

State warns Menlo Park district to raise scores for black, disadvantaged students. Page 5

The Almanac

THE HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER FOR

MENLO PARK, ATHERTON, PORTOLA VALLEY AND WOODSIDE

MARCH 25, 2009

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The Beat goes on

Michelle Kraus heard the 'Howl' decades ago, and now helps preserve the voice of Beat poet Allen Ginsberg

See Cover, Section 2



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Photo by Ted Petit

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On the cover

Michelle Kraus of Menlo Park has been inventorying the photos, books, notes and other items she acquired while working in the home of Allen Ginsberg some 30 years ago to compile a bibliography of the works of the Beat poet, who worked with her on the project. She plans to donate the collection to a library or museum. Photo by Michelle Le. See story, **Cover, Section 2**.

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Roberts Tip of the Week

Ketchup Plays Catchup

For as long as most of us can remember, the ketchup bottle has been a fixture on many restaurant tables. However, although this tomato-based sauce has been touted as America's number one condiment, it has been supplanted in recent years by salsa. This shift in tastes is quite understandable since salsa is also a tomato-based condiment that has more in common with present-day ketchup than the first version of ketchup. The fact is that the precursor to ketchup was a salty, pickled fish sauce known as: ketsaip," which Dutch and British sailors brought home from China. Had the recipe remained, it is doubtful that many people would be pouring ketchup on their burgers and fries today.

As for the cuisine, ketchup has taken American cuisine to the next level with its sophisticated spices and added touches to traditional cooked at home by mom dishes. We invite you to come to ROBERTS MARKET, where we feature the finest produce, meats, poultry, and seafood available in the area, and we have a great selection of marinades which help change the taste of your favorite meats. We pride ourselves on catering to our valued customers' needs and on the high if you find yourself pressed for time visit our "heat and eat it" department for wonderful gourmet prepared foods. You can find prepared food such as home-made hot soups, sandwiches, salads, and gourmet food stuffs.

P.S. The first published ketchup recipe in 1727 included anchovies, shallots, vinegar, white wine, cloves, ginger, mace, nutmeg, and lemon peel.

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Local News

MENLO PARK | ATHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

Atherton parking crunch ousts Tech Crunch

No more blogging in his jammies for TechCrunch founder Michael Arrington. The wildly popular Silicon Valley business blog's headquarters recently moved from Mr. Arrington's Atherton home to office space in downtown Palo Alto.

Atherton, of course, doesn't have commercial zoning and the town has strict limits on home-based businesses.

Mr. Arrington reports — in his blog, naturally — that neighbors complained to the town about traffic from his staff, guests and interview subjects. “Legal action was threatened,” he says.

The upside of the move, he says, is that he took advantage of the lousy real estate market to secure new digs at a great price.

“I’ll miss having TechCrunch at my house, where my commute time was measured in seconds and I was always surrounded by fascinating people who dropped by for interviews,” he says in his blog.

Lost in translation

Ancient Rome had them. *Insulae* were multi-family dwellings for people of modest means, according to Wikipedia's references for the word “apartment.”

Apartments could be found within the 16th century walled city of Shibam in Yemen. The mud “tower houses” rose up to 16 stories in the so-called “Manhattan of the desert,” now a United Nations World Heritage Site, Wikipedia says.

Wikipedia entries for Portola Valley, Atherton and Woodside do not mention the word “apartment,” and with good reason. There aren't any, notwithstanding a note in a story about U.S. house-hunting by residents of China in the March 19 English-language edition of the People's Daily Online.

“... the housing prices for communities near San Francisco, including Woodside, Atherton and Portola Valley, have witnessed 14 to 37.9 percent rises in the average price of an apartment in 2008.”

Yes, they have cottages to rent, and yes, they have no apartments.

California warns Menlo Park district to raise scores for black, disadvantaged students

By Andrea Gemmet

Almanac Staff Writer

SCHOOLS

The Menlo Park City School District is not exactly filled with under-achievers.

Despite high overall scores on standardized tests, two groups —

African American and socio-economically disadvantaged students — are doing so poorly that the state sent the district an early warning letter, said Superintendent Ken Ranella.

If the Menlo Park district doesn't bring up the percentage of students in these groups who are proficient or better in English-language arts and math — as determined by

standardized test scores — it is in danger of being classified as a “program improvement district,” Mr. Ranella told the school board at the March 10 meeting.

As part of the federal No Child Left Behind legislation passed in 2001, schools must show that a minimum percentage of students in each “subgroup” — from English language learners to children

with disabilities — are demonstrating proficiency for two consecutive years.

The schools that don't meet the minimum standards under the act are subject to “corrective action.”

If test scores for the two groups of students don't rise, state teams would come in to direct the instructional program.

Menlo Park City School District 2008 proficiency scores

	English-language Arts		Math	
	Percent proficient	State target	Percent proficient	State target
African American	28.3	35.2	33.3	37.0
Socio-economically disadvantaged	27.2	35.2	30.0	37.0
Hispanic	41.7	35.2	38.3	37.0
Pacific Islander	45.5	35.2	42.4	37.0
English Language Learners	43.3	35.2	45.1	37.0
Pupils with disabilities	64.3	35.2	62.7	37.0

Source: Menlo Park City School District

Menlo Park students do well as a whole, but when the student body is divided into subgroups, some aren't meeting minimum state standards. Compounding the problem is that state targets for proficiency rise every year.

Being named a program improvement school or district means being subject to “an escalating series of interventions and

See **WARN**, page 6

Fire closes Peet's, Calla indefinitely

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

Peet's Coffee & Tea in Menlo Park is closed indefinitely, as is the Calla clothing boutique next door, after the March 17 fire that firefighting officials say caused about \$1 million in damage and rendered unusable the two-story building at the corner of University Drive and Santa Cruz Avenue.

The building, which has professional offices on the second floor, is off-limits to normal business pending an assessment by a structural engineer, said Ron La France, the city's building official, in an interview. The electrical power to the building has been cut, and all the drywall will be removed so the wiring can be tested and perhaps completely replaced, he said.

The building's structural stability is in question, he said. To get at the fire, firefighters left a “big hole” in the second-story floor, Mr. La France said. The smell of smoke also remains in the wood and will have to be sealed in



Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

Battalion Chief Mike Shaffer of the Menlo Park Fire Protection District stands where firefighters cut through the wall to get to the source of the fire. He is in the second-story office area above the Calla clothing boutique.

before the building can be reoccupied, he said.

The four-alarm fire is thought to have started overnight in a utilities closet in the office of a mail-services business, from where it slowly traversed the interior wall framing and along floor joists, said Fire Chief Harold Schapelhouman of the Menlo Park Fire Protection District. “This thing had been burning for

a long, long time,” he said. “It had a really good head start on us.”

An alarm system notified firefighters shortly after 7 a.m. They worked in crew shifts of 20 minutes to 30 minutes at a time, using axes, chain saws and sledgehammers to uncover the charred and blackened beams.

“It was a very stubborn fire,” Chief Schapelhouman said. Firefighters were “playing a little

game of hide-and-go-seek ... trying to see where it had gone.”

To put the fire out required water, lots of it, and that turned the boutique on the first floor into a shimmering catch basin.

“We tried to do the least amount of damage (to the store) as possible,” he said. “In this economy, we're pretty sensitive

See **FIRE**, page 6



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Fire closes Peet's, Calla indefinitely

FIRE

continued from page 5

to trying to help out the business owners the best that we can so that they can survive this."

As some firefighters battled the fire, others worked to remove merchandise from the store.

The response to the fire included about 70 firefighters, 14 engines and four trucks from various Peninsula agencies. One firefighter suffered a shoulder injury and was taken to Kaiser Permanente hospital in Redwood City, where he was treated and released.

The blaze was declared under control at 8:30 a.m., but crews continued to battle hot spots until about 1:30 p.m.

Firefighters stood overnight watch and periodically went up into the building with a thermal-energy-detection camera to check for hot spots, all in all about a 25-hour operation start to finish, Chief Schapelhouman said.

The investigation is ongoing, but he said inspectors have concluded that the fire was not intentionally set and did start near the utility closet.

The building was not equipped with a sprinkler system, though it will be when the rehabilitation is complete, he said.

Free food?

The morning after the fire, the front door to Peet's was open, but the way in was blocked by a portable coffee dispenser, a box of scones and a Peet's employee doing the serving. The refreshments were free but you had to find a seat outside, the inside being off-limits.

When will Peet's reopen? "You know, in the best case scenario, we

could open pretty soon," company spokeswoman Erica Hess said in an interview. Asked to be more specific, she said it depends on when the building is declared safe to work in and when the power is reconnected.

As for free coffee and scones, that will depend on what can be brewed and transported from the company's three Palo Alto stores, she said.

There are no plans to lay off any of the approximately 15 Menlo Park employees, she said.

Mr. La France, the Menlo Park building official, said it's possible that Peet's could open before the other businesses because the water damage was slight compared with what happened upstairs and to the boutique.

Ms. Hess said a few ceiling tiles got wet and some refrigeration lines were damaged and that they're cleaning in hopes of removing the smoky odor.

The San Francisco-based company has 193 stores, Ms. Hess said, most of which are in California. Others are in Denver, Chicago, the Pacific Northwest and the Boston area. The Menlo Park store, which opened in 1971, was the second in the chain. The first opened in 1966 on Vine



Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

Libby Ellis, center, manager of the Calla clothing boutique, watches firefighters outside her store on March 17. For more photos go to www.TheAlmanacOnline.com.

Street in Berkeley.

Wet, smoky clothes

It will likely be months before Calla reopens, store owner Phil Bachler told The Almanac, as his stock was significantly damaged by smoke and water.

The clothes will probably be given away, added Mr. Bachler, a native of Atherton.

He and his wife Tiger have owned Calla since September. On the day of the fire, she was in Los Angeles on a buying trip when Mr. Bachler called her to let her know what was happening back home.

The store was insured, he said. ■

*Bay City News Service
contributed to this report.*

WARN

continued from page 5

consequences," according to the California Department of Education. State teams would come in to direct the instructional program. Mr. Ranella said he hoped to avoid such an intrusion.

While the district scores well on the API (Academic Performance Index) as a whole, when the student body is divided into subgroups, there is a big gap between white and Asian students and everyone else.

District officials have been working on strategies to close the gap for all of its under-performing subgroups for the past year.

"The greatest issue for the state is our gap," Mr. Ranella said. "Our gap is extraordinary because we have such high achievers."

Of particular concern are the scores of African American and

socio-economically disadvantaged children, which are well below the state's target numbers of 35 percent proficient in English and 37 percent proficient in math.

"I think 28 percent of our African American kids and 30 percent of our poverty kids (scoring as proficient) is not acceptable, and this reinforces that message," Mr. Ranella said.

Previously, the number of students in those two subgroups has been so small that it is not considered "statistically significant," according to Mr. Ranella. Now those groups are growing and getting closer to statistical relevance, and the state is taking notice, he said.

