

**GREEN ACADEMY:** New garden takes shape at Woodside High School. Page 5

# The Almanac

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

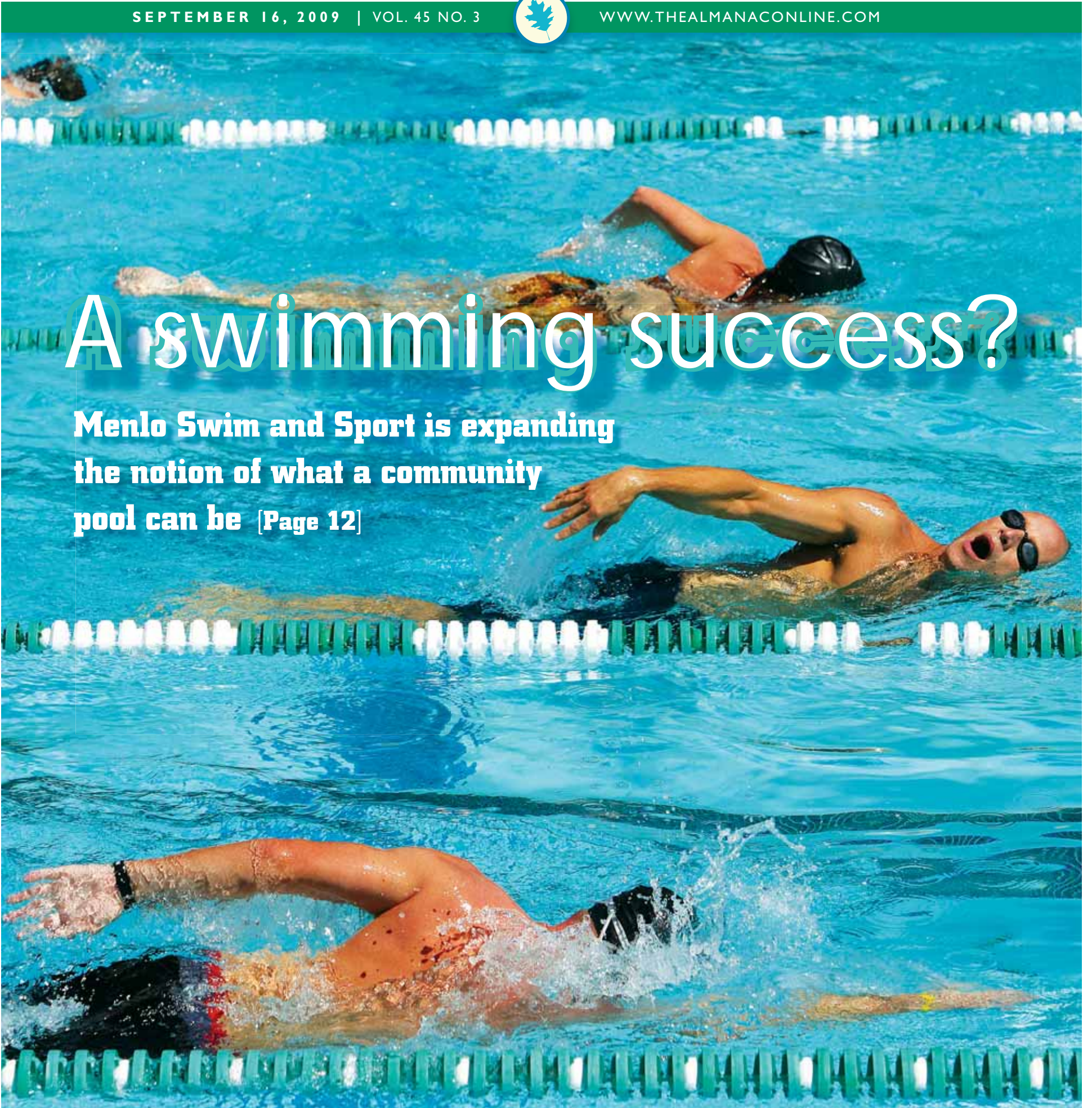
SEPTEMBER 16, 2009 | VOL. 45 NO. 3



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## A swimming success?

**Menlo Swim and Sport is expanding the notion of what a community pool can be [Page 12]**



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# Inside

This week's news, features and community events.

## FIRST SHOT



Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

### A future for Tinker Park?

**Antonio Madrigal** and his sister **Marina** play at Tinker Park, on the Hillview Middle School campus in Menlo Park. The park was slated for demolition, but now may have a future. See **Page 16**.

## Menlo Park

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## On the cover

Members of the masters program swim laps at Burgess Pool. Menlo Swim and Sport, the private company that began operating the pool in 2006, is winning over swimmers — and expanding the notion of what a community pool can be. Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac. See **Page 12**.

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## CALLING ON THE ALMANAC

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### CHILDREN'S VIEW OF THE WORLD

Preschoolers should have their eyes examined so that certain ailments can be diagnosed and treated early. Among the common problems uncovered during a comprehensive exam of young eyes are strabismus (crossed eyes), in which one of both eyes are unable to align properly, and amblyopia (lazy eye) in which one eye fails to correctly process sensory input. These conditions affect up to five percent of children, but can usually be

corrected if treated early enough. Treatment for amblyopia relies on covering the strong eye with a patch in an effort to force the child to use and strengthen the weaker eye. As for strabismus, remedies include eyeglasses, eye drops, eye patches, and eye exercises in less-than-severe cases.

Children know only what they see and not what they are supposed to see, so they don't complain about certain symptoms. If your child crosses one or both eyes, has difficulty picking up small objects, or avoids reading or doing puzzles, please call your eye doctor to schedule a comprehensive eye health exam that includes testing for amblyopia and strabismus.

P.S. Without prompt treatment, eye-alignment problems will worsen and can even lead to legal blindness in the weaker eye.

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

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# Local News

MENLO PARK | AHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

## Rapid growth in Menlo Park school enrollment

■ School district may open a new school on the O'Connor campus in Menlo Park's Willows neighborhood. The site is now leased to the private German-American International School.

By **Andrea Gemmet**  
Almanac Staff Writer

Student enrollment is climbing dramatically in the Menlo Park City School District, and if the trend keeps up, the only solution may be to open an additional elementary school.

The district is in the midst of an ambitious building campaign to increase classrooms and facilities on its three elementary school campuses, with a major rebuilding of Hillview Middle School set to start next year. But it might not be enough.

Superintendent Ken Ranella said current projections show 2,150 elementary students enrolled in the district by 2014. That number

of students divided among two grade K-5 schools and one K-3 school, is just too big, he told the school board at its Sept. 9 meeting.

In the past 10 years, district enrollment has gone up by nearly 600 students, he said.

"We've grown a school, quite frankly," he said.

District officials are currently studying the possibility of reopening a school at the district-owned O'Connor site.

The O'Connor campus in Menlo Park's Willows neighborhood is currently leased out to the German-American International School. If the district wants to reclaim it when the lease expires in 2011, it must inform the private school of its plans by

January, according to the lease agreement.

Without an additional campus, two of the district's elementary schools could grow to around 800 students.

"Oak Knoll and Encinal will be two of the largest elementary schools in the Bay Area," said Mr. Ranella, adding that 400 to 500 students is a more typical school size in California.

Hillview Middle School, which is expecting an increase to 900 students in the next few years, could easily top 1,000 students by 2016. However, 900 to 1,200 students is a pretty typical size range for a middle school, Mr. Ranella said.

"I think the staff and principals do an excellent job of making large schools seem intimate and small," Mr. Ranella told *The Almanac*. "(But) there's a tipping point."

Board member Jeff Child is already thinking about where to find the money to open the O'Connor campus. Besides

the overhead involved in hiring staff and administrators, the campus would likely need some refurbishing.

At the meeting, Mr. Child suggested saving money by looking for extras that could be cut out of the Hillview project, and adding them back in later if the district can afford it.

