, Waverley St. and Kent Place, Jan. 30.

■ CD case stolen, 1500 block of San Antonio St., Jan. 30.

■ Navigation system stolen, 600 block of Woodland Ave., Feb. 2.

■ Purse and \$80 stolen, 1600 block of

Marsh Road, Feb. 2.

■ Satellite radio stolen, 600 block of Sharon Park Drive, Feb. 2.

#### Fraud reports:

■ Unauthorized access to checking account and \$280 stolen, Jan. 30.

■ ID theft, 400 block of Glenwood Ave., Feb. 4.

### WOODSIDE

**Theft report:** Dark gray Trek mountain bike stolen, Woodside High School at 199 Churchill Ave., Jan. 28.

#### Auto burglary reports:

■ Window smashed and purse containing check book, credit cards and cash stolen for a total loss valued at \$400, 3000 block of Woodside Road, Jan. 31.

■ Window smashed and laptop computer, purse, house keys and credit cards stolen, 3000 block of Woodside Road, Jan. 31.

### WEST MENLO PARK

**Fraud report:** Resident informed of arrest of suspect in Orange County whose ID card had victim's driver's license number on it, 2000 block of Mills Ave., Jan. 31.

## Center named in honor of Bill, Jean Lane

Around this time next year, construction workers should be nearing completion of a new environmental education center to be called the Bill and Jean Lane Education Center at Edgewood Park and Natural Preserve, located at the northern border of Woodside along Interstate 280.

By a unanimous vote Jan. 27, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors approved a resolution making the name official, an aide to Supervisor Rich Gordon said.

The Lanes are being recognized for their environmental stewardship, including the Folger Estate Stable, the effort to protect the threatened Bay Checkerspot butterfly, and the building of all-season equestrian trails in Huddart Park, County Manager David Boesch said in a staff report.

Regarding the new education center, a significant gift from the Lanes closed a fundraising gap. Private fundraising is expected to conclude successfully by the end of March, Mr. Boesch said.

Construction is set to start in August, with completion expected in March 2010.

### GUEST OPINION

*continued from page 27*

alternatives are also challenging:

■ Is it possible to underground the system as some have proposed, funding it by recovering the use of the land now used by the railroad for housing to help offset the added cost of tunneling?

■ The Caltrain corridor would be eligible to compete for the \$9 billion funding only if it accommodates high-speed rail. The region may face a choice between a fully grade-separated high-speed rail/Caltrain combination or ending high-speed rail in San Jose and shifting passengers bound for

Palo Alto or San Francisco onto Baby Bullet trains that may not be fully grade-separated even though they would run much more frequently than today's trains.

Finally, there is the question of whether Palo Alto wishes to become a stop for the high-speed rail trains, assuming it comes up the Peninsula. It would stop at Millbrae for the airport and at one of the midline stations, either Palo Alto or Redwood City, or neither.

After attending the first high-speed rail scoping session recently, it became evident that this project represents a major land use/transportation transformation of our Peninsula and we need a process outside

the EIR to plan and design the interface between speeding trains and our neighborhoods and downtowns — with the help of the best urban design and technical teams.

Despite the difficult economic times, there will be substantial infrastructure dollars flowing for regional rail in the Bay Area. We need more interested citizens to watch the process, provide comments and ask questions.

**Yoriko Kishimoto is a member of the Palo Alto City Council and former mayor. She serves on the boards of the Valley Transportation Authority and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. This article originally appeared in the Palo Alto Weekly.**

### LETTERS

*continued from page 27*

of all of Menlo Park taxpayers.

I don't think that people who were so careless about agreeing to waste millions on a sports complex should have a lot to say about our public safety — or other city expenses.

**Elizabeth Lasensky  
Fremont Street, Menlo Park**

### School lunches may offer vegan/vegetarian option

*Editor:*

President Obama's nomination of Iowa's Tom Vilsack for secre-

tary of agriculture is a winner. In an interview last week, Mr. Vilsack called for the department to "champion everyone who eats." He may well be the first secretary to recognize that the USDA's mission is to provide a healthful food supply for the American people, rather than welfare checks to agribusiness conglomerates.

The best opportunity to apply this mission is our nation's school lunch program, once used by USDA as a dumping ground for surplus meat and dairy commodities. According to USDA's own surveys, 90 percent of American children consume excessive

amounts of fat and only 15 percent eat the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables.

Not surprisingly, nearly half of American children are overweight, 25 percent have high cholesterol and blood pressure, and 30,000 suffer from Type 2 diabetes, once limited to adults. Their early dietary flaws become lifelong addictions, contributing to the escalating public health crisis.