Last month, district teachers, psychologists, counselors and administrators held a meeting and developed a needs-assessment study. The district is looking at the problem from all angles, Mr.

Ranella said.

The district's four principals have been instructed to discuss strategies for helping under-performing students at every faculty meeting for the rest of the school year, he said.

"We're trying to come up with a coherent plan we can implement," he said. "There's been a lot of good work, but none of it has been systemic enough."

Compounding the problem is that state targets for proficiency rise every year. Board member Laura Rich pointed out that under the current system, eventually every school is going to become a program improvement school.

"It's important we focus on the achievement gap, but unless they change (the system), we're going to be program improvement at some point," she said. "Everyone is, because there's no way to get 100 percent proficiency." ■



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Kucera world champ in amateur 'cutting'

Hollie Kucera of Atherton has been named the 2008 world champion in the \$10,000 amateur division of the National Cutting Horse Association's World Championship finals. Hollie was also named Rookie of the Year at the finals, held Feb. 14 in Amarillo, Texas.

In the \$10,000 amateur class, Hollie finished the year with \$15,660 in earnings. Her total year-end earnings of \$24,101 also earned her the Rookie of the Year award.

The top 30 National Cutting Horse Association money earners in each of the associations 12 classes were invited to Amarillo

See picture on Page 3

to compete for the title of world champion in respective divisions. This year there were nearly 360 entries.

Hollie rode her horse, CiCi Slip-pin, to the world championship. She has owned the 11-year-old mare for seven years.

Hollie became interested in cutting through her four years of competing in high school rodeos, where she also split training time between roping, barrel racing, goat tying and pole bending.

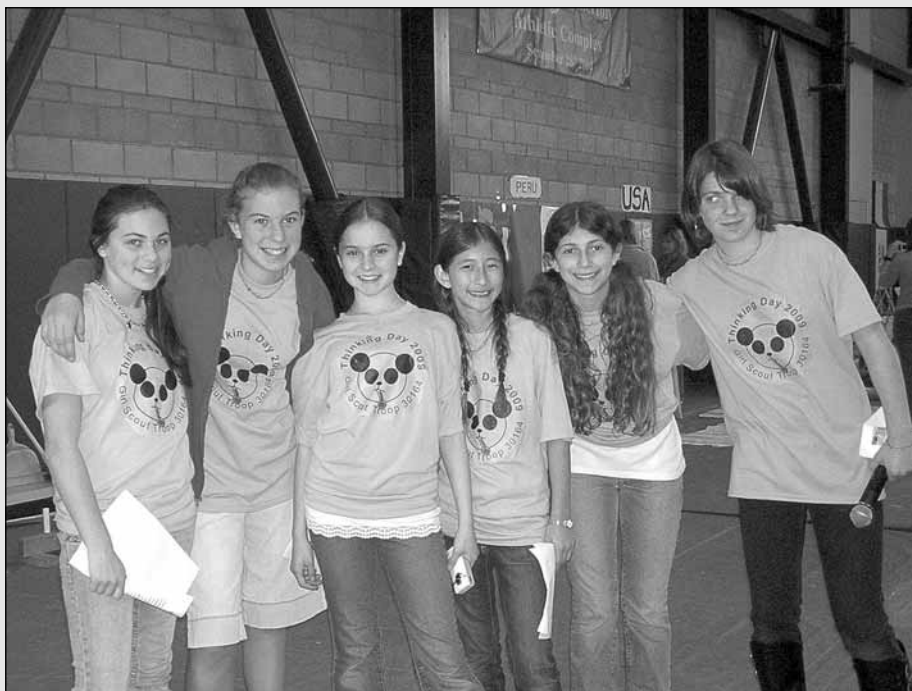
Majoring in electrical engineering, Hollie is a freshman at Cal

Poly-San Luis Obispo. Her professors were supportive of her efforts and followed her performances at the world finals via a live Web-cast.

"I missed four days to come here, so I have a lot to make up," she said in an interview with Cutting Horse Chatter magazine.

The National Cutting Horse Association has 21,000 members. The sport of cutting has its roots in Western ranching, where good horses were a necessity for ranch work and cattle handling.

For more information about the National Cutting Horse Association, go online to www.nchacutting.com or call 817-244-6188.



Members of Troop 30164 are, from left, Sarina Chaiken, Amanda Plante, Evy Vaughan, Sabrina Williams, Becky Abramowitz and Lauren Kirkbride. (Megan Hogan is not pictured.)

Photo by Ora Chaiken

Girl Scouts teach, learn about the world

By Marcy Abramowitz

More than 400 local Girl Scouts, ranging in age from kindergarten Daisies to eighth-grade Cadettes, participated in the recent "Thinking Day" program at Menlo-Atherton High School.

At the event, the scouts learned about 31 countries around the globe — and other local scouts were doing the teaching.

Here's how it worked: Before the event, each troop selected five countries they would like to learn about. Then, troops were assigned a country by lottery.

Members of each troop studied their country and its people. Preparation took months, as the girls learned key facts about geography, language and government, as well as cultural elements such as food and dress. Each troop then built a booth, created costumes, prepared food, and learned a dance or

About the author: Marcy Abramowitz resides in Menlo Park. Her daughter Becky is a member of Troop 30164.

other cultural activity.

At Thinking Day, the scouts visited other troops' booths, where the troop representing that country gave a presentation. The scouts then had their "passport" stamped for each country visited.

This annual event, sponsored by the South County Service Unit of the Girl Scouts of Northern California, brought together girls from 34 local troops.

The theme of this year's event was "Health Awareness." The girls shared information on a major health issue affecting their country (such as insect-borne diseases like malaria), lifestyle issues such as obesity and smoking, and malnutrition.

This year's event was led by

seventh-grade Cadette Troop 30164 from Hillview Middle School in Menlo Park, with assistance from Troop 31235, also from Hillview.

Members of Troop 30164 spent almost a year planning the event, and their efforts will be a key element in earning their Silver Award, the second highest achievement in Girl Scouting.

Troop 30164 is led by Ora Chaiken; members include Becky Abramowitz, Sarina Chaiken, Megan Hogan, Lauren Kirkbride, Amanda Plante, Evy Vaughan and Sabrina Williams.

The South County Girl Scout Association represents 71 troops with 880 registered scouts in Atherton, East Palo Alto, Ladera, Menlo Park, Portola Valley and Woodside. For more information, go online to www.girlscout-snorcal.org and click on "Greater Bay Area." ■

REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Gloria Darke



Need help to sell home?

Dear Gloria,

We have been having financial difficulties for the past year and can no longer afford to keep our house. I know it isn't a good time to sell but we don't want to fall behind on our payments. What are the best steps we can take to facilitate a fast sale with a good price?

Name withheld

Dear Sellers,

I am sorry for your problems. I am sure it is of little comfort to know you are not alone. I do applaud your decision to take action before you damage your credit as well as cause additional stress in your life. So what can you do to make the best of the situation and maximize your position? I would say that there are two important points; Price it right for this market.

Get the house in the best possible condition. So much has been said and written about pricing in this market that no more need be said. However, getting the house in good condition is so important. I just spoke with a realtor

who has been working on a house since January and has spent 70,000 on fix up costs. That house did go to market last week and had two offers on it. That is not what I am suggesting for you. I would recommend that you deal only with the cosmetics and what buyers can really see. There are some sellers who like to have a new furnace, update the plumbing, fix the fireplace, etc. Perhaps these items need to be addressed by way of a counter and the seller give a credit for items that are non-functional but these are not the upgrades that buyers see and are willing to pay for. Focus on the most dramatic transformations with new paint, perhaps floor coverings and decluttering. The most bang for the buck that you can get is by hiring a professional stager. They will make all the recommendations and for a relatively small amount will rent furniture, art, and even bedcoverings to you until the house sells. And don't forget to make the front of the house appealing so that when potential buyers drive up they can make an emotional connection.

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

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10:00am–4:00pm Tickets at the door: \$5

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Will garbage, child care get more expensive?

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

Menlo Park's City Council will decide whether to approve a steep hike in garbage rates, and an additional increase in child care fees, at its meeting Tuesday, March 24.

The council will also consider city staff's recommendation to change the way the city calculates building fees. Instead of paying an up-front charge based on the cost of construction, builders would pay in increments over the course of the project, with the fees based on the cost to city staff of reviewing plans and preparing permits.

Garbage rates

Under the staff's proposal, residents and businesses could see their garbage collection rates jump 32 percent within the next two years.

The city's contract with the collection company Allied Waste will expire by the end of 2010, and the city will have to cover an \$800,000 deficit with the contractor by then, according to city staff. That deficit built up because recent rate increases haven't matched rising costs, said John McGirr, the city's revenue and claims manager.

Under the recommendation by city staff, rates would increase 20 percent in 2009. According to current estimates, they might jump an additional 10 percent in 2010 — though for now, the council will only vote on 2009 rates.

Garbage rates are incorporated into the property tax roll for most of the city's 7,000 or so single-family residences, while commercial and multi-unit residences are billed quarterly,

according to city staff.

Building fees

It is unclear how the city's plan to assess building fees based on the cost to the city to provide building services — rather than the value of the project — will affect construction projects.

While Menlo Park might have been charging some builders more than it cost the city to check plans and issue permits, that doesn't mean the city should fear lawsuits from builders, City Attorney Bill McClure said. Many cities charge based on the value of the project, a strategy that "has been upheld by courts as a reasonable good faith method of charging fees," he wrote in an e-mail to *The Almanac*.

The current system has made it difficult for the city to prepare a budget for the planning department, according to Finance Director Carol Augustine.

Child care

Four months after the council approved a 5 percent increase in fees for preschoolers and toddlers, it will vote on an additional 2 percent rate hike — a proposal likely to aggravate parents, who argue that the center could be run more efficiently.

A majority of council members seemed to favor a 7 percent jump when discussing the issue during a November meeting, but decided instead upon a more gradual 5 percent hike.

The council has charged a commission with the task of evaluating how to reduce the city's \$360,000-plus subsidization of the center.

The meeting is set to begin at 7 p.m. in the council chambers, in the Civic Center complex between Laurel and Alma streets. ■

City may change the way it calculates building fees.

Council may OK \$18.8 million in projects

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

■ MENLO PARK

The city of Menlo Park is looking to winnow a projected \$2 million deficit, but city officials don't seem inclined to do it by delaying capital improvement projects.

The City Council looks poised to approve a series of projects for the fiscal year beginning July 1, including \$2 million in infrastructure spending from the city's capital improvement fund.

Though the council decided to hold off on several major infrastructure projects in a scramble to narrow a budget deficit for the current fiscal year, a majority of council members seem to agree with City Manager Glen Rojas' assessment that the city shouldn't put off those projects in order to weather a tough economic climate.

The capital improvement fund is separate from the general operating fund, and does not directly affect that fund's budget. But the city backs infrastructure projects indirectly through a transfer from the general fund.