"Are we making a mistake by not thinking about these things?" he said.

Also at the meeting, the board discussed some tweaks to the design of Hillview. District officials, thinking ahead to surging enrollment, are making sure that conference rooms or other spaces can be easily converted into extra classrooms if needed.

Mr. Ranella is currently conducting a study of issues surrounding re-opening the O'Connor campus, with three former school board members acting in an advisory capacity. The board will have to review and act on any recommendations before the end of the calendar year. ■

## Council fines Woodside couple \$10,000 for felling trees without a permit

By **Dave Boyce**  
Almanac Staff Writer

It was more than a slap on the wrist, but not the right to the jaw that it could have been.

After a searching discussion, the Woodside Town Council, in a unanimous vote on Tuesday, Sept. 8, agreed to levy a fine of \$10,000 on residents Dr. Eric and Jacquie Weiss. Their violation: authorizing the felling of 10 significant Coast Live Oak trees on a Sand Hill Road property they own without having first gotten a tree-cutting permit, a \$60 item.

The penalty also requires that they obtain a permit and finish up the thinning activities at the site. Since the council needs a formal resolution for this action, one will be provided for an up-or-down vote at the Sept. 22 meeting, Town Manager Susan George said.

The 5-0 vote did not include Councilwoman Deborah Gordon, who recused herself in part because the Weiss' property is leased from Stanford University, where she works. Mayor Peter Mason was away.

Dr. Weiss directs The Village Doctor medical clinic in town. "I'm the person who misstepped and neglected to ask for a permit," he told the council in a bid for leniency. He had reason to ask. Had the council gone by the book, the fine could have been \$92,500.

Ms. Weiss spoke next and noted

that the mature trees in the area "made (the ones they felled) kind of look like weeds at the time. It seemed like the right thing to do, only now I realize that it wasn't."

The couple had hired an arborist for a walk-through to advise them on how to care for their 35 significant trees, Dr. Weiss said, adding that he mistakenly assumed that a tree was significant if it measured 12-inches in diameter at 48 inches above ground, not the 9.5 inches the town specifies.

Their intent, given Woodside's equestrian culture, was to restore a horse corral area that had become overgrown, Dr. Weiss said.

San Mateo arborist Kevin Kiely testified to the council at the request of the town as to the appropriateness of the thinning that did take place. The trees that were cut showed evidence of having grown haphazardly, he said.

"I do believe that the thinning of the woodland there will improve the tone of the larger trees there," he said. "For a non-professional, they did a fairly good job of selecting trees."

During the public comment period, several residents spoke admiringly of Dr. Weiss' character and asked the council for leniency.

### Council comment

Councilman Dave Tanner, a

See **TREES**, page 6



Photo by Dave Boyce/*The Almanac*

A raised planting bed in the lower tier of a new three-tiered garden at Woodside High School is now home to a crookneck squash planted by Green Academy teacher Josh Rubin, foreground, and senior and teaching assistant Mac Hart.

## New garden takes shape at Woodside High

By **Dave Boyce**  
Almanac Staff Writer

Back in the 19th century, kids on the prairie had more than a few experiences in common, including sub-zero winters, scorching summers, sitting together in a one-room schoolhouse, and acquiring a working familiarity with the shovel and garden hoe.

Now a common if tenuous thread connects those kids to some 56 sophomores in Wood-

side High School's Green Academy. No, it's not the weather. The sophomores are sitting together to study, more or less, and they're shoveling and hoeing in a garden.

Landscapers have leveled a secluded plot on the campus into three rectangular tiers, each with three 4-foot-by-30-foot raised beds of soil mixture. Soon to be seen there: broccoli, red cabbage, cauliflower, parsley, green onions, lettuce and radishes, according to Principal David Reilly and Academy teacher Josh Rubin in an

interview at the garden.

The walls of the raised beds, built block by block by students in a bucket-like brigade, serve a convenient function as seats in what has become an outdoor classroom. That's a switch: a group of students breaking a sweat from physical work not related to athletics. How did they feel about that? It was a big deal, Vice Principal Diane Mazzei said.

See **GARDEN**, page 6

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## Judge to issue ruling on Jackling house in 90 days

By Dave Boyce  
Almanac Staff Writer

The judge overseeing the disposition of the 85-year-old Woodside mansion known as the Jackling house heard on Sept. 8 from preservationists and the homeowner and will deliver an opinion within 90 days, Woodside Town Attorney Jean Savaree said.

San Mateo County Superior Court Judge Marie S. Weiner “asked a lot of questions (but) gave no indication of where she was going” in a decision that could resolve an eight-year battle, Ms. Savaree told the Town Council at its Sept. 8 meeting.

Homeowner and Apple co-

founder Steve Jobs wants to tear the old place down and build a modern family home on the Mountain Home Road property, while the group Uphold Our Heritage wants to preserve it substantially as it is, though not necessarily in its current location.

Meanwhile, the signatures of the town and Palo Alto entrepreneur Gordon Smythe have been affixed to a three-way contract that would allow Mr. Smythe to deconstruct the house and store significant parts of it to use in a new house, should he find a suitable site in five years.

The contract “is on its way to Mr. Jobs,” who is expected to be ready to sign it, Ms. Savaree said. ■

### TREES

continued from page 5

general contractor, agreed that the thinning had been well done. The fine, he said, should reflect the fine for not having a building permit: three times the cost of the permit, so \$180. “It’s not as if they were (illegally) building a house or anything,” he said.

Not good enough, Councilman Ron Romines said. The intent of the town’s tree-protection ordinance “doesn’t change by the character of the person who removed the trees,” he said. A significant fine is appropriate, but not the maximum, given that the thinning was well intended.

Considering the \$21,700 estimate to replace the trees, Mayor Dave Burow suggested a fine of about half that, at \$10,000. No fine at all would set a bad precedent, he added.

Councilwoman Sue Boynton initially opposed a fine. It would be inconsistent, she said, with

a (2007) council decision to suspend a staff-recommended fine for a tree-conscious property owner who, unaware that he needed a permit, had moved three significant oak trees to Atherton.

That case was one of a total of perhaps two in which the council has had to apply the ordinance, and it occurred when the ordinance was “young,” Ms. Boynton said in an interview.

“It becomes arbitrary,” she told her colleagues. “I think we’re holding fast to being consistent when we haven’t been consistent so far.”

Deciding to support a \$10,000 fine was a struggle, Ms. Boynton told The Almanac. The case pits community rights against those of a property owner who had apparently acted in the best interest of the remaining trees. “I felt, at the end, that I needed to recognize both situations,” she said.

The ordinance needs tweaking, she added, to ensure that fines are commensurate with the impact on the environment. ■

### GARDEN

continued from page 5

The “ultimate goal” is to get the vegetables into students’ homes and the notion into their heads that vegetables come from gardens, Mr. Rubin said. Sale of the vegetables may also help fund the Green Academy, whose state grant expires in three years, Ms. Mazzei noted.

Asked how the students reacted to being in the garden, Mr. Rubin said that they are “at peace. (It’s the) difference between them in a classroom that is hot and stuffy and being able to come out here and have this wind.”

The garden is only the beginning. If the school wins a state matching grant, the garden will

migrate to the roof of a new and very green classroom building on the site.

Vegetation throughout the campus will gradually lose its non-native aspects as more and more natives replace them, Mr. Rubin said. Water and electricity use will be optimized as well.

“We want to make the campus as much of a (green) learning site as possible,” he said.

Project donors of money, product discounts and/or time, school staff said, include the Grousbeck Family Foundation in Los Angeles, Lyngso Garden Materials in Redwood City, Integrity Block in Los Altos, Acterra and Palo Alto Hardware in Palo Alto, and Margaret MacNiven. ■

# City unveils plan to revamp El Camino, downtown area

■ It lays out plans for one or more parking garages, and a small covered marketplace downtown.