But change is on the way. Hawaii, California, New York, and Florida legislatures have asked their schools to offer daily vegan/vegetarian options. According to the School Nutrition Association,

52 percent of U.S. school districts now do. President Obama is likely to call for similar measures when the Child Nutrition Act is reauthorized by Congress late this summer.

Parents and others who care about our children's health should work with PTAs and school officials to demand healthful plant-based school meals, snacks, and vending machine items. Additional information is available at [schoolnutrition.org](http://schoolnutrition.org), [schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov](http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov), [healthyschoollunches.org](http://healthyschoollunches.org), and [choiceusa.net](http://choiceusa.net).

**Malcolm Davidson  
Encinal Avenue, Menlo Park**

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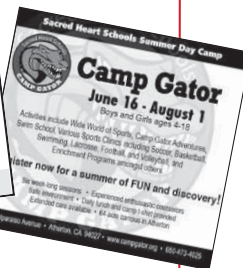
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The Almanac, established in September, 1965, is delivered each week to residents of Menlo Park, Atherton, Portola Valley and Woodside and adjacent unincorporated areas of southern San Mateo County. The Almanac is qualified by decree of the Superior Court of San Mateo County to publish public notices of a governmental and legal nature, as stated in Decree No. 147530, issued November 9, 1969.

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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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or deliver to: Editor at the Almanac, 3525 Alameda de las Pulgas, Menlo Park, CA 94025.

### CALL

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

## Hope for more playing fields

In 2006, 61 percent of Menlo Park voters rejected a plan to build playing fields on the landfill in Bayfront Park that proponents had hoped would make a dent in the city's serious lack of space for local sports team to practice and compete.

Since then, the city has been considering other options, but no reasonable idea has surfaced to accommodate the growing demand for space for boys' and girls' leagues from AYSO and advanced soccer teams, Little League and higher level baseball teams, rugby, and other more exotic sports like field hockey and lacrosse.

### EDITORIAL

The opinion of The Almanac

But that all changed last week, when the council looked over a plan to completely revamp Belle Haven's 8.3-acre Kelly Park to install one full-size, artificial turf soccer field, two tennis courts, a running track and a multipurpose court that could be used for basketball. The current park arrangement includes an under-used baseball field and a slanted soccer field adjacent to the Senior Center on Terminal Avenue. A newly designed Kelly Park would cost \$4.5 million, and would likely be paid for at least in part through funds from the redevelopment district.

Whether the addition of only one soccer field will make a serious dent in the local playing field shortage is open to question, but even more fields could be on the way. At the same council meeting, city officials announced that discussions have begun for the city sharing operating oversight of Flood Park off Bay Road. The 21-acre county park contains a baseball field, softball

field and tennis court, along with open space and picnic areas. If plans proceed, city officials said two full-size soccer fields could be installed on the property if some trees and tennis courts were removed. The park is located just across U.S. 101 from Kelly Park. Unfortunately, any redesign of the park must wait until the retrofit of the huge Hetch Hetchy water line, which runs under the park, is completed in either 2010 or 2011.

Local youth and recreational sports leagues have to be thrilled that at least there are some reasonable options ahead to expand the city's roster of playing fields. The potential of adding three more soccer fields to the city's collection would be a huge step toward alleviating the shortage. The plan should be welcomed and helped along by AYSO and all other sports leagues.

But while it is important for the city to serve the leagues, much more due diligence needs to be done in the Belle Haven neighborhood to assess the community's needs and to make sure that local players have every opportunity to use the fields, as Belle Haven resident Matt Henry pointed out. Tennis courts, rather than more basketball courts, may not be the best choice in this neighborhood.

And besides, as Mr. Henry said, funds the city receives through the redevelopment district are intended primarily to benefit the residents of the district, which encompasses the Belle Haven neighborhood and some of the land adjacent to it. The city should make sure it accommodates Belle Haven residents for use of Kelly Park before it opens the fields up to other city residents.

### LETTERS

Our readers write

### County panel was no fan of water district

Editor:

In 2006, the San Mateo County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) completed a state-mandated study of the Los Trancos County Water District that identified a district that no longer provided water service but continued to collect property tax and to refund it in the form of rebates on private utility water bills.

The LAFCo report identified this rebate as a program that rewarded consumption and conflicted with the intended use of property tax for education, fire and police service. In response, the water district board reduced the rebate and proposed that the district needed to continue to exist as steward of district-owned lands, and to continue to collect its share of \$130,000 in property tax.