The council looks set to sign off on spending \$18.8 million in all for 24 projects at its meeting on Tuesday, March 24. The bulk of the money — \$17.2 million — would go toward four major efforts: the construction of a new gymnasium at Burgess Park, street resurfacing, and a new water pump station in Sharon Heights.

Most of the funding would come from purses that don't contribute to the city's ongoing budget operations, such as bond measures, water usage rates, state redevelopment funds, and cash for mitigation efforts from development projects. A total of \$100,000 would come from the city's

general fund.

A majority of council members asked city staff to tack on four projects to the 20 recommended by City Manager Glen Rojas. New restrictions on smoking, a project to maintain street trees that are in bad health, sidewalk design for Santa Cruz Avenue, and consideration of a bike lane on Middle Avenue are in.

The city also plans to refurbish the gym floor at the Onetta Harris community center, a project it had delayed. But improvements to the library

The projects include a new gym at Burgess Park and a renovation of Kelly Park.

Web site would be sidelined for at least another year.

A project to remove and replace dying street trees would be discontinued, as would a program to buy carbon-emission offsets through PG&E.

Work would continue on 39 projects that had been funded in previous years.

Too many projects?

While a majority of council members said they were satisfied with the projects recommended by city staff, Councilman John Boyle argued that they should have been more cautious in approving projects. The economy is shaky, he said, and he is concerned that some of the city's dozen funds won't be "replenished" at their regular rate. Besides, the city's practice of paying for long-term projects out of one fiscal year's budget is imprecise, and creates unrealistic expectations.

"We need to look at the list and say, 'Which of these projects need to be done?'" Mr. Boyle said at the meeting. "I'd love to see us do all of them, but I don't believe they all need to be done."

Public Works Director Kent Steffens said that many of the projects are, in fact, urgent. The city is \$15 million behind in street resurfacing, the Sharon Heights pump station is 40 years old, and the city's water supply is being threatened by an aging roof, he said. He argued that delaying those projects would only cost the city more in the long term, and might become safety hazards.

The city should think twice about more routine maintenance projects, Mr. Boyle said, such as \$25,000 in repairs to a fence in the Civic Center, and \$175,000 to keep up city buildings. But his fellow council members were apparently swayed by Mr. Steffens' warning about the danger of delaying such projects.

"I am pretty well satisfied that staff is in a strong leading position on everything we do regarding projects," said Councilman Andy Cohen.

The city has a "fiduciary responsibility" to complete many of the projects funded by bond measures or rates; the money is there to be spent, Councilwoman Kelly Ferguson said in an interview.

But "it's still money," Mr. Boyle said. "In a tough time, we need to be a little more cautious about what we commit to, and the expectations we set."

The project list the council will vote on March 24 is the first phase in the budgeting process. It will be able to amend the list when it makes its final decision on the 2009-2010 budget.

The meeting will begin at 7 p.m. in the council chambers in the Civic Center complex. ■

Unlocked vehicles targeted in Atherton

Residents of Atherton's Lindenwood neighborhood reported 11 unauthorized entries into mostly unlocked vehicles last week.

The thief or thieves got away with an Apple iPod, coins, battery recharging devices and DVDs, all thefts reported in the Atherton Police Department's crime log for Monday, March 16.

Three incidents were reported in the 200 block of Catalpa Drive, five in the 300 block of Greenoaks Drive, and one each in the first blocks of Linden Avenue and Flood Circle and the 200 block of

Oak Grove Avenue.

The incidents were reported between 7:12 a.m. to 11:19 a.m., implying that they occurred during the previous night.

One owner found his registration card on the ground beside his silver Mercedes. In another case, someone attempted to steal a "running machine" from a garage; the entry into the garage classifies this incident as a burglary.

No forcible entries were reported, and several vehicles showed signs of having been rummaged through with nothing stolen.

Public meeting Wednesday on bike/pedestrian bridge

Menlo Park residents can weigh in Wednesday on design options for a rebuilt U.S. 101 bike/pedestrian overpass at Ringwood Avenue.

The meeting is set to begin at 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 25, in the Senior Center at the end of Terminal Avenue in east Menlo Park.

The new overpass will be built in the same place as the 40-year-old bridge that's there now. Caltrans has said that a new bridge is needed to accommo-

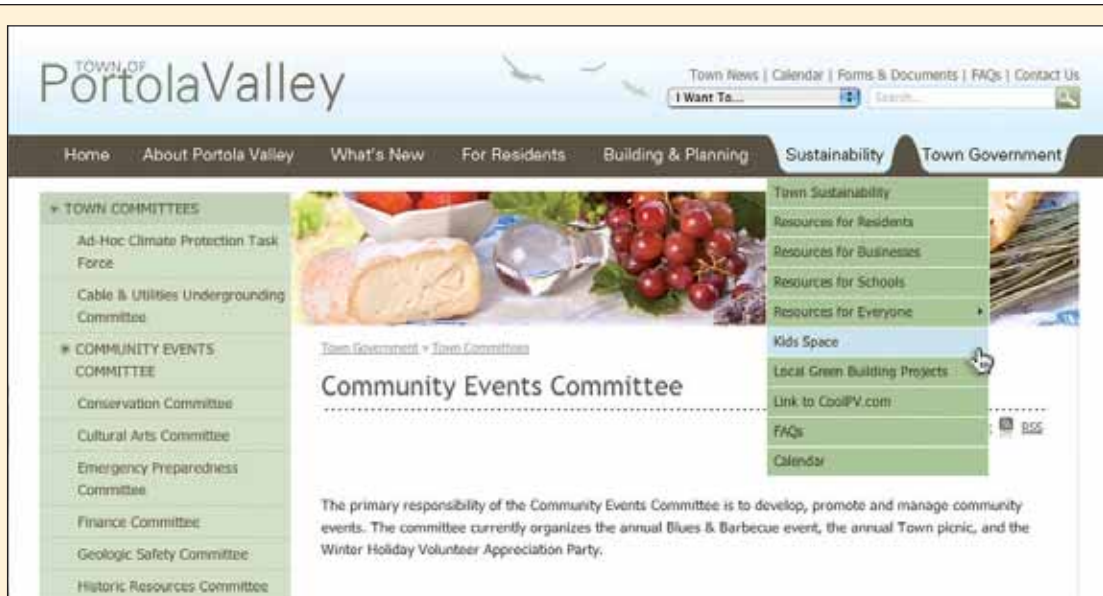
date additional freeway lanes, and to allow greater access for people with disabilities.

Some residents who live near the bridge said they hadn't been notified about the design meetings, the first of which took place March 19. Transportation Manager Chip Taylor said the city had sent fliers to a wide swath of residents in early March, but that it mailed out a second set of notices on March 20, in case people didn't receive the first one.

Mr. Taylor said the ramps leading to the bridge will be lengthened as part of the new design, and that "we wanted to make sure the community had an opportunity to weigh in on what it looks like." Caltrans is in the beginning design stages, he said.

The City Council approved a plan for the new bridge in late 2007. Councilman Andy Cohen voted against a rebuilt bridge,

See **BRIDGE**, page 20



The new site is easy on the eyes. Tranquil colors are everywhere, as are allusions to spaciousness.

New Web site better match for 'green' town

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

In a game of word association, the response "dowdy" doesn't really fit with the words "Portola Valley," "Secluded" maybe, or "exclusive" or "wooded," or "green" for regular readers of The Almanac's coverage of the town's many environmental initiatives.

But the "d" word could have applied to Portola Valley's Web site, launched in 2002, at least until the afternoon of Feb. 26, 2009, when the town's redesigned site went live.

Where the old site took visitors from page to page via logic and mouse clicks, the new one flows. It's new, it's improved, and it can be found at www.portolavalley.net.

First, the new site is easy on the eyes. Tranquil colors are everywhere, as are allusions to spaciousness. Silhouettes of soaring raptors grace the top edge, while along the bottom are silhouetted figures enjoying open space. A slide show of outdoor scenes has top billing on a home page that includes permanent slots for news and upcoming events.

Space is abundant between lines of text, menu items and at the margins. A little touch of magic: menus pop down when the mouse moves over tag words such as What's New, For Residents, and Sustainability.

The design cost the town about \$70,000 and was a collaboration, said Town Manager Angela Howard, between Oakland-based Two Fish West and Vision Internet, a Santa Monica company that specializes in creating government Web sites.

The cyber landscape is new, and that can be disorienting for a while. The site has many entry points, but it may not be obvious how to retrace your steps. The answer: look near the top of a page for a clickable return path.

Appearances aside, the practical elements include a news section that is tunable. You can choose to focus on news concerning deliberative bodies in town government, for example, or sustainability, or building and planning. The calendar focus is similarly adjustable, and there

is room for more categories, Stacie Nerdahl, the town's webmaster, said.

Supplementing the calendar are notices by which residents subscribe and receive e-mail messages concerning selected government meetings, including minutes and agendas, and event categories such as holidays and classes. The classes pages will have instructor biographies, Ms. Nerdahl said.

The individual Web pages for local government include dates of future meetings, and the pages for volunteer committees reportedly will be open to some level of customizing.

For the general public, the site is interactive in other ways. Users can report potholes, reserve library books, send the town feedback — such messages become public documents — and commend someone in writing.

It's still a bit old-fashioned, however, when it comes to reserving a recreational field or activity room. A form must be printed out and either mailed in or hand delivered. Seeing a room's dimensions in person is good practice for people planning to use it, said Town Hall

Office Assistant Cindy Rodas.

As a community hub, the Web site includes links to local schools, in-town forums and businesses. For information on living a greener lifestyle, the Sustainability menu offers local and regional connection points, including one to CoolPV.com, the site for the town's ad hoc committee on climate protection.

The sometimes contentious business of designing, planning and building a home has its own set of entries, including lists of frequently asked questions.

Not every feature was up and running at the time The Almanac went to press. The general plan, for example, has space reserved but no links yet.

The history pages include a dateline describing the Town Center, and four segments of video documenting the Town Center's latest evolution. Town Historian Nancy Lund said via e-mail that plans for the pages include historic Portola Valley photographs, a "great many" of which are already digitized. ■

Appearances aside, the practical elements include a news section that is tunable. You can choose to focus on news concerning deliberative bodies in town government, for example, or sustainability, or building and planning.

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FREE Introductory evening, RSVP NOW as space is limited Monday, April 20 from 7 – 9 p.m.
1023 Corporation Way, Palo Alto

For more details visit us online at www.exploringsenseofplace.org.
To RSVP, call 650-938-9300 ext 12 or email jcronin@exploringsenseofplace.org



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Diagnosed at age 12 with a rare and rapidly growing tumor in her lower leg, Katie came to Lucile Packard Children's Hospital for life-saving care. But it wouldn't be easy. The only treatment that could beat Katie's cancer was chemotherapy and amputation. The oncology team at Packard Children's got to know Katie well and provided specialized care on par with her spirit. This focused, multidisciplinary support helped Katie achieve a clean bill of health and get back to the active lifestyle she loves.