By Sean Howell  
Almanac Staff Writer

After two-plus years of meetings and workshops, residents will get their first look this week at a preliminary version of a long-term plan that could alter the landscape of the city's downtown area.

The \$1.2 million planning effort began amid debate over how much development residents want to see along El Camino Real, following the closure of several El Camino auto dealerships. The plan establishes guidelines for development height and density at those sites, as well as on other parcels along El Camino, and in the city's downtown area.

It also lays out plans for one or more parking garages, and a small covered marketplace in the downtown area.

At the meeting Thursday, Sept. 17, residents will be asked to debate a variety of methods for making the downtown area more pedestrian-friendly, including removing some or all of the parking along Santa Cruz Avenue.

Under the proposal, buildings heights would range from two to three stories along most of El Camino Real, with much of the land given over to mixed-use development. Buildings in the downtown area could increase to three stories, with property owners in some cases allowed to add housing units above retail space.

The area around the Caltrain station would allow for high-density mixed-use development ranging from three to five stories, with an emphasis on housing, according to city planner Thomas Rogers.

Buildings could also reach three to five stories on a portion of the east side of El Camino south of Ravenswood Avenue, including property owned by Stanford University.

The zoning would require the upper stories of taller buildings to be set back, and would include other architectural guidelines, Mr. Rogers said.

## ■ WORKSHOP

Residents are asked to weigh in on a plan that would dramatically alter the city's downtown area at a workshop Thursday, Sept. 17, in the meeting room behind Ace Hardware, at 700 Santa Cruz Ave. Come as early as 6:30 p.m. to preview the plans. The meeting room fronts on the parking lot off Chestnut Street.

The workshop will be geared more toward modifying existing plans, rather than coming up with new ideas. Residents will still have a chance to comment in Planning Commission and City Council meetings before the city finalizes the plan over the coming year.

## ■ Business concerns

Much of the plan's focus is on bringing people to the city's downtown. But one property owner says she fears the plan could drive out local businesses.

Nancy Couperus, who helped found Menlo Park's farmers' market and owns the building on Santa Cruz Avenue that houses the stretch of retail from Posh Bagel to Fleet Feet (formerly Runners High), has voiced concern in recent weeks about several of the proposals under consideration.

Building parking garages and allowing taller buildings downtown would give Menlo Park a "big city ambience," Ms. Couperus wrote on preservempdowntown.org, a Web site outlining concerns that she says other business and property owners share. The garages would make it more difficult for shoppers and patients of medical offices to park, and the higher rents that will come with additional development could crowd out small business owners, she said.

Fran Dehn, CEO of the Chamber of Commerce, declined to comment for this story.

Mr. Rogers, the city planner, noted that the relevant public bodies spent plenty of time debating the balance between the input of business interests and residents, and that the Chamber of Commerce has two seats on the 18-person oversight committee. "Ultimately it's a balancing act," he said. ■

# Man robbed in Sand Hill Road parking lot

Two men broke into an occupied vehicle in a parking lot in the 2400 block of Sand Hill Road in Menlo Park at about 7:25 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 10, and robbed a 41-year-old man visiting on business from Switzerland, police said.

One suspect broke the vehicle's driver's-side front window and attempted to push the victim back in his seat, while another broke the passenger-side front window and took the victim's backpack, said spokeswoman Nicole Acker for the Menlo Park Police Department.

No one was injured, she said. With the backpack in their possession, the robbers got away in a vehicle driven by a third party who had pulled up behind the victim's vehicle, Ms. Acker said.

The backpack contained the victim's passport, three watches valued at \$1,500 and a laptop

## ■ BRIEFS

computer valued at \$2,500, Ms. Acker said.

Five Menlo Park officers responded to the scene and were there for about an hour and 15 minutes doing an area check and looking for witnesses, Ms. Acker said. The report did not mention that they found any, she said.

The victim said he could not describe the suspects because their faces were covered, Ms. Acker said.

Police are asking anyone with information to call 330-6300.

## ■ New work on rail crossings in Atherton

Overnight work on two railroad crossings in Atherton is set to begin on Monday, Sept. 28, Caltrain announced.

The grade crossings at Watkins Avenue and Fair Oaks Lane are slated for several improvements, including clearly marked pedestrian crossings with fencing, gates and sidewalks, said spokeswoman Ellen Glover in a press release. The work is scheduled for Sunday through Thursdays for four weeks, between 8 p.m. and 4 a.m.

The streets will remain open during construction, with flaggers directing traffic, Ms. Glover said. Neighbors may hear noise from construction equipment and notice light from two portable light towers powered by diesel generators.

The project is part of a larger program to improve at-grade crossings in San Mateo County, said Ms. Glover.

Information about the project is online at caltrain.com/grade crossings.

## REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman



### Home Buying Advice in this Fall Season

**Q: I plan to buy a house in the next year and I want to try and time my purchase to take advantage of lower prices and mortgage rates as well as any incentives being offered. Do you have any advice on this?**

identification of the property. Now is a very good time to buy because prices are stable and inventory is increasing. In addition, if you are a qualified first time buyer there is a tax credit of \$8000 that may be available if you purchase before December 1, 2009.

**A:** First, you should decide what you need and want in a property. You should be sure that you have enough money saved to make the purchase you want. Choose a realtor you like who can advise you well with the entire home buying process. You should also choose the lender you would like to work with and be fully approved by them subject to the

stronger position if you wait until spring of 2010, then you should probably wait. There are potential risks if you wait until then, e.g., interest rates may rise, prices may be higher, etc. But if waiting makes sense for your finances and needs, this is the right decision for you. You shouldn't rush to do anything until you have determined that it is best for you.

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






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## Portola Valley schools may go solar with stimulus funds

By Andrea Gemmet

Almanac Staff Writer

Portola Valley schools may go solar, thanks to a nearly \$3 million windfall from federal stimulus funds.

A proposed project would install photovoltaic solar power systems at both Corte Madera and Ormondale schools, and be funded by up to \$2.85 million in tax credits from the Qualified School Construction Bonds program, said Portola Valley School District board member Judy Mendelsohn. The systems would generate enough power to cover 100 percent of the school's energy costs, she said.

The board, which gave a preliminary go-ahead to the project in August, is set to hear a detailed presentation at its Sept. 30 meeting.

"If we can finance both projects with bonds, that's great, and if we can't afford it, we can't afford it," Ms. Mendelsohn told *The Almanac*. "Everybody wants to be green, but for the district, we'll only do it if fiscally it makes sense."

A likely spot for the solar panels is the roofs of the multi-use gyms, she said.

The tax credits cover the interest payments on school construction bonds, and are intended to

free up school district money for additional construction or facility rehabilitation projects.

The bonds would have to be issued by the end of 2009, or the district forfeits the stimulus funds, Ms. Mendelsohn said. Voter approval for the bonds isn't needed, she said.

"The payments to pay back the bonds would come from our savings in energy costs, (so) no new taxes or assessments would be needed," she said.

"Because the bonds would be interest-free for the district, we would get substantial savings over the 15-year term of the bonds. This savings is what may make the project financially feasible for us."

Portola Valley was one of only two districts in San Mateo County to be selected, via a lottery, to receive the stimulus money. The other one is the San Mateo-Foster City school district.

California's share of the \$22 billion Qualified School Construction Bond tax credits is an estimated \$2.7 billion over two years. It's part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that was signed into law in February. A second wave of the stimulus money will be allocated next year. ■

*The systems would generate enough power to cover 100 percent of the school's energy costs, said Judy Mendelsohn, a member of the Portola Valley school board.*

## Express bus service to city to shrink

Fewer SamTrans buses will be running in San Mateo County after mid-December, and the wait for the next one on some routes will be longer.

The governing board of San Mateo County Transit unanimously adopted a proposed rate and schedule change on Sept. 9 to address a revenue shortfall of \$28.4 million for the fiscal year that began July 1.