The San Mateo County LAFCo adopted determinations that the district no longer provided the service for which it was formed and an existing agency or agencies, with the authority to provide other desired services of conservation, fire protection, and so on, could be designated



Menlo Park Historical Association

### Our Regional Heritage

This 1930s scene in downtown Menlo Park was captured not long after the city incorporated in 1927. The town's voters had turned down incorporation in 1924, but after leaders considered being annexed to Palo Alto, and Atherton, which incorporated in 1923, it was decided to put the issue to voters again and the measure passed on Nov. 15, 1927. The action was certified by the state on Nov. 23, 1927, the date on the city's seal.

to receive the property taxes. There is no suggestion in the LAFCo report or findings that upon dissolution the district property tax would be spent at the county level. Property tax would be re-distributed to agencies, including the fire and other districts that already provide

services to the community.

Los Trancos residents have historically paid some of the highest rates in the Bay Area even with property tax subsidizing water rates. When the district sold the water system to CalWater, rates were reduced in the short and long term. The

California Public Utility Commission, not the district, sets the rates for CalWater customers.

The LAFCo report did not, nor did the commission's determinations support, the assertion that the district's activities were consis-

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## LETTERS

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tent with district charter as a water agency. The report stated that the district's continued existence and rebate program conflicts with state policies encouraging elimination of redundant layers of government. The state Legislature recognized this when it passed legislation that removed the Los Trancos district from membership in the Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency (BAWSCA).

And as stated in the LAFCo report, state law discourages continued collection of property tax by special districts that have the ability to raise funds through user fees. In this case, the district no longer provides water service and continues to receive property tax as an unintended consequence of Proposition 13.

The Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) is an independent commission charged with regulating the boundaries of cities and special districts, encouraging the orderly development of local government agencies; preventing premature conversion of agricultural and open space lands; processing boundary change applications and conducting studies with the goal of improving efficiency and reducing costs of providing urban services. The LAFCo and Grand Jury Reports can be found at [www.sanmateolafo.org](http://www.sanmateolafo.org)

**Linda Craig**

(Editor's Note: Linda Craig is a board member of LAFCo.)

### Minor, but nagging thoughts on Menlo issues

Editor:

I realize that with all that is ailing our country and economy, most local problems are minor. But two nag at me.

One is reflected in last week's letter critiquing Mr. Brooks' excellent Jan. 28 letter concerning the long-standing eyesore that is the Park Theatre. In her letter, Sue Kayton argues that the sorry site that we all have to view can be laid at the feet of the Menlo Park City Council because the council has not approved the theater owner's remodeling/replacement plans.

Unlike Ms. Kayton, I don't know how to fairly apportion responsibility between the theater owner and the city. But I am willing to bet that if the house across the street from Mr. Crittenden's home looked like his theater, he would not be a happy camper and would be demanding at minimum some action to make the property at least presentable until a final plan is agreed upon. I think that is all that many of us in Menlo Park want to see.

The other issue relates to Menlo

## A Palo Alto take on high speed rail

by Yoriko Kishimoto

Last November voters passed Proposition 1A and swept in a new transportation vision for California — one that will see a high-speed rail line as the spine that will connect the key cities and regions of our state.

Many — including myself — hope this will create an attractive and clean high-tech alternative to expanding airports or highways and help spur the transformation of California into a more transit-friendly, green economy with vibrant, walkable downtowns up and down the state.

The system is expected to cost \$45 billion to build, with annual operating costs of \$1.6 billion when it is fully up and running. In return, the system is expected to support a robust and productive economy by providing service between Los Angeles and San Francisco in 2-1/2 hours for up to 93 million passengers per year by 2030. The operating costs are expected to be more than offset with annual passenger revenue of \$3.6 billion.

The ballot measure authorized \$9.95 billion in bonds to plan and construct the first phase of the 800-mile system. It may be 20 years before an integrated statewide system is up and working. In the meantime, there will be work on segments.

It is worth noting that \$950 million is earmarked for local rail lines to feed into

the high-speed line. Competition to be the first segment is expected to be between the Anaheim area and the Caltrain segment that runs up the Peninsula and through our local communities.

The state budget crisis has slowed this speeding train since no bonds are expected to be issued in the near future. Nevertheless, the "scoping process" for environmental impact studies for the proposed segment between San Jose and San Francisco has already begun, with comments due by March 6.

According to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, our regional transportation-funding agency, the Bay Area is slated to receive \$439 million for rail services to connect to the high-speed rail, including ACE, BART, Caltrain, Muni, and light rail in Santa Clara County. This is our opportunity to truly integrate them into one regional rail system. Caltrain today operates 96 trains on weekdays, or 48 in each

direction, carrying 12 million passengers in 2008. Caltrain plans call for electrification by 2015, which will reduce emissions by more than 90 percent, allow more peak-hour trains as well as serve more stations in less time.