During her stay at Packard Children's, Katie made new friends and set her sights on a future profession as an oncology nurse. And from what we've seen, she's got the drive to achieve anything she puts her mind to. Visit www.lpch.org for more information.

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Lucile Packard
Children's Hospital
AT STANFORD





Photo by Barbara Wood

The mother and daughter segment is always a highlight of Woodside High's annual Athletic Boosters' Club Fashion Show (here featuring teacher Lisa Camera with daughter Angie Pomi in 2007).

Fashion show raises funds for WHS sports programs

By Barbara Wood
Special to The Almanac

■ SCHOOLS

Woodside High School seniors, plus parents, school staff and alumni, will become fashion models for a day on Saturday, March 28, as they strut their stuff in the school's Performing Arts Center to raise money for the school's athletic programs.

Two showings, at noon with a lunch before the show and at 5 pm, are planned. Tickets are \$20 for the lunch show and \$15 for the evening event, with students and Woodside High staff discounted to \$10 for the evening show.

The fashion show, which this year is themed "Class of 2009 Travels through Time," showcases the talent, energy and creativity of the senior class. Students, including those representing each school sport, choreograph their own numbers and some students provide live musical entertainment.

Featured entertainers include senior members of

the school Dance Team, Jordan Fox, Cameron Stuckey and Daniel Larsen, Michelle Quezada and Adrian Johnson, with a special guest appearance by Peter Girardot, father of a senior student.

In celebration of the 50th anniversary of Woodside High, alumni will also model this year.

Money raised by the fashion show funds bus transportation, uniforms, a trainer, safety gear, equipment, and scholarships for student athletes. It is the primary fundraiser for the WHS Booster Club.

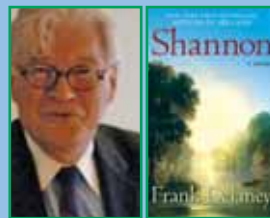
Liz Dorstewitz is the fashion show chair, assisted by Tina Patrick, Donna Losey, Diane Carr, Linda Drey-Nightingale, Karen Peterson and Bunny Weiss.

Tickets are \$20 for the lunch show and \$15 general and \$10 seniors and students for the evening show, and may be purchased by calling 367-9750, ext. 4851. Seats are assigned and may sell out. ■

KEPLER'S FEATURED AUTHORS IN APRIL

Frank Delaney
Shannon: A Novel
Wednesday, April 8,
7:30 p.m.

An unforgettable account of salvation, belief, and the healing power of discovering one's roots.



Tina Seelig
What I Wish I Knew When I Was 20: A Crash Course on Making Your Place in the World
Friday, April 17,
7:30 p.m.

A great guide to moving in more exciting, creative, and fulfilling directions, written by a person who is an expert at doing so.



Don't miss these other exciting author events!

Antoinette May
The Sacred Well

Thursday, April 2, 7:30 p.m.

A modern American journalist searches for what her counterpart found in 1923 in the Yucatan.



Brian Eule

Match Day: One Day and One Dramatic Year in the Lives of Three New Doctors

Tuesday, April 7, 7:30 p.m.

Compelling tale about the real-world rigor of residency training.



Alva Noë

Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness

Thursday, April 16, 7:30 p.m.

UC-Berkeley philosopher challenges the assumptions underlying neuroscientific studies of consciousness.

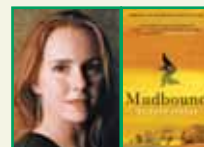


Hillary Jordan

Mudbound: A Novel

Monday, April 20, 7:30 p.m.

A beautiful debut and superbly rendered depiction of the fury and terror wrought by racism.



Nafisa Haji

The Writing on My Forehead: A Novel

Tuesday, April 21, 7:30 p.m.

An intricate story that connects a young woman and her family over continents and through generations.



Edith Gelles

Abigail & John: Portrait of a Marriage

Wednesday, April 22, 7:30 p.m.

The first dual biography of America's original 'power couple.'



Geoff Dyer

Jeff in Venice, Death in Varanasi

Friday, April 24, 7:30 p.m.

Another wildly original novel from this fearless and funny writer.



Thrity Umrigar

The Weight of Heaven: A Novel

Monday, April 27, 7:30 p.m.

From the bestselling author of *The Space Between Us*, an emotionally charged story of life, death, despair, and hope.



Susan Linn

The Case for Make-Believe: Saving Play in a Commercialized World

Tuesday, April 28, 10:30 a.m.

Lays out the inextricable links between play, creativity, and health, showing us why we need to protect our children from corporations that aim to limit their imaginations.

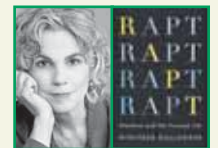


Winifred Gallagher

Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life

Tuesday, April 28, 7:30 p.m.

Acclaimed behavioral science writer argues that the quality of your life largely depends on what you choose to pay attention to and how.

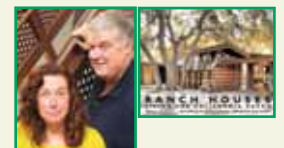


David Weingarten and Lucia Howard

Ranch Houses: Living the California Dream

Wednesday, April 29,
7:30 p.m.

An essential resource for architects, home owners, and all those who aspire to the indoor/outdoor lifestyle that is the California Dream.



Special Youth Event!

Book Signing with Nancy Redd

Body Drama

Tuesday, April 21st,
4:00 p.m.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS A MEET AND CHAT BOOK-SIGNING AND THERE WILL NOT BE A FORMAL PRESENTATION.

Nancy dares to empower a new generation of women with the priceless gift of self-knowledge.



Story Times

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

April 5th -

Story Time with
Caren McCormack

Growing up in Texas, Caren watched many friends celebrate their quinceañeras (15th birthday parties). This childhood experience inspired the story of young Lolo.



April 12th -

Ladybug Story Time

Tune in for the further adventures of Ladybug Girl and the introduction of her new sidekick, Bumblebee Boy.



April 19th -

Poetry Story Time

It's National Poetry Month! Join us as we read a selection of well-loved children's poems and write a few poems of our own.



April 26th -

Story Time with
Tony Gemignani

Tony and the Pizza Champions

This inside look into the acrobatic art of pizza tossing is sure to please pizza lovers of all ages. Don't miss Tony's live pizza-tossing demonstration after the reading!



Our event program is updated often. Please visit keplers.com for current information. All events are free at Kepler's unless otherwise noted.

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- CAHSAH California Association for Health Services at Home
- NPDA National Private Duty Association
- DCPA Dementia Care Professionals of America

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How to recognize signs that your parents may need your help!

According to the Census Bureau the fastest growing population is 85 years old and older. As a result, many of us find ourselves in the “sandwich generation”, that is, children who may need to take a more active role in the care of their parents.

Do you know potential signs? Do you have a plan?

THE FOLLOWING BEHAVIORS ARE POTENTIAL AREAS OF CONCERN:

- Forgetting to take medications
- Falling
- Getting lost
- Forgetting appointments
- Changes in personal hygiene
- Withdrawing socially
- Loss of vitality
- Excessive anxiousness
- Telling the same stories over and over again
- Difficulty sleeping

What can you do?

Scott Stanley, President of Caring Hands Caregivers, says, “Most relatives of the elderly have no idea the amount of resources available to aid them in developing a customized care plan for their loved one. We encourage people to develop a relationship with a trusted resource in the industry before there is a problem.”

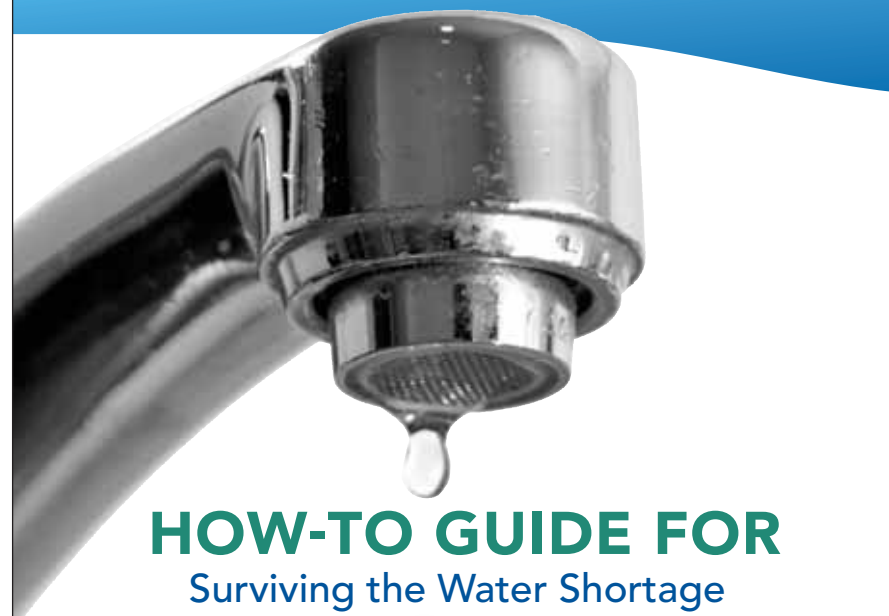
“We are a small agency and we focus on more complex cases and live-in care. We provide constant support with key industry experts, allowing for optimal customized care”, Stanley states. “Start with a phone call to us and, based on your needs, if we can’t help you, we’ll get you pointed in the right direction.”

In addition, get an assessment by a Care Manager. They are well-connected and a great source of information.

Make sure you have a conversation with your loved ones in regards to their health directives. Document these wishes and post in a place where Emergency Medical Staff would have easy access.

Planning and education are imperative for the smoothest transitions!

Take the 20-Gallon Challenge



HOW-TO GUIDE FOR Surviving the Water Shortage

Are you worried about dry weather conditions, but unsure about ways to reduce your family’s water use? We can help!

With the state of California in its third dry year and the Governor declaring a drought, some water utilities have already implemented mandatory reductions. Beginning March 2009, the City of Palo Alto is asking you to voluntarily reduce your water use by a minimum of 10%. As the water supply situation unfolds this spring, look for regular drought updates and information about possible mandatory restrictions at www.cityofpaloalto.org/resiwater

Help Us Help You Save

Sign up for a free Water-Wise House call. We will send a technician to your home to review your indoor and outdoor water use patterns, replace inefficient fixtures like showerheads and faucet aerators and make water-wise recommendations. To schedule your appointment, call (800) 548-1882.

The CHALLENGE calls for a reduction of water use by 20 gallons per person, per day.