In the Almanac's circulation area, two weekday express lines serve San Francisco and one of them will be gone after Dec. 20: the RX line that passes through Menlo Park and Atherton between 6:30 and 7 a.m. and returns about 12 hours later.

The all-day KX express to the San Francisco airport and the city will continue, but on an hourly rather than the current 30-minute schedule. Likewise, the 390 weekend line that connects Menlo Park to the Daly City BART station will

run on the hour rather than the half-hour.

One-way adult fares will rise on Feb. 1, 2010, to \$2 for a local trip (up 25 cents), and \$5 for an express trip to the city (up 50 cents). Youth fares, passes and discount fares will rise accordingly. Fares for paratransit services will go up in July 2010.

For more information on fares and schedules, go to [tinyurl.com/o5uu7n](http://tinyurl.com/o5uu7n).

In a statement, SamTrans spokeswoman Christine Dunn said the proposed changes have been influenced by more than 800 comments from the public and are "the most drastic in the agency's 33-year history."

The schedule changes will reduce service by about 7.5 percent and are expected to save more than \$6.3 million annually, but affect less than 3 percent of weekday riders, Ms. Dunn said. The fare increases will generate about \$1 million annually. ■



Photo by Dave Boyce/The Almanac

## In honor of the fallen

Three hundred and forty three flags, in memory of the 343 firefighters who died on Sept. 11, 2001, in New York City, adorn the front yard of the fire station at 3322 Alameda De Las Pulgas on the Friday's eighth anniversary of the attack. Station 4 was one of three stations in the Menlo Park Fire Protection District so decorated, said Fire Chief Harold Schapelhouman. He said the district has raised enough money to place the flags at five of its seven stations next year, and will have them at all seven stations in 2011 for the 10th anniversary of the attacks.

## Sequoia district asks judge to throw out parts of Everest charter school lawsuit

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

In its latest legal move in its court battle with Everest Public High School, the high school district is claiming that Everest made errors in its lawsuit and is asking the judge to throw out substantial portions of it.

Attorneys for the Sequoia Union High School District, in an Aug. 31 filing with San Mateo County Superior Court, claim, in part, that Everest improperly included claims for damages and attorneys' fees, improperly named district Superintendent Pat Gemma as a co-respondent, and is using the case as a referendum on charter schools and a "vehicle for publicity and news media sound bites."

The Sequoia district's filings are "irrelevant to the case" and "absurd," said Everest co-founder Diane Tavenner in an interview. "Nothing that they have filed has anything to do with the core conflict or argument that we're attempting to resolve."

Ms. Tavenner, who is not an attorney, said her comments reflected the views of Paul Minney, Everest's lead attorney.

Asked to elaborate, particularly on what issues Everest may be trying to obscure, attorney David A. Levy of the County Counsels Office, which is representing the Sequoia district, replied: "We have addressed the salient legal issues in the papers we filed with the court, which are publicly available. I am sure you understand that it is our obligation to continue to address those issues directly with the court."

The district has also hired the San Francisco firm of Kerr & Wagstaffe for this case. The firm did not respond to a request for comment.

Everest, in July, filed a 27-page civil complaint alleging, in part, that the district violated state law by not offering Everest facilities in Redwood City that are more like what students use at Menlo-Atherton and Sequoia high schools.

The district's offer consists of six portable buildings — four classrooms and two for administration — on a residential parcel in East Palo Alto at the district's southern end. A nearby YMCA could offer physical activities, while amenities such as a full library and playing fields would be available three miles away at Menlo-Atherton High School.

Everest offered to settle with the district at a site on Charter Street in Redwood City, which the district did not agree to. Everest then leased a floor of an empty office building on Main Street. The school opened in August with 108 freshmen.

In its filing, the district describes Everest's suit as "unconventional" and "replete with improper matter" that does not address the essence of the case: whether the court should overturn the district's discretion in offering facilities in East Palo Alto.

The district goes on to say that Everest asks the court to rule on whether "charter schools are a good idea or how they compare to traditional schools."

By forcing an Oct. 5 hearing on "technicalities" rather than on evidence, facts and depositions that get to the issues — which now will be addressed in a second hearing — the Sequoia district is "dramatically increasing the timeline and dramatically increasing the costs" of the case, Ms. Tavenner said.

If the Sequoia district loses, it would likely have to reimburse Everest for its attorneys' fees. The total reimbursement probably will not exceed six figures, Ms. Tavenner said. ■

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## City in tough spot on affordable housing

By Sean Howell  
Almanac Staff Writer

Faced with a surplus of funds to spend on below-market-rate housing and a paucity of places to build new units, Menlo Park is considering two possible locations for such housing in the Belle Haven neighborhood — despite a sense among some nearby residents that the city is trying to cram ill-advised projects into their neighborhood.

The city has proposed two sites it owns as possible locations for new housing developments. One is a 1.5-acre parcel behind Terminal Avenue, between Beechwood School and the fire station. The other is a 2.1-acre parcel along Hamilton Avenue, near Willow Road.

In suggesting housing developments on those sites, city management points to several state requirements that it provide below-market-rate housing city-wide, and that it devote funds to housing within the redevelopment district, which overlays Belle Haven and its surroundings. Officials also point to the fact that the city does not own any parcels outside that district that would be suitable for housing.

Members of the Housing Commission often lament the fact that the city has plenty of money from developers earmarked for below-market-rate housing — \$11 million at last count, nearly one-third the size of the city's total annual expenses — but few places to spend it.

Some Belle Haven residents, however, have called the city's approach wrong-headed, asking why it seems fixated on providing below-market-rate housing in their community, rather than in areas west of the freeway. Of the city's 57 below-market-rate units, 20 are located in a mixed-income housing development in Belle Haven.

### ■ INFORMATION

The City Council will discuss an array of housing programs and development projects, including whether the city should pursue housing projects at two sites in the Belle Haven neighborhood, in a study session at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 15. The meeting will be held in the Menlo Park Senior Center, not the council chambers — a typical procedure when the council is discussing issues specifically related to Belle Haven.

“There is no question that Belle Haven is part of the solution, but is it the entire solution?” Ash Vasudeva, who lives in that mixed-use development and presides over the Belle Haven Homeowners' Association, asked in an interview. “I am very proud to live there, it's created a real diversity in this city, but it shouldn't be the only place,” he said, arguing that it would make more sense for the city to plan for housing developments along El Camino Real.

### Few sites

During a community meeting in November of 2008, a number of Belle Haven residents ridiculed plans for a 22-unit affordable housing development at the Terminal Avenue site, a joint project with Habitat for Humanity that has been gestating since 2001. Residents argued that shoehorning the development into a narrow strip of land between an existing residential block and a defunct rail line would create a ghetto.

Later, several residents said they would rather see the city give or sell the land to Beechwood School to allow it to expand, though the city notes that the school has not approached it with the idea.

“To me, expanding a school that is a good school is above everything,” Belle Haven resident

Matt Henry said in an interview, portraying the development as a choice between investing in the city's children, or in adults looking for a chance to own a home. “That may be cold-blooded, but that's the way I see it,” he said.

While the homeowners' association opposes the Terminal Avenue project, Mr. Vasudeva said he was “a little more optimistic” about the proposal to develop the Hamilton Avenue site, “if it's part of a larger mixed-use community, or a real transit stop on the Dumbarton corridor ... if they really see it in somewhat of a larger way than simply fulfilling their (state) requirements.”

The City Council is expected to direct city staff on whether the city should pursue housing projects at one or both sites during a study session at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 15, in the Menlo Park Senior Center at the end of Terminal Avenue — just around the corner from the proposed Habitat development. Among other things, council members will also discuss whether the city should proceed with a plan to buy an equity stake in homes in Belle Haven threatened with foreclosure.