The costs, including the scheduled replacement of cars, have increased to \$1.5 billion. An electrified Caltrain would

be able to accommodate 172 trains/day or 97,000 daily riders.

Here are some questions we should ask:

■ The Bay Area will be spending \$223 billion under the transportation commission's draft 2035 plan. Does the plan adequately fund the integrated modern rail plan we need? Are we really squeezing every dollar, including scrutinizing projects that entered the planning process many years ago, before we realized the urgency of the climate crisis?

■ We will need to build 48 new grade crossings for high-speed rail, overpasses or underpasses, on the Peninsula, but where might these require additional right of way along the line?

■ With grade separations, safety is increased and the requirement to sound train horns at crossings is eliminated, but the frequency will be much higher. There are still many unanswered questions about how the frequent and fast, but quieter, trains will affect the communities that they pass through.

■ Will the mitigations potentially be worse than the impact, such as high walls or trenches?

■ How will this affect Caltrain's electrification and modernization program? How will high-speed rail technically integrate with Caltrain?

■ How would construction of high-speed rail affect Caltrain service — for how many years? Accommodating both the high-speed rail and the Caltrain service will mean substantial changes for the Peninsula. But the

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Park's request for some \$6.9 million from the not-yet-approved federal stimulus package. This \$6.9 million would pay for street resurfacing, a pedestrian underpass on Bayfront Expressway at Willow Road, a solar voltaic system at the city's corporate yard and solar water heating for Belle Haven pool.

While all may be worthy projects, anyone who reads or views the national news knows that Menlo Park is not hurting like communities in Ohio, Florida and

Michigan and elsewhere. If the city believes it is really critical to spend \$6.9 million on these items in the next year or two, city leaders should be willing to go to the community and argue for higher taxes or the use of some of Menlo Park's \$30 million-plus general fund reserve. I don't think we are due a federal hand-out and I don't think we need to send our mayor to Washington to ask for one.

**Nancy Borgeson**  
Laurel Street, Menlo Park

### Council is wrong on sergeants' pay

Editor:

Menlo Park City Council member Kelly Fergusson's guest opinion in the Almanac last week uses several half-truths to perpetuate the myth that the public was given adequate opportunity to review the 22 to 38 percent pay increase (including base/other compensation) that she just approved for our police sergeants.

She says that the raise for the sergeants was "discussed" while setting the 2008-09 budget, but if you go to the city's Web site and read the minutes of the June 2008 council meetings that addressed that budget you will see that they reflect no such discussion; indeed, the only mention at all is a vague reference to the impending expiration of the sergeants' contract in a staff report. Likewise, Ms. Fergusson's assertion that the sergeants' planned raise was made clear during earlier discussions of the line officers' contract is simply not reflected in minutes or staff reports associated with that contract negotiation.

She then says that no member of the public spoke up during the council meetings where the sergeants' contract was negotiated in closed session, but neglects to mention that over 50 citizens sent messages to the council urging them to not approve the sergeants' contract at their Jan. 13 meeting.

Notwithstanding the spin, the fact remains that the public didn't know any details about this contract until it was too late for any meaningful public input.

Yes, police retention is critical to ensuring public safety, but the fact remains that these are difficult economic times that do not justify the council's action in approving large increases in pay with limited public input.

**Nicole Lance**  
Laurel Avenue, Menlo Park

### Putting a true value on sergeants' pay raise

Editor:

I have no idea how much is reasonable in our lopsided economy for a police officer to earn. I do know that it is important to me that the officer who answers my urgent call is experienced, timely and well trained, among so many other things. How do I put a dollar value on that?

On the other hand, there are some, not all, people who are loudly opposing the sergeants' pay raise who also over two years ago supported putting a multi-million dollar sports complex on Bayfront Park — with funds we didn't have. That complex had the potential to go many millions of dollars in overdraft. Clearly these supporters valued a sports complex for some at the expense

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Photo by Ralph Oswald

### Skaters identified

Last week's Regional Heritage photo of the three ice skaters on the Skylonda pond brought back memories for Ralph Collins, of Portola Valley, whose family lived in the area and were the proprietors of Collins Skylonda Store (on the site now occupied by Alice's Restaurant) from 1941 to 1950. In last week's caption, only Norma Oswald, at left, was identified. Mr. Collins supplied the names of Peg Bolton, the skater at far right, and Janet Adams, in the center. All lived in Skylonda at the time and obviously enjoyed taking advantage of the unusual hard freeze in 1949 that turned the Skylonda reservoir into a skating rink.

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