Here are some tips to help you reduce your water usage:

TIP	WATER SAVED
Run your dishwasher only when full.	2 to 4 gallons each load
Turn off water when brushing teeth or rinsing dishes.	2 to 2.5 gallons every minute
Shorten showers.	2.5 gallons per minute
Fill the bathtub only half full.	15 to 25 gallons each bath
Wash only full loads of clothes.	15 to 50 gallons per load For even more savings, purchase a high-efficiency clothes washer and save 35 gallons per load AND get a rebate. Visit www.waterenergysavings.com for more information.
While working in your yard, do not use water as a broom or leave the hose unattended.	10–25 gallons per minute
Repair broken or leaky sprinkler heads and adjust sprinklers to prevent overspray and run-off.	15 to 25 gallons per day per leak or overspray Receive a rebate up to \$1,000 for improving your irrigation system. Visit www.valleywater.org to find out more.
Add 2 to 3 inches of mulch around trees and plants to reduce the amount of water needed.	20 to 30 gallons per day
Water your lawn only when the top one inch of soil is dry. For more savings, replace your lawn with an attractive drought tolerant and bay-friendly landscape.	Up to 60 gallons of water per day Beautify your yard and you may qualify for a Water-Efficient Landscape Rebate. Call (866) 685-2322 for more information.

For more information on water saving programs and rebates in Palo Alto, call (650) 329-2241 or visit us on the web at www.cityofpaloalto.org/resiwater
650.329.2241

REFINISH YOUR DECK

From Truevalue.com courtesy of Thompson’s WaterSeal

Your deck or porch is constantly beaten on by the sun, rain and snow. This abuse causes the old finish to come off and makes the wood look old and weathered, even if it is new. After a while the wood has no protection so it starts absorbing the rain and blisters in the sun. This causes rotting and splitting of the boards that will have to be replaced. To prevent this from happening, and to revitalize the look of the wood, it is necessary to refinish the deck, which is easy to do.

deck or porch, so it is important that you protect yourself. Rubber boots or galoshes protect your feet but it is also important to protect your eyes and hands. This can be done with goggles and rubber gloves. Don’t do this project if there are little kids or pets around because you have to leave the cleaner on the deck or porch for a while.

MATERIALS CHECKLIST

- Plastic tarps (to cover your plants around the deck)
- Goggles
- Rubber gloves
- Rubber boots
- Thompson’s WaterSeal Deck Wash
- Hose
- Thompson’s WaterSeal Semi Transparent Stain
- Paint roller
- Roller sleeve with 3/8” nap
- Roller extension handle
- Paint tray
- Tray liner

Test Your Deck
 How can you tell if you need to refinish? Do this simple test. Drip drops of water onto the deck or porch. If the water beads on the surface, the deck is still protected and you don’t have to refinish. If any of the drops soak into the wood, it means the old finish has worn away leaving the wood unprotected. Refinishing is necessary.

If your deck or porch looks old and dirty but passed the water drop test, try cleaning it with a mild bleach solution to kill the mildew build-up. This might be all that is needed to clean and brighten your deck or porch. If this doesn’t work and you really don’t like the look, refinish it. Since the old finish hasn’t been fully worn away, it takes longer to strip. Caution: Protect Yourself! You use chemicals to strip the

Step 1. Protect Plants
 Soak any plants that are around the deck or porch with water and then cover them with plastic tarps. If you soak the plants, any deck cleaner that gets under the tarps is diluted by the water before it touches the plants.

Step 2. Strip Deck or Porch
 Make sure that you are wearing the goggles, gloves and boots to protect yourself. Apply the Thompson’s deck cleaner to the deck. Follow the instructions on how to apply it and how long to leave it on. Rinse off the deck cleaner with the hose. Use a lot of water and saturate the deck and the surrounding covered plants. This dilutes the deck cleaner so it won’t harm the grass. Wash off the plastic tarps too. Let the deck dry and do the water test again. If the water drop beads, you have to do another round of deck cleaner. If the drop soaks into the wood, all the old finish is removed. The deck can be stained.

Step 3. Stain Deck or Porch
 To apply Thompson’s semi-transparent stain use a paint roller with roller sleeve. Add the extension handle so you won’t have to bend down. Pour some stain into the lined tray and coat a small area. Do a small area because you want to apply the second coat while the first coat is still wet. Repeat until the entire deck is stained with two coats. Let dry.

Step 4. Easy Cleanup
 Rinse the plastic tarps one more time to make sure all the deck cleaner is off. Follow the deck cleaner’s instructions on how to store it. Follow the stain’s instructions on how to dispose of the roller sleeve and tray liner.

Step 5. Maintain Your Deck
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New math books, budget cuts on MP school board agenda

A new math curriculum and potential budget cuts are the topic of a special Menlo Park City School District board meeting, beginning at 6 p.m. Tuesday, March 24.

The "California Everyday Mathematics" series was unanimously approved by the school board in December. Adoption of the curriculum has proved controversial in some districts, although a textbook selection committee recently recommended its adop-

tion in the Palo Alto Unified School District.

In a special study session, the district's principals and assistant superintendent will discuss the new math program, which will go into effect in the fall.

An update on proposed budget cuts for the new school year is also on the agenda.

The meeting will be held in the board room at the district office, 181 Encinal Ave. in Atherton.

Shorter meetings, but more of them?

The Atherton City Council meeting on March 18 was expected to last at least five hours, but a surprise motion by Councilman Jim Dobbie cut it short.

The monthly meeting, which began at 7 p.m., was optimistically expected to wrap up at midnight, according to the agenda. But just as the meeting got under way, Mr. Dobbie made a motion requesting that the meeting adjourn at 10:15 p.m., no matter what.

Mr. Dobbie said that late night meetings discourage public participation.

The motion passed on a 4-1 vote, with Charles Marsala opposed.

Unfortunately, the time constraint didn't seem to make the meeting any more efficient. One of the key items on the agenda, the town's midyear budget adjustment, which includes a number of budget cuts, didn't get heard.

Instead, a special meeting will be scheduled to hear the remaining eight agenda items, and one resident complained that she wasted her time waiting for an agenda item that wasn't heard.

However, one veteran council-watcher expressed enthusiasm for the idea of getting home early.

"I've been coming to meetings for many, many years, and I've never seen a motion affect the town more than this one did tonight. I think it's really great," said Atherton resident John Ruggeiro, calling Mr. Dobbie's motion "earth-shaking."

Making the early departure time permanent will require a separate action by the council, however, as Mr. Dobbie's motion only affected the March 18 meeting.

Warning siren for Walsh Road

Residents of Atherton's Walsh Road neighborhood have been agitating vociferously for an emergency evacuation plan. The hilly rural area, between Alameda de las Pulgas and Interstate 280, has only one point of egress and residents worry that a wild-

ATHERTON

fire or other emergency could leave them trapped.

The Atherton City Council, at its March 18 meeting, approved \$5,500 in additional funding for an emergency warning siren on the California Water Service Co.'s Bear Gulch reservoir property near the center of the neighborhood. It won't add an exit, but it will ensure that residents are alerted to emergencies so they can prepare to evacuate.

"I don't think there's a higher use of taxpayer money than to save lives," said Councilwoman Kathy McKeithen.

The bill for the siren — expected to cost less than \$30,000 — is being split between the town, the Menlo Park Fire Protection District and Cal Water. The water agency and the fire district pitched in \$10,000 each. Atherton's total contribution comes to \$14,400 and includes funding for two caches of disaster supplies.

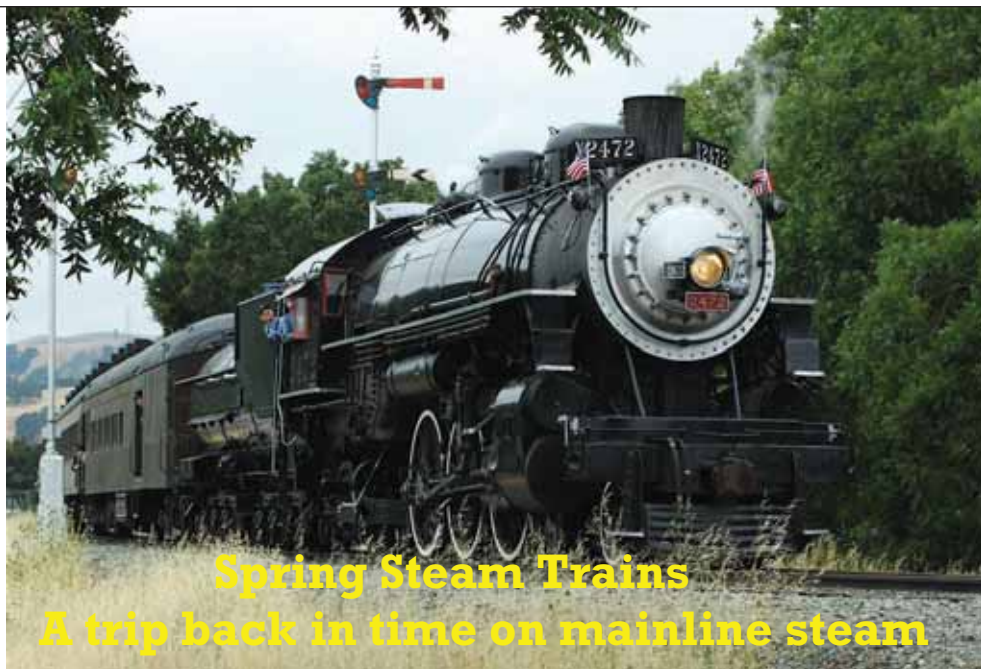
"We want to get something in place before the fire season starts," said fire district Chief Harold Schapelhouman. "We have a moderate fire problem up there, but it's the highest (fire hazard) level you have in town."

A pricey plan to create a new emergency evacuation route through the Cal Water property and connecting to Moore Road in Woodside is still pending.

How do you like your tax?

Atherton's likely voters may be getting a phone call from opinion pollsters Godbe Research. On March 18, the Atherton City Council approved a \$19,550 contract with Godbe to survey voters about the town's special parcel tax.

Currently, the parcel tax brings in about \$1.8 million annually, but it expires next June. Residents will be queried on their preference for renewing the parcel tax or replacing it with a utility user tax or a general tax.



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Noise policies are topic for hearing and vote

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

■ PORTOLA VALLEY

Cities and towns have policies, as established in their general plans, and laws (ordinances) that depend on those policies as a framework.

The Town Council of Portola Valley will consider an update to its policies on noise — the noise chapter in the town's general plan — with a public hearing and a vote on Wednesday, March 25. The meeting begins at 8 p.m. in the Community Hall at 765 Portola Road.

(It so happens that Portola Valley is also in a community discussion on an update to its noise ordinance. Some key issues there include a leaf-blower ban on Sundays, dogs that won't stop barking, and weekend hours for noisy activities like the running of electric or gas-powered saws.)

The council also plans to

discuss amending the town's building code to include the state's fire-resistance regulations, known as Chapter 7A, which include rules for ignition-resistant roofs, attic vents, decks, windows and landscaping.

The Woodside Town Council recently adopted 7A, but left out the landscaping provisions pending more deliberation. The town is relying on routine wild-fire hazard vegetation surveys by the Woodside Fire Protection District, which also serves Portola Valley.