When it comes to building below-market-rate units, the city's in a tough spot, said Councilman Andy Cohen. Mr. Cohen recently helped develop a program for the city to buy and resell foreclosed homes in Belle Haven that received wide support.

“If in fact there is no other place (the housing) could go, it would be unfortunate, I think, to miss the opportunity to meet a requirement imposed on us, and also create this resource in Menlo Park,” he said. “I don't like thinking that this is a problem destined to happen. I would like to think that there are ways to do these projects that make them more likely to succeed.” ■

## Commission to review El Camino office proposal

At its meeting Monday, Sept. 21, Menlo Park's Planning Commission is scheduled to review a proposal to build a two-story office building on El Camino Real.

If the commission grants the various approvals required for the project, the developer of the site at 1706 El Camino Real would be allowed to tear down a one-story, 6,900-square-foot commercial

building, formerly occupied by Gaylord India Restaurant, and replace it with a two-story, 10,100-square-foot office building.

The property is near Buckthorn Way, on a stretch of El Camino in Menlo Park that abuts Atherton.

The commission is scheduled to meet at 7 p.m. in the City Council chambers in the Civic Center complex, between Laurel and Alma streets.

## Gluten-free event at San Mateo Draeger's market

A day-long event with samples of gluten-free products, cooking demonstrations and lectures is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. as part of Draeger's new Gluten-Free Club on Sept. 20, at its San Mateo store, 222 East 4th Ave., in San Mateo.

The event features lectures by Dr. Rick Petersen, author of “The Gluten Effect,” and a book-signing

and cooking demonstration by Jacqueline Mallorca, author of the “Wheat Free Cook” and the new “Gluten-Free Italian” cookbooks. Draeger's in-house chef will also do cooking demonstrations. About 20 vendors will offer samples of gluten-free products.

For more information, go to [tinyurl.com/mp4n94](http://tinyurl.com/mp4n94).

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AT STANFORD



## Two more clothing retailers open in downtown Menlo

By Sean Howell

Almanac Staff Writer

Two new clothing retailers are opening in Menlo Park, the latest additions in an influx of new clothing stores to the downtown area.

Women's clothing store Pink & Harmony held a grand opening at its location at 1155 Crane St. on Friday, Sept. 11.

Pendleton, a national chain that sells blankets and wool clothing for men and women, is scheduled to hold a ribbon-cutting ceremony Friday, Sept. 25, at its new location at 145 El Camino Real near Cambridge Avenue, according to the Menlo Park Chamber of Commerce.

Including Pink & Harmony and Pendleton, no fewer than six downtown retailers have started to sell women's clothing over the past several months, with another, Alys Grace, expected to open Oct. 1.

### Water-efficient landscaping classes

Menlo Park residents can sign up for two water-efficient landscaping classes, co-sponsored by the city and the Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency.

The first class will cover upgrading existing irrigation systems and running them effectively, and will run from 9 a.m. to noon on Thursday, Oct. 1.

The second class, from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Oct. 3, will teach do-it-yourself handymen how to install a drip irrigation system.

### Sen. Simitian holds town hall meetings

State Sen. Joe Simitian is inviting the community to town hall meetings to discuss state government issues. Residents are encouraged to bring questions, concerns and ideas to the meetings set for:

■ Thursday, Sept. 24, from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the Redwood City

### ■ MENLO WATCH

To register, e-mail [landscape@bawasca.org](mailto:landscape@bawasca.org) or call 349-3000. For more information, visit [tinyurl.com/lqw6qo](http://tinyurl.com/lqw6qo).

### Sustainable Menlo Park meets on SRI campus

After a summer hiatus, the Sustainable Menlo Park speaker series will return Wednesday, Sept. 23, with an event on the campus of SRI International.

Dr. Alex Beavers, the company's corporate director, will speak about environmental sustainability, and SRI's contributions to the environment, according to Sustainable Menlo Park chairman Chuck Kinney.

The meeting is scheduled to begin at 5:30 p.m. in the international building, along Ravenswood Avenue just west of Middlefield Road. For more information, visit [sustainablemenlopark.com](http://sustainablemenlopark.com) or e-mail Mr. Kinney at [sustainablemenlopark@gmail.com](mailto:sustainablemenlopark@gmail.com).

### Chamber mixer set for Sept. 16

Menlo Park's Chamber of Commerce will hold a mixer from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 16, at Visions Artwear and Salon at 644 Santa Cruz Ave. in Menlo Park. For more information, contact the chamber by e-mail at [info@menloparkchamber.com](mailto:info@menloparkchamber.com) or by calling 325-2818.

council chambers, 1017 Middlefield Road in Redwood City.

■ Saturday, Sept. 26, from 10:30 a.m. to noon at the Palo Alto City Hall council chambers, 250 Hamilton Ave. in Palo Alto.

For more information, call Sen. Simitian's office at 688-6384 or go to [senatorsimitian.com](http://senatorsimitian.com).

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Participants in the masters program swim laps at Burgess Pool.

# A swimming success?

Three years after Menlo Park's controversial decision to hand its public pool over to a private operator, Menlo Swim and Sport is winning over swimmers — and expanding the notion of what a community pool can be

Story By  
**Sean Howell**

Photos By  
**Michelle Le**

Responding to a call on The Almanac's Web site for thoughts on Menlo Park's public pool in Burgess Park, one longtime resident, who identified herself only as Pam, recalled swimming at Burgess decades ago, when "kids ruled the pool." As a 10-year-old, she'd swim with her friends all day; everyone would rush to the fence when they heard the music of the ice cream truck approaching, sticking dollar bills through the wire and getting popsicles and taffy strips in return.

Now, everything operates on a timetable, she said. During a recent visit, she wasn't in the pool for more than five minutes before being shuffled into another area to make room for a swim class. Adults have ruined it.

A glance at the pool's schedule will quickly confirm that the days of Pam's childhood are long gone. Weekends in one pool are mostly left open for free swimming, but time is blocked out the rest of the week for a great variety of uses: lap swimmers, masters swimmers, a water exercise program, a kids swim team, swim lessons, scuba lessons, water polo

teams, and camp activities all vie for space.

Not everyone, it turns out, longs for the old days. To the chagrin of some and the great appreciation of others, Tim Sheeper — whose company, Menlo Swim and Sport, operates the city facility — is challenging the notion of what a public pool is, offering a wide variety of inventive programs. In the three-plus years his company has operated the pool, he has received largely positive reviews from swimmers, working to overcome acrimony from people upset over the way the city handled the transition to a

privately run facility.

"We have a desire to use (the pool) as a base, and send people around the whole community," he said in an interview. He's toying with the idea of making what he calls the "wildly successful" summer day camps more adventurous by sending kids out to skate, mountain bike or kayak.

#### Hurt by controversy

Many credit Mr. Sheeper with energizing the Burgess Pool, offering programs that appeal to a wide range of swimmers.

But not everyone has embraced the idea of a private, for-profit

company operating a facility that, many point out, was built with taxpayer dollars.

Arguing that the city would not be able to run the program without a heavy subsidy — a claim that some, including current mayor Heyward Robinson, have questioned — the City Council handed the pool over to Mr. Sheeper's for-profit company rent-free in the spring of 2006, without putting the contract out to bid.

While the decision didn't help the careers of the three council members who voted for it — Nicholas Jellins didn't run for re-election, and Mickie Winkler and Lee Duboc were swept out of office the following fall — Mr. Sheeper "took a beating for it as well," he said in an interview. Outrage over the decision often spilled through the front door of the pool facility, with some people storming in to voice their displeasure. Others simply boycotted the programs.

Frustrated in his attempts to rent space from the city for the swimming programs he runs, Mr. Sheeper had met with Ms. Winkler and Ms. Duboc in the office of local architect Sam Sinnott, a longtime Sheeper acolyte, to discuss the situation, according to Mr. Sinnott. The councilwomen asked if Mr. Sheeper would try his hand at running the entire range of programs at the pool. He agreed.