The Portola Valley council may also address "meeting management and protocol to improve communications at council meetings," a likely reference to raised voices, principally from Councilmember Richard Merk, that have punctuated several recent council discussions.

Middle school students are taking roles in the Sacred Heart School's presentation of "Cats." Among them are, front row, from left: Rachel Hutton and Payton Smith; back row, Courtney Schrier, Malea Lamb Hall and Brooke Warren.



Sacred Heart Schools stage the musical, 'Cats'

Students in grades 6-8 at Sacred Heart Schools in Atherton will present "Cats" at 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday, March 27-28, and 2 p.m. Sunday, March 29, in the Connolly Theater, Campbell Center for the Performing Arts, on the

school's Atherton campus.

Rachel Prouty is the drama director. Sacred Heart students will assist in makeup and costume design.

Since "Cats" opened in London in 1981, it has been staged around the world. The plot is

based on T.S. Eliot's "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats." The music is by Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Tickets for "Cats" are \$12 for adults and \$8 for students. To reserve, call 322-9931.

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Split council says no to looser rules for small lots

By Andrea Gemmet

Almanac Staff Writer

■ ATHERTON

In Atherton, where the standard lot size is a generous acre, residents of one of the town's small pockets of smaller lots — Parker Avenue, a dead-end street off Stockbridge Avenue — are deeply divided.

Some residents want new zoning rules that would allow them to build bigger houses and cover more of their lots. Others like the neighborhood just the way it is.

The debate bubbled over at the Atherton council meeting on March 18, as a contingent of

Parker Avenue residents asked the council to consider changing the street's zoning.

The council, on a 3-2 vote, with Charles Marsala and

Elizabeth Lewis in the minority, declined to pursue the rezoning.

Proponents argued that in several other parts of town, smaller lots are zoned RI-B, a designation that gives owners flexibility to build on more of their property.

Lots of 0.18 acre shouldn't be held to the same restrictions as one-acre lots, said Colleen Anderson, a Parker resident. People have to park on the street because there's no room for garages under the current regulations, she told the council.

"Many people are unable to remain due to inadequate living space for growing families," said Parker Avenue resident Rachel Rosati Warner. "We may have to move."

Other residents, however, scoffed at the idea that the homes were so small that growing families had to move away.

The crowd in the council chambers erupted in laughter when Parker resident Duane Wadsworth asserted that, "One hundred percent of children raised (on Parker) are free of large-house deficit syndrome."

"Anyone who needs more (space) than that can jolly well

move elsewhere," said Dick Pike, a Parker resident. "Please, no more attempts to rezone Parker."

However, after the meeting, Ms. Anderson promised that the rezoning issue would be back.

"I'd like to get people together to put it on the ballot so Atherton can decide, and take it out of the council's hands, because I can't understand why they wouldn't even look at it," she told *The Almanac*.

A number of residents who live on adjacent streets that border

Parker Avenue lots spoke at the meeting to object to rezoning, saying they would be adversely impacted.

Because property owners on Parker Avenue are so deeply divided,

town staff said that any rezoning effort would have to be initiated by the City Council and the estimated \$7,000-to-\$10,000 cost would be borne by the town.

Spending another \$10,000 when town officials have been feverishly making budget cuts to make up for a projected \$2 million revenue shortfall seemed to be reason enough for Mayor Jerry Carlson to reject the idea.

"I'm deeply concerned by the divisiveness," Mr. Carlson said. "I would not like to see the town put out money on this at this time."

Councilwoman Elizabeth Lewis said she'd like to see the issue go before the town's general plan committee to see if a compromise between the neighbors could be reached. Charles Marsala said he thought the issue deserved more study.

Councilwoman Kathy McKeithen said she was afraid that if the council initiated the rezoning it would open the floodgates to requests for spot zoning.

"Parker is a special community, I think in large part because of our general plan," she said. "You are a special group of people. I hope you can work out your differences." ■

Councilwoman Kathy McKeithen said she was afraid that rezoning would open the floodgates to requests for spot zoning.

New teen shelter opens its doors

After 57 years, San Mateo County's Children's Receiving Home, a shelter for teens at risk of abuse, is moving to a new facility on the Youth Services Center campus at 31 Tower Road in San Mateo.

The new 9,000 square foot home is licensed for 12 residents. It has a library, on-site counsel-

ing rooms, family visiting room, and a large kitchen. Each of the bedrooms has been decorated by local faith-based groups. There is also space for outdoor activities.

The Children's Receiving Home provides a refuge for children who, for safety reasons, are unable to remain with their families.



Celebrating their victory are members of the Menlo-Atherton High School frosh-soph boys basketball team.

Basketball: M-A frosh-soph boys take title

The Menlo-Atherton High School frosh-soph boys basketball team clinched first place in the Peninsula Athletic (PAL) League Southern Division for the second year in a row on Feb. 12.

The M-A Bears compiled a league record of 7-1, beating the Woodside High Wildcats 44-30

in the final game of the season.

The M-A Bears also took the Bear Classic earlier this year, defeating the Palo Alto Vikings in the championship game 37-35.

The team members are Christian Perkins, Jesse Perkins, Miles Weiss, Walbank Mahon-

ey, Zach Cantu, Michael Culhane, McKinley Mathon, Chase Warren, Chris, Bill Thomsen and Coach Tino Mendoza. Not shown in the picture: Wes Haggman and Stoss Dela Morte).

Story submitted by Tarry Perkins.

Creek flood-control effort gets federal aid

■ Army Corps gets \$335,000 to study improvements to San Francisquito Creek; local officials contemplate a quicker fix.

By Gennady Sheyner

Palo Alto Weekly

A regional effort to tame the San Francisquito Creek received a boost March 11 when President Barack Obama signed the omnibus spending bill, which includes \$335,000 for the project.

But it will be at least two years before any significant flood-control measures are put in place, officials from the San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority (SFC JPA) said at a community meeting March 12.

JPA Executive Director Len Materman said the federal money will help fund a feasibility study by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which seeks to protect the communities flanking the creek from a 100-year flood. The study began in 2005 but has slowed down, largely because of a funding shortage. The Army Corps didn't receive any federal money last year for the project.

Mr. Materman said the agency hopes to get another \$700,000 for the Army Corps study in next year's spending bill.

"We are pretty determined to raise the profile of this project and get it moving," he told about 80 residents gathered in the Palo Alto City Hall. "Every opportunity we have, we meet with federal officials."

Meanwhile, the creek authority, which consists of representatives from Menlo Park, Palo Alto, East

Palo Alto, the Santa Clara Valley Water District and the San Mateo County Flood Control District, is working on a plan to implement near-term measures to calm the volatile creek. Mr. Materman said the agency hopes to have the smaller-scale improvements in place by summer of 2012.

The agency hired a consultant last month to analyze the upstream area and identify potential sites for detaining water during floods. The consultant will also analyze three proposed alternatives in the vulnerable downstream area, where the creek capacity is smallest and where the flooding danger is greatest.

The downstream options include creating a new channel that would divert water across the Palo Alto Municipal Golf Course, widening the mouth of the creek near the Baylands and removing a levy between the creek and the Baylands.

Strengthening flood control around the creek emerged as a priority in 1998, when a storm pushed water from the creek over the banks, causing \$28 million in flood damage. Since then, residents in the three cities around the creek's most flood-prone sections have become impatient because of the lack of progress.

"Many of us share frustration over the years of delay," said Karen White, president of the Duveneck/St. Francis Neighborhood Asso-

ciation and one of the organizers of the meeting.

The community groups recently launched a Web site (www.threeforthecreek.com) to raise awareness about the effort to enhance flood-control along the San Francisquito.

Meanwhile, members of the JPA Board of Directors, which includes mayors of East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Palo Alto, are lobbying federal officials for more money. Mr. Materman said the agency has enough to pay for one near-term improvement but would need additional resources for a more comprehensive fix.

Menlo Park Mayor Heyward Robinson said assistance from the federal government will be crucial.

"We're doing a lot locally," he said. "The federal government will have to be a major partner to get a solution."

Mr. Robinson was joined at the meeting by Palo Alto Mayor Peter Dreke and East Palo Alto Mayor Ruben Abrica.

Mr. Abrica, whose city has the most to lose from a major flood, said immediate improvements are urgently needed.

"I know my colleagues, Peter and Heyward, the three of us, have been putting a lot of effort in letting all levels of government know that we really are in need of some resources," he said. "We need to do something quickly as we're building a big project down the line." ■

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Community

NEWS OF LOCAL PEOPLE AND EVENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

Filoli holds its 'Spring Fling' March 28

Filoli, now open after its winter hiatus, is celebrating the season with "Spring Fling" from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Saturday, March 28, at the historic Woodside estate.

Many outdoor events have been scheduled for the season's first fundraiser. Members of the Peninsula Carriage Driving Club will have a horse and carriage on display. Fortis Agility Sports Training group will have their dogs navigate an obstacle course. Guide dog puppies will be on hand with their trainers. And there will be a miniature horse for petting.

Visitors will be able to wander through the gardens, which are filled with hundreds of blooming camellias, magnolias and tulips. The greenhouses will be open, and children will be able to decorate a pot and plant it in the potting shed.

The Andrew Dudnick Jazz ensemble will perform at the tennis court, while the Bay Area Showcase Choral Group strolls the property entertaining with favorite songs.



Photo by Nilda Gardon-Lindofer.

Wisteria and tulips add to the beauty of Filoli's springtime season.

Inside the mansion, volunteers have created many floral displays. A puppet show and magic show will take place in the ballroom.

Co-chairs for "Spring Fling" are Suellen Rottiers and Leslie Howard. Hundreds of Filoli's volunteers are working on the event.

Admission to "Spring Fling" is \$20 for members, \$25 for non-members, \$5 for children ages 5 to 17, and free for those under 5. Box lunches may be ordered in advance at \$16 for adults and \$10 for children. For reservations, call 364-8300, ext. 508, or go to www.filoli.org.

M-A High foundation goes online for fundraiser

By Kelly Todd

M-A High staff

Menlo-Atherton's Foundation for the Future is holding its second "M-A on eBay" auction March 22-29. Up for bid are vacation homes, parties, community events, business services and sporting opportunities, in addition to unique items offered by M-A parents and teachers.

The difference from other school auctions? Everything is

online, from the auction catalog (on www.maauction.org) to the live auction for a week on eBay.

There is no event and no cost to put on this auction — every dollar raised supports M-A students and programs through the Foundation for the Future, a fundraising organization for M-A.

The idea of a completely online auction started last year when the foundation was exploring new ways to raise funds for class size reduction, teacher development,

expanded curriculum, and critical services and programs at M-A.

Board members Trish Gump and Linda Fornaciari had been involved with the Las Lomas Education Foundation and knew people love to support a school by buying donated items at an auction. As students graduated from La Entrada, so did the items their parents regularly donated to the schools' auction.

"It felt like leaving money on the table — money that M-A could well use," remembers Trish. They and fellow board members asked friends for auction items and the auction was born.

Not wanting to put any precious resources into holding an event or paying for an online auction company, they chose to use eBay's charitable works program. Adding a catalog Web site leading bidders to eBay was the key, and the Web site was donated for the remainder of the year by local company Intuit.

"This kind of auction is more inclusive," explains Linda. "We reach more people online without an event, plus eBay is easy to use and well-known to most bidders. And we get plenty of bidding

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See AUCTION, page 19

Portola Valley entrepreneur named to POST board

Venture capitalist takes helm of POST board

Donna Dubinsky, Portola Valley resident, personal computing entrepreneur and outdoors-woman, has been appointed to the board of directors of the Peninsula Open Space Trust, a non-profit with the goal to protect "the beauty, character and diversity of the San Francisco Peninsula and Santa Cruz Mountain range."

Ms. Dubinsky is co-founder of Palm Corp., maker of the Palm Pilot personal digital assistant (PDA), Handspring Corp., maker of the Visor PDA and the Treo phone, and Menlo Park-based Numenta.

She is currently chief executive of Numenta, which is developing software algorithms based on theories of the operation of the neocortex in the human brain, according to the company Web site.

"Donna brings enormous energy and good humor to the Board along with her well-tested business savvy," POST President Audrey Rust of Atherton said. "She exudes enthusiasm and interest in our mission and will be invaluable in helping us seek new ways to reach out to supporters in Silicon Valley and beyond."

New addition to MP

Marq's in Menlo at 1143 Crane St. is the newest addition to the downtown Menlo Park restaurant scene. Billed as "a bar, a grille, and a piano," the restaurant features cuisine by Executive Chef Gary Maffia and nightly piano entertainment.

Marq's is open Tuesday through Saturday. Hours are 5 to 11 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, and 5 p.m. to midnight Friday and Saturday. The phone number is 853-1143

AUCTION

continued from page 18

frenzy without a live event."

The first year's auction raised \$50,000, but, according to Trish, "it went beyond raising funds; the auction fills a void at M-A by offering chances for parents to come together at parties, and for community members and businesses to support our school. People are very generous and seem excited to be a part of this. No one turns us down."

For more information, contact co-chair Michele Culhane or Trish Gump at mafoundation@yahoo.com with questions, or go online and view the auction catalog at www.maauction.org. ■

Ms. Dubinsky has a bachelor's degree in history from Yale University and a master's degree in business from the Harvard Business School, according to her online bio at Numenta. She is also a trustee of Yale and of the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, which was founded by her husband Len Shustek.

Ms. Dubinsky has hiked in "rugged outdoor environments," a POST statement said, including Mt. Kilimanjaro and Patagonia.



Donna Dubinsky

Woodside resident and venture capitalist Mark Wan takes on a new and different set of responsibilities with his appointment as chair of the board of directors of the Peninsula Open Space Trust.

Mr. Wan is a founding partner of Three Arch Partners in Portola Valley (in 1993). In earlier years, he helped launch and occasionally manage several health care companies, including Epocrates, Odyssey Healthcare and Perclose Medical, according to a Three Arch online biography.

"It is an interesting time to be in a leadership position, given the impact of the current economy on fund raising," he said in a POST statement, speaking of his new role.

Mr. Wan is an outdoorsman who enjoys running trails, off-road cycling, and competitive sports, the statement said.

He grew up in Southern California, where the fields of his youth are now malls and housing tracts, he said. Thus his motive for protecting open space around here, particularly in a stressed economy with even more potential open space coming on the market, he said.

"I'm concerned that our public partners are going to have more limited resources to acquire properties from POST," he said. "It means POST will have to hold and manage properties even longer now, and ongoing support from our donors will be more important than ever."



Mark Wan

"Mark clearly understands the impact our work has on the future sustainability of our region, and he knows what could happen if we let the moment pass," said POST President Audrey Rust. "At this critical time, I am heartened to know we have such an effective voice for the land guiding POST."

Mr. Wan has a bachelor's degrees in engineering and economics from Yale University, where he graduated summa cum laude and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. He also has a master's degree in business from Stanford University.

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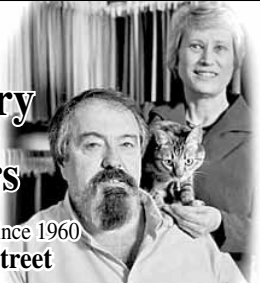
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Resident suspects mountain lion killed cat

An Emerald Hills residents says she suspects a mountain lion is responsible for the killing of her cat on Saturday.

Erin Ferguson said that she let out her cat for the first time in two months, and it was attacked and killed about 15 feet from her home around 4 a.m. Saturday, March 21. The swiftness of the attack, and the distinctive "scream" made by the predator, all point to a mountain lion, she said.

Ms. Ferguson said she doesn't want to alarm her neighbors, but she does want to let people know that a couple of simple steps can help protect their pets: keep pets in at night, and keep their pet food indoors.

Mountain lion sightings can be reported to the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office (call 911) and pet-related problems can be reported to the Peninsula Humane Society/SPCA at 340-7022.

SLAC to get \$68 million

Big science got a \$1.2 billion

Menlo mock trial team wins trip to nationals

The 19 members of Menlo School's mock trial team won a bronze medal at the state finals in Riverside March 22, and with it, a trip to the American Mock Trial competition in New Brunswick, NJ, in May.

Menlo's ersatz lawyers and witnesses finished in the top three following four rounds of competition with the top 34 teams in California at the state finals, sponsored by the Constitutional Rights Foundation.

NEWS BRIEFS

boost from the recent \$787 billion federal economic stimulus package, and there will be a local impact.

The SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory in Menlo Park is set to receive \$68 million from the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Science, said SLAC spokeswoman Melinda Lee.

She said the money will be divided among three projects:

- Speeding the assembly of the Linac Coherent Light Source, a new X-ray device that should, among other capabilities, be able to capture chemical processes in stop-motion video.

- Supporting experiments with the Facility for Advanced Accelerator Experimental Tests, or FACET, to accelerate subatomic particles over distances shorter than ever before.

- Providing funds for seismic upgrades to laboratory infrastructure, including the

Stanford Synchrotron Radiation Lightsource, recently used to beam X-rays at a 145-million-year-old fossil in hopes of finding indications of soft tissue.

SLAC is located on Sand Hill Road and is operated by Stanford University for the federal energy department's Office of Science.

Rains near last year's total

Two weeks of dry weather and the 0.4 inches of rain that fell on central Menlo Park over the weekend brought the total to 14.35 inches.

That total is less than two inches off last year's total of 16.1 inches at this time, according to resident Bill Russ, who tracks local precipitation with a rain gauge at his Cotton Street home.

The normal total for central Menlo Park for a full year — from July 1 to June 30 — is 16 to 18 inches.

The March rains signaled the end of the rains last year, Mr. Russ said.

The fictitious case they tried involved an arson fire at a religious compound.

It was a surprise finish for the Menlo team, since it had only competed once before in the state finals, said Debbe Stern, a Menlo parent. "More than half its members had never competed in mock trials before the first scrimmage in December," she said.

The team practiced nights and weekends preparing for the com-

petition, with help from Menlo teacher Dan Devitt, the team's faculty sponsor, and parent volunteers, Ms. Stern said. Local lawyers and fire marshals also lent their expertise, she said.

The mock trial program furthers an understanding of important constitutionally protected rights, as well as developing skills in logical reasoning, public speaking and knowledge about the law, according to Mr. Devitt.

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

Commercial burglary reports:

- TV stolen from dorm room after entry via window, Menlo College at 1000 El Camino Real, March 15.

- Property stolen after forced entry, Menlo College at 1000 El Camino Real, March 15.

MENLO PARK

Residential burglary reports:

- House ransacked, 800 block of Laurel Ave., March 15.

- Property stolen, 1200 block of Carlton Ave., March 14.

- Laptop computer stolen after break-in, 1100 block of Willow Road, March 17.

Commercial burglary report: \$900 in cash stolen, 600 block of Santa Cruz Ave., March 17.

Auto burglary reports:

- Window smashed and possible loss of property, 200 block of Waverley Ave., March 15.

- Window smashed, 1300 block of Mills St., March 16.

- 600 block of Sharon Park Drive, March 18.

Robbery report: Attempted strong-arm robbery by two males in their late teens, 400 block of Hamilton Ave., March 15.

Theft reports:

- Purse stolen from unlocked vehicle, 1700 block of Stanford Ave., March 14.

- Vehicle navigation unit stolen while having car washed, University Drive, March 14.

- Bicycle stolen, 700 block of Live Oak Ave., March 14.

- Vehicle navigation unit and other items stolen, first block of Willow Road, March 16.

Stolen vehicle report: 200 block of Marmona Drive, March 13.

Fraud reports:

- Two cases of identity theft, 500 block of Bay Road and 700 block of Laurel St., March 13 and 16.

- Two cases of unauthorized use of credit cards, 1200 block of Mills Court and 1100 block of Hollyburne Ave, March 18.

Child protective services reports:

- 400 block of O'Connor St., March 16.
- 1400 block of San Antonio St., March 19.

WOODSIDE

Robbery report: Stolen Apple iPod sold to school secretary by student who lied about how he obtained it then tried to buy it back, Woodside High School at 199 Churchill Ave., March 12.

PORTOLA VALLEY

Mountain lion sighting report: Child in yard reported a "large, taupe-colored" cat, larger than her Mastiff dog, staring at her from 10 yards away, 100 block of Bolivar Lane, March 14.

BRIDGE

continued from page 8

saying Caltrans has a bad track record when it comes to involving residents.

The bridge has long been a contentious issue, with residents on the west side of the freeway argu-

ing it provides criminals an easy escape route to east Menlo Park. Residents on the east side of the freeway have said their neighborhood is being unfairly blamed.

Fifty or so students use the bridge to get from the primarily low-income Belle Haven neighborhood to Menlo-Atherton High School.

OBITUARIES

Rose Ohtaki

Longtime Menlo Park resident

Rose Oda Ohtaki, a resident of Menlo Park for 38 years, died Feb. 20. She was 88.



Rose Ohtaki

Ms. Ohtaki was born in Syracuse, New York. She attended beauty culture school, LDS business College, and owned and operated a beauty salon in Salt Lake City for 10 years. In the 1950s she moved to San Francisco and worked for J. Magnin, first as a secretary, then became the first Asian saleswoman and assistant hat buyer.

In 1955 she married Pete Ohtaki. His work with Japan Airlines took them to Seattle and New York City.

After moving to California, the Ohtakis were deeply involved in community services. Mrs. Ohtaki was president of the Japan-America Society Women's Auxiliary. She was active in the La Entrada and Woodside High School PTAs and fought against racial quotas in the Sequoia Union High School District, say family members.

She also led her neighborhood in convincing Menlo Park and San Mateo County to install a cross-walk on Santa Cruz Avenue at Oakdell Drive and Sharon Road, they say.