"I was not aware that that was not the normal process they go through," he said of the fact that other operators were not invited to bid on the contract.

After the pool opened, "there was a split in the community, for and against, based on what they were reading and hearing," he said. "There was a misconception about how we were operating the business."

The only way he could convince swimmers that they were in good hands was to show them, he said. "I had to keep my head down and stay focused on the facility, and the staffing."

Mr. Sinnott said he's glad Mr. Sheeper persevered in his bid to run the facility. "He does not like controversy and negativity," he said. "He's so anti-negative that, when he coaches, he'll call everybody fast, faster, fastest — he would never call a lane slow. He does not like political battles."

"It works best if nobody knows who Tim Sheeper is," Mr. Sheeper said. "Nobody should know, or care to know, my name. What's important is that the pool offers services they value."

Over time, people's attitudes seem to have softened, he said. The deal angered some, but "who ended up benefiting from it?" he asked. "It's been a positive for everyone in the community."

In the 2007-08 fiscal year, the city spent just under \$12,000 on the pool,

In March, Christine Concpson (center) taught a swim class under the new inflatable dome at Burgess Pool that keeps swimmers warm in the winter. Her students are, from left: Sophie Robbins, her sister Kaylie, and Ashley MacDonald.

all of it going to facility maintenance, according to Carol Augustine, Menlo Park's finance director.

#### Balancing act

For Menlo Swim and Sport staffers, ensuring that the various groups that use the pools have enough time and space is a constant balancing act. Most of the complaints about the operation come from individual swimmers who feel squeezed out by the more structured programs.

According to numbers provided by Mr. Sheeper, the pool supports 200 kids in swim lessons, 125 masters swimmers, 120 lap swimmers, 100 swimmers on



TIM SHEEPER, OWNER, MENLO SWIM AND SPORT

*'It works best if nobody knows who Tim Sheeper is. Nobody should know, or care to know, my name. What's important is that the pool offers services they value.'*

youth teams, 30 swimmers in exercise programs, and 30 water polo players per day, with the number of open swimmers fluctuating depending on the weather. He said his staff works hard to accommodate everyone.

"It would be a mistake to pigeonhole it as a high-performance facility," he said. He sees the pool as a meeting place for the community, with programs that offer something for everyone. "We have really listened to the feedback. Most of the time it's good information, and we take that and see if we can make schedule changes to suit most everybody's needs." But "of course, there are some people who don't

understand the share model."

In terms of "walk-in" use, the pool is actually something of an exception when it comes to the city's sports facilities, most of which are blocked out nearly full-time by sports teams. People can drop in to swim laps throughout the week, or frolic in the instructional pool on weekends. On some summer days, it attracts as many as 1,000 people, according to Mr. Sheeper.

Reviews have largely been positive. Of the 445 swimmers who filled out a survey distributed by Mr. Sheeper's company after its first summer of operation, 88 percent said the quality of the programs met their expectations, and 71 percent agreed that the fees and programs were competitive with facilities elsewhere.

The city has received several complaints about the program over the past three years, but all have been resolved with Menlo Swim and Sport, according to Katrina Whitaker, who supervises the city's recreation programs. None have required mediation by the City Council, or threatened Mr. Sheeper's contract with the city, she said.

The pool is open year-round; a new dome paid for and installed by Menlo Swim and Sport shelters the instructional pool during the winter months, keeping kids warm. Mr. Sheeper points out that for \$14, less than the price of two movie tickets, a whole family can spend a day at the pool.

Many laud the breadth of programs offered, the cleanliness of the facility, and the new dome.

"I've been impressed with the number of programs that address all age groups," Menlo Park resident Ned Moritz, a lap

swimmer, wrote. "Senior exercise programs as well as beginner classes for small children seem to keep the pool full and active all the time. I don't remember any of these programs or the intensity of the programs in the 'old' days."

Frank Tucker also said the new operation is an improvement over the previous pool: "I often felt in prior years that there were limited offerings of activities at the pool, and that the staff was somewhat unenthusiastic," he wrote. He said he has been largely satisfied with both the swim lessons and swim teams his children have participated in, though others expressed frustration at the progress their children made.

Menlo Park resident Greg Gaffney, one of many middle-aged people in the masters program, said he was grateful to be welcomed into the masters program, despite not having swum for decades. When he joined the program, Mr. Gaffney, 51, couldn't go more than four laps without stopping, he said. In the three years since, he's moved up three lanes, and can now swim across lakes without a wetsuit, he said.

Andy Cohen, a council member who voted against the decision to award Mr. Sheeper the contract, said he's been "completely satisfied" with Mr. Sheeper's work. A lap swimmer who uses the pool frequently, Mr. Cohen said the pool feels crowded, but not necessarily as a result of the way the schedule is managed.

"I'm just one of many people who use it, and so I wouldn't want to come across as complaining about Sheeper or the operation, just because I'm not able to have a lane to myself," he said.

#### Program's future

Many who disagreed with the council's decision to allow Menlo Swim and Sport

See **BURGESS POOL**, page 14





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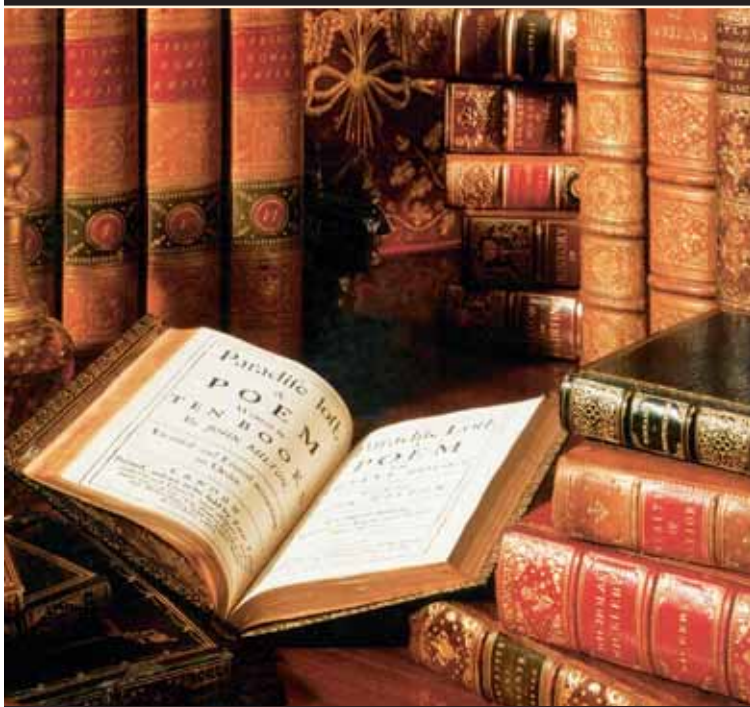
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## COVER STORY

### BURGESS POOL

continued from page 13

to operate the pool — four of the five current council members criticized that decision openly — have called for an open bidding process when Mr. Sheeper's lease expires in 2011.

Others have praised the current arrangement, saying that Mr. Sheeper is doing the city a favor, and that there simply isn't anyone else around who would be willing or able to run the programs.

"I just hope they renew his contract. I hope they don't nickel and dime him," said Mr. Sinnott, who instigated a minor Web-based brouhaha when he sent an e-mail before the last council election, warning fellow swimmers that union-beholden council members might tap city employees to run the program when Mr.

Sheeper's contract expires. "I just don't want him to leave."

For his part, Mr. Sheeper tries not to worry about what will happen when the contract ends. The council is responsible to its constituents, he points out; if swimmers are happy, that bodes well for his company.

"We've set (the program) up with a good, solid long-term foundation," he said. "If it doesn't pay off, then I've lost the gamble, but I didn't want to be thinking about this as only a five-year contract, cutting costs to make a profit. That's just not good business sense."

For Mr. Sinnott, one of Mr. Sheeper's main attributes as a coach is that he makes swimming enjoyable.

"He's a really creative guy; he makes it fun," he said. "Swimming can be pretty dreary, a lot

of it is just repetition — 'give me 10.' ... The facility's great, but the coaching is really what counts."

In swimming, Mr. Sheeper hopes people can find an activity that keeps them active and healthy well into middle age, and beyond.

Coaching "is about tapping into ... what drives people?" Mr. Sheeper said. "What makes each individual go?"

### INFORMATION

For more information on programs offered and fees charged at Menlo Park's Burgess Pool, visit [menloswim.com](http://menloswim.com). To view Almanac readers' reviews of the programs and facilities, visit [tinyurl.com/pwa4mq](http://tinyurl.com/pwa4mq)

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## Armed men invade home

Two masked men armed with handguns invaded an occupied home in the 700 block of Ivy Drive in Menlo Park on Sept. 6, at about 10:45 a.m., and got away with cash and property after forcing the occupants to lie on the floor, police reported.

The seven victims, five women, one man and a boy, ranged in age from 10 to 73, and none was injured, said Menlo Park Police Department spokeswoman Nicole Acker.

The men entered the home through an unlocked door and

demanded money and property, police said. They kicked open one locked inside door, rummaged through purses and a small safe, and fled on foot with \$230 in cash, a cell phone and a man's gold necklace, police said.

Victims described the men as black, about 5 feet 7 inches to 5 feet 8 inches tall, dressed in black and carrying handguns.

One of the victims managed to "sneak out" of the house and call police on her cell phone while the robbery was ongoing, Ms. Acker said.

## Two men robbed on Willow Road

Two men were robbed at gunpoint on Willow Road in Menlo Park on Sept. 4, police reported. A juvenile has turned himself in to police in connection with the robbery, said police spokeswoman Nicole Acker.

Police are searching for his accomplice

The juveniles made off with a cell phone and \$220 in cash in the robbery, which occurred

around 3:15 p.m. Friday, Sept. 4, in the 1300 block of Willow Road, just inside Menlo Park's border with East Palo Alto, police said.

The young man turned himself in after one of the men who was robbed identified him to police, Ms. Acker said. He did not return the property, she said.

According to the police report, neither of the men were injured.

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PAMF's Center for Hearing Health is hosting a community Pediatric Health Fair for parents and their special needs children. The event features:

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- Information on topics including autism, nutrition, speech pathology, audiology and allergies
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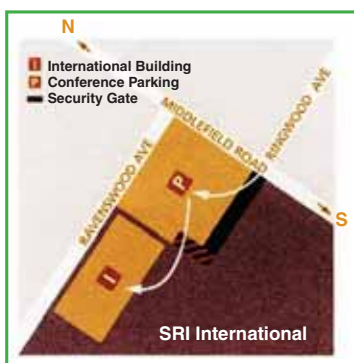
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**Wednesday, September 23, 2009**

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The meeting will be held in the International Building at SRI on 333 Ravenswood Avenue, Menlo Park. Access to parking is on the west side of the intersection of Ravenswood and Middlefield Road. Follow the signs to the International Building.

Any questions contact: Chuck Kinney  
Chairman Sustainable Menlo Park  
[sustainablemenlopark@gmail.com](mailto:sustainablemenlopark@gmail.com)

**A future for Tinker Park?**

By **Andrea Gemmet**  
Almanac Staff Writer

See photo on Page 3

A preschool tot lot and a public middle school are admittedly strange bedfellows. But it seems to work at wee little Tinker Park, a small public playground carved out of the Hillview Middle School campus on Santa Cruz Avenue in Menlo Park.

A transformation of the Hillview campus, set to start next year, would have eliminated Tinker Park and used the space as a sort of landscape buffer, with an emergency vehicle access road and an outdoor classroom area under a large oak tree.

The plan is to rebuild Hillview's classrooms, administrative offices and other buildings in denser, two-story clusters where the playing field now stands, and then tear down the old single-story buildings and create a new field.

But, acting on a request from the city of Menlo Park, the Menlo Park City School District's board opted to carve out a one-eighth-acre spot for Tinker Park from the 9-acre campus, possibly forgoing the outdoor classroom.

The existing park, including a small grassy field, inhabits about one-quarter of an acre.

The future of the pocket-sized park sidetracked the school board during its review of minor changes to the Hillview plan at the Sept. 9 meeting. Board members debated whether to keep the park, where to put it, and who would pay for it.

"It's got nothing to do with operating a school. What are we giving up that was intended for the middle school?" Superintendent Ken Ranella asked the board.

Mr. Ranella pointed out that with the ever-growing enrollment in the district, there are space constraints on all the campuses. As a result, the district is creating community assets that are also useful to students, like fields, jogging tracks, basketball courts and multi-purpose rooms.

"Tinker Park was designed by the city when schools were small and the space was not used — many, many years ago," he said.

By and large, board members seemed unconvinced that many



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teachers would lead classes on informal benches in the small, undeveloped space called out on the Hillview plans.

"I don't think it's as peaceful as it looks in this drawing," said board member Laura Rich, pointing out its location on busy Santa Cruz Avenue.

Board member Maria Hilton was less enthusiastic than her colleagues about saving the park.

"I want to be a good neighbor and a good partner, but this really isn't looking at the project as a middle school," she said. "There are other parks in this town."

She pointed out that the surrounding neighborhood is all single-family homes with backyards where children can play.

"I see it as using this buffer space in a better way, personally," countered board member Jeff Child. "We give the city a little help, and we're asking for a lot of help from them, by the way."

He and board member Mark Box had fond memories of taking their own children to Tinker Park, and they bristled at a suggestion to eliminate the swing set in order to save space.

"The main thing is the swing, that's what the park is," said Mr. Child.

But the board members drew the line at paying to replace the park, which is estimated to cost around \$50,000, including new fencing.

On 5-0 vote, the board directed the district architect to include a version of Tinker Park — with the swing — in the Hillview plans, but to pass the installation costs on to the city of Menlo Park.

At the meeting, the board also affirmed its previous decision to eliminate tennis courts from Hillview, saying that they took up too much space and were of too little use to such a large student population. City officials had also asked the district to consider saving the tennis courts.

Menlo Park officials also offered to contribute toward the installation of a new artificial turf field at Hillview, Mr. Ranel-la said. The local AYSO already has pledged between \$75,000 and \$150,000 toward the new field, which will be shared by youth soccer teams. ■



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# Shaping Our Future Together

September 2009

## El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan

### September 17 Community Workshop

*Where the Plan Takes Shape*

**What:** Specific Plan Workshop #3

**When:** Sept. 17 – 7:00 p.m. (preview at 6:30 p.m.)

**Where:** 700B Santa Cruz Ave. (enter from rear parking plaza, behind Ace Hardware)

Development of the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan is entering a decisive phase for community input. Refined concepts and a preferred alternative—based on input from the previous community meetings—will be presented and discussed during the third and final community workshop on September 17th. The results of this workshop will set the foundation for the draft version of the Specific Plan. Because the Specific Plan will guide the direction for downtown and El Camino Real over the next 30 years, **you are strongly encouraged to participate in this workshop.** Join us September 17th to help decide what the heart and soul of our town will be like for future generations.

For more information—including past workshop presentations, materials, and summary notes—or to sign up for project e-mails, please visit [www.menlopark.org/specificplan](http://www.menlopark.org/specificplan) or contact Thomas Rogers at (650) 330-6722 or [THRogers@menlopark.org](mailto:THRogers@menlopark.org)

You will have a chance to weigh in on proposed public improvements, including expanded public spaces, wider sidewalks on Santa Cruz Avenue, and enhanced crossings of El Camino Real. You will also have an opportunity to consider a preferred direction for the use, size, and character of private development, with its associated traffic and fiscal implications and potential public benefits. This is your chance to make your voice heard and transform our community's exciting vision into an enduring reality.

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# Community

NEWS OF LOCAL PEOPLE AND EVENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

## Woodside holds Barn Dance at Runnymede

Woodside will celebrate its rural heritage on Saturday, Sept. 26, from 3 to 8 p.m. at the Runnymede Sculpture Farm with a Community Barn Dance, sponsored on alternate years by the Woodside Recreation Committee.

Activities for children and the young at heart include two merry-go-rounds (one with live ponies), hay wagon rides, fire engine rides, a petting zoo, and other animal activities as well as western-themed games and face painting.

Guided tours of the sculpture garden at Runnymede will be featured along with art and environmental exhibits by local artists and groups.

Admission also includes a barbecue dinner, and dancing in the Runnymede barn featuring country western and contemporary music. Some surprise entertainment is also promised.

More than 450 people attended the previous events, and tickets will be limited.

Purchase tickets, \$20 for children and \$35 for adults or \$95 for a family of up to 5 people, by Sept. 18 with a form found at the Woodside Recreation Committee's Web site, woodsiderec.com, or at Town Hall, 2955 Woodside Road.

### Cooking for kids

Junior cooks will learn to make pastry for quiche, prepare guacamole, veggie dip, and cheese puffs at a hands-on cooking demonstration from 1 to 3 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 20, at MacArthur Park, 27 University Ave. in Palo Alto.

The event will highlight recipes from "You've Got Recipes," a new children's cookbook by Jerry Anne Di Vecchio, with illustrations by Francoise Kirkman. Kids will be taught by the book's authors and Faz Poursohi, Mac-



Photo by Jim Milton

Ilana Lindsay gets up close and personal with a chicken at one of the previous Barn Dances held in Woodside.

Arthur Park's executive chef.

Ms. Di Vecchio was the food editor of Sunset magazine for more than 40 years. Ms. Kirkman was an art director and designer at the magazine for many years.

Cost of the cooking class is \$25 per person, plus tax and gratuity. Copies of the book, available at the class, are \$27.95. To reserve, call 321-9990.

### Sacred Heart Prep senior fashion show

"Gator Rock Cafe" is the theme for Sacred Heart Preparatory's annual senior fashion show to be held Saturday, Sept. 19, on the Atherton school's campus. The theme was inspired by rock and roll classics of the 1970s and beyond, says committee member Margie Kriebel.

The entire senior class of 134 students, along with parents, will model fashions from local stores, including Bloomingdale's Stanford Shopping Center.

The evening will begin with

### AROUND TOWN

cocktails at 5:30 p.m., followed by dinner in the school's Aquatic Center. The runway show, to be held after dinner, will be choreographed by Kim Selby. Sacred Heart seniors will also perform in student-choreographed dance numbers.

Linda Benevento, Tracy Cowperthwaite, Terry Straube, and Mary Beth Oppenheimer are co-chairs for the event. Proceeds from the fashion show will be used to support senior activities, including the junior/senior prom and graduation night. Proceeds will also help fund the Senior Legacy Scholarship and the senior gift to the school.

For more information, call Sacred Heart Schools, 322-1866.

### Seismologist to talk on quake preparedness

It's will have been 20 years, come Oct. 17, since the Loma Prieta earthquake shook the Bay Area into a new seismic awareness: that more and bigger quakes are coming.

A 2008 survey by the U.S. Geological Survey puts the likelihood of a magnitude 6.7 quake in the greater Bay Area in the next 30 years at 62 percent.

USGS seismologist Jack Boatwright will give a free talk for the general public at 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 24, examining the Bay Area's level of preparedness for the next big quake, and considering what scientists have learned about the 1989 earthquake, according to USGS.

Mr. Boatwright will speak in Conference Room A of Building 3 in the USGS offices at 345 Middlefield Road in Menlo Park. For more information, go to online.wr.usgs.gov/calendar.

### Workshop on college financial aid

College affordability coach Vicki O'Day will discuss college financial aid options during a free program at 7 p.m. Monday, Sept. 21, at the Menlo Park Library, 800 Alma St. in the Menlo Park Civic Center.

Topics to be discussed are the costs of college, expected family contribution, need-based and merit aid, financial aid packages, scholarships, and strategies for finding affordable colleges.

Visit www.menloparklibrary.org or call 330-2530 for more information.

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## Book Fair offers 30,000 books for sale

One of Menlo Park's oldest traditions, the Menlo Park Friends of the Library Book Fair, takes place Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 19 and 20, on the grounds adjacent to the library, at the corner of Ravenswood Avenue and Laurel Street in the Menlo Park Civic Center. Hours will be 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday.

More than 30,000 "gently used" books will be offered in 30 categories, including biography, travel, psychology, religion, and children's classics.

Most books will sell for less

than \$2, many for \$1.

"A student can still find a complete 'Shakespeare' for a dollar," says Friend's spokesman Tim Goode.

He advises shoppers to come early on Saturday morning for the best buys. The number of cashiers has been doubled to expedite sales and volunteers will help carry shoppers' purchases to their cars.

This year, instead of an auction in the council chambers, there will be a selection of "special books." There will be no bidding. Instead, the price of each book will be marked inside the front cover. The

auction is being postponed until 2010 in order to build up the collection of quality books, according to Friends member Jackie Drew

Snacks, such as cookies donuts, coffee, and orange juice, will be for sale.

Through the Book Fair, the Friends of the Library has been able to donate \$100,000 toward renovation of the children's library, scheduled to start in November; \$50,000 to Project Read; and more than \$100,000 for special needs for both the main library and the Belle Haven library, says Mr. Goode.

## Fundraising is sweet when beneficiary is Project Read

Project Read-Menlo Park's third annual dessert-tasting fundraiser is set for 7 to 9 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 26, in Room 105 of the Burgess Recreation Center.

"Taste Desserts! For Literacy" will feature cakes, pastries and other confections donated by local businesses and bakers. There will also be live music and

a silent auction.

A number of students, tutors and community supporters will be honored during a program that will be emceed by student Olegario Neves and volunteer Kristi Breisch.

Tickets are \$20 in advance, and \$25 at the door. All proceeds benefit Project Read-

Menlo Park, which has helped more than 1,200 adults learn to read since its establishment in 1985.

The Burgess Recreation Center is at 700 Alma St., in the Menlo Park Civic Center.

For information or to buy tickets, contact Roberta Roth at 330-2525, or rlroth@menlopark.org.

### COLLEGE GRADS

■ **Jennifer Baker**, a 2001 graduate of Menlo-Atherton High School, graduated from the University of San Francisco School of Law, summa cum laude, at the top of her class of 220 graduates. She is the daughter of John Baker of Pleasant Hill and Ruth Wheeler of Orlando, Florida, and the granddaughter of Diane Berlin of Menlo Park. Ms. Baker, who was technical editor of the Law Review, has begun a three-month stint as a White House intern in the office of Vice President Joseph Biden, after which she will begin her position with the firm of O'Melveny and Myers, LLP, in their Washington, D.C., office.

■ **Nathan Saul Mazonson** of Menlo Park recently graduated cum laude from Dartmouth College in Hanover,

Massachusetts. The son of Dr. Peter D. Mazonson and Mary Ann Zetes, he majored in environmental sciences and minored in engineering sciences. Founded in 1769, Dartmouth enrolls 4,200 undergraduates and 1,000 graduate students in engineering, business and medicine.

■ **Mary Kormanak**, daughter of Ken and Judy Kormanak of Portola Valley, recently graduated as a doctor of optometry from the New England College of Optometry in Boston, where she completed a four-year program of studies. She has been accepted in a one-year residency program at a VA Hospital Clinic in the Boston area, where she will specialize in primary care and ocular disease. She did her undergraduate work at UCLA. She hopes to return to California in a couple of