Ms. Ohtaki enjoyed ikebana flower arranging, kamakura bori wood carving, and golf. She received many compliments on her manicured Japanese garden.

In 1996, she wrote an article for the Utah Centennial book titled "Issei Pioneers in Syracuse," followed in 1997 with a similar article for Davis County, Utah.

She had great pride and joy in raising her only son, Peter Jr., and for his achievements and accomplishments, say family members.

She is survived by her son, Peter Ohtaki Jr. of Menlo Park, and two grandchildren. At her request, no service will be held.

Lucette Sommer

Former French teacher

Lucette Sommer of Menlo Park died peacefully March 29 at the age of 86.

Ms. Sommer was born in Morgan Hill to Lucien and Marcelle Decanniere, who had immigrated from Belgium following World War I.

She grew up in San Jose, and received degrees in education from San Jose State University and Stanford University. She returned to her alma mater high school in San Jose to become the youngest teacher the school ever had, teaching French, Latin and history, family members said.

Ms. Sommer met her future husband, Werner Sommer, at UC Berkeley in 1949. She was attending summer school; he was a graduate student, studying international law and public affairs. As residents of International House, they sat at the French-speaking dining table.

Married in 1952, the Werners lived in Africa, Greece, Switzerland, Germany, England and Belgium before settling in Menlo Park. Ms. Sommer became a volunteer for Stanford Children's Hospital, working three days a week to prepare donations for the yearly rummage and fine arts sales.

Ms. Sommer spent the last year of her life at the Silverado Memory Resource Center, a home for people with Alzheimer's disease. Many there remember her speaking French and giving French lessons, say family members. Mr. Sommer visited her every day.

Ms. Sommer is survived by her husband, Werner, and her daughter, Lisa.

Kieth Winton

Former Woodside Elementary teacher

Services will be held at 11 a.m. Friday, March 27, at Crippen & Flynn Chapel, 400 Woodside Road in Redwood City, for Kieth A. Winton. Mr. Winton, who died March 22, was 85.

Born in Rupert, Idaho, Mr. Winton was a U.S. Army veteran of World War II. He received a master's degree in education from the University of Idaho and taught at Woodside Elementary School for 30 years.

He owned a dance band known as the Modernaires, was an avid collector of antiques, and enjoyed traveling with his wife, Bonnie.

He is survived by his wife, Bonnie J. Winton of Redwood City.

Friends may visit Crippen & Flynn Chapel between 4 to 7 p.m. Thursday, March 26. Burial will be at Alta Mesa Memorial Park in Palo Alto.

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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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POST your views on the Town Square forum at www.TheAlmanacOnline.com

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CALL

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

Hope for retrieving county's lost funds

Given the billions of dollars that are being thrown around to "save" the insurance giant AIG, as well as many of the nation's banks and the auto industry, it is more than appropriate for Congress to restore \$2 billion lost to local and state governments when Lehman Brothers failed last fall.

San Mateo County lost some \$150 million in bond money when Lehman Brothers collapsed. The Menlo Park City School District was among the big losers, seeing nearly \$4 million vanish from what it thought was an ultra-safe investment pool. County Treasurer Lee Buffington was in charge of the Lehman investment, which included funds from many school districts and government agencies, which in many cases are required to park their holdings in the county fund.

The good news came last week from Reps. Anna Eshoo, Jackie Speier and Barney Frank, chairman of the House Financial Services Committee, who announced congressional hearings on using Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) funds to compensate public agencies for some \$2 billion in Lehman funds lost nationally by state and local governments.

Mr. Frank's committee, which has focused on the federal bailout funds, just last week was the setting for an angry interrogation of Edward Liddy, the chief executive of AIG, which awarded its executives \$165 million in bonuses after receiving nearly \$200 billion of government aid.

Without help from the federal government, San Mateo County

has little hope of recovering more than a small fraction of the funds it lost in the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy. There simply is not much left of the heavily leveraged bank.

But with California's increased clout in Washington, including Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, a San Francisco Democrat, and longtime local congresswoman Anna Eshoo, the odds look good that legislation will save at least some of the investments. And it can't hurt that many other states are seeing similar losses, which will spur other Congress members to take up the cause.

The Menlo Park district was not alone in taking a hit from the Lehman collapse. Altogether, San Mateo County school districts, including Menlo Park, lost \$58 million. The estimated losses to other local school districts are: Las Lomas, \$320,000 to \$330,000; Portola Valley, \$102,000; Woodside elementary, \$50,000 to \$60,000.

Local legislators, including supervisors Rich Gordon and Rose Jacobs Gibson, were in Washington last week to promote the TARP solution, along with Mary McMillan, the deputy county manager.

Rep. Eshoo said she hopes that the county and other public entities will be able to recover some of the lost funds. "Our schools, public safety and social services will suffer if we cannot return a portion of these dollars back to our local governments," she said.

County officials also met with the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and senators Diane Feinstein and Barbara Boxer as well as officials from the Senate and House Finance Committees.

EDITORIAL

The opinion of The Almanac

LETTERS

Our readers write

A little kindness goes a long way

Editor:

I belong to an organization called Kindness International, which in many ways is similar to the Dare (anti-drug) program we have in our schools. The goal of this organization is to combat violence by teaching about kindness.

I read with great interest the Feb. 11 Almanac issue that talked about Hillview School and one of their newest programs, which dealt with combating bullying and promoting kindness.

I decided right then that I would send a letter to your newspaper and also to Hillview School, talking about the Kindness International organization and its goals and purposes. I had a few family issues in the meantime and was unable to write this letter until now.

In the meantime, I was at Walgreens in Menlo Park last week and met a group of students. I noticed a certain toy they were planning to buy and since I have seven grandchildren decided to ask them about the toy and how it worked.

The students were so helpful, so kind, so interested in helping me and in teaching me how to work



Portola Valley Archives

Our Regional Heritage

Arastradero Road, shown here in a Berton Crandall photo from about 1912, is one of the oldest roads in the area. It was built in the 1830s, following an old cattle trail, and remained unpaved until the 1940s. It was the most direct, all-weather road from the redwoods to the Santa Clara Valley.

this toy that I excused myself that I decided to give each one of the students a "kindness card." The card says, "Start a ripple of kindness, and pass it on." The organization sells a deck of these cards for \$5.

I was pleasantly surprised to find out that these students went

to Hillview School and told them how I had recently read about the bullying program in The Almanac and that I was planning to write a letter of praise to the school to thank them for promoting acts of kindness in our schools and at the same time,

combat bullying.

I would like to say, "Hats off to the Hillview students, teachers and administrators, and I hope that this program will continue full speed ahead and that the

See **LETTERS**, next page

Mayor says suggestions were just that

By Heyward Robinson

I appreciate the opportunity The Almanac provided me last week to share an abbreviated version of my State of the City remarks. Because I know there is heightened interest in the community about this year's city budget, I'd like to elaborate on some ideas I shared in that speech that may not be clear, and address some errors in last week's Almanac editorial.

I did not present a "Mayor's Budget." When a draft budget is presented (sometime in May), it will be from the city manager, working with staff and taking input from the council and the community. The city manager and staff are just beginning the process of gauging the council's inclination on how much (and what) to cut, whether we should dip into our reserves (and by how much), whether we must consider raising the utility users tax, and so on.

My intent in discussing the budget in the speech was to share my general thoughts on the subject. I expect that some of my suggestions will be in the final budget and some will not.

I was clear in my remarks that "everything should be on the table" when considering budget choices. I also said I did not support "across the board" staff cuts. I did not mean to imply that no positions should be cut; but cutting staff **will** mean reductions in services. Over 30 positions were eliminated between 2002 and 2004. A few positions have since been added,

but there is little or no fat in the organization. The Almanac's editorial asked for layoffs but did not acknowledge that those layoffs will result in service cuts. We cannot keep services the same, avoid dipping into reserves, keep the utility users tax at 1 percent, and have a balanced budget. Something has to give.

The editorial also asserts that the city's current labor costs are out of line at "72 percent of the city's annual expenses." Although you would expect a high proportion of labor costs in an organization that primarily provides services, the city's actual total annual expenses are roughly \$90 million, depending on how much money is spent from special funds in a given year. The city staff of 268 is managing that entire amount, bringing personnel expenses closer to 36 percent of budget.

Long-term labor costs are a concern. But Menlo Park cannot unilaterally break agreements with our labor groups in order to reduce benefits or salaries. We have learned the hard way that we are in a competitive labor market, particularly with our public safety employees. We **will** be taking a close look at salaries and benefits this fall when other union contracts come up.

Like residents, Menlo Park is reining in its spending. But we are moving cautiously to minimize the disruption that cuts have on our ability to deliver the high-quality services that our residents expect. We are carefully weighing the potential impacts of all our options as we work to develop a responsible city budget balancing immediate community needs with a long-term vision of what we need to be a vibrant community in the future. We welcome your continued interest and engagement in this process.

Heyward Robinson is mayor of Menlo Park.



End the Portola Valley utility taxes

By Charles Engles and Ed Wells

On Nov. 3, 2009, Portola Valley voters may face yet another election to authorize four more years of utility taxes. About four years ago, the utility taxes were extended through June 2010, but only by a very slim majority.

The utility tax was first authorized about 20 years ago to provide emergency funds for specific projects, such as repairing storm-damaged roads. Once these projects were completed, however, successive town councils have promoted utility taxes for new projects and increased

(Editor's Note: The utilities taxed are electricity, gas, phone and water for residents and businesses. There are two components: a 4.5 percent rate, which was lowered from 5.5 percent in 2006. Revenues from this tax can be used only for council-designated expenses. Proceeds from an additional 2 percent tax, adopted in 1997, are restricted to the preservation and purchase of open space. Total income from both taxes is expected to be \$737,400 in the 2008-09 budget year.)

budgets. Governments always find ways to spend taxpayer money once they have it.

The general fund does not need utility tax revenue now because it has received \$6 million more in property taxes than projected from the time of the 2005 election, and the Town Center projects have been completed, largely with donated funds.

And we do not need utility tax

and out of school, and also set an example to other schools that do not have this program so that they may benefit from learning about kindness programs such as this.

**Helen Steinberg
Crest Lane, Woodside**

revenues for our beloved open space program either. We have shown that major open space projects (Shady Trail, Sausal Creek) can be financed privately with tax deductible donations, and with no town funds!

Furthermore, the utility tax is a very inefficient source of revenue because it is not tax deductible. It also puts a burden on our older residents with limited income from Social Security and interest and dividends from shrinking investments.

The council should declare that the town will defer any utility tax election until we have a real emergency. An early decision to end utility taxes will help the town staff and finance committee to develop a tighter budget for next year, consistent with the difficult economic times we live in.

We suggest that you use the new town website — portolavalley.net — and let the council members know how you feel about paying more utility taxes.

**Charles Engles and Ed Wells
live on Wintercreek and
Naranja Way, respectively,
in Portola Valley.**



LETTERS

Continued from previous page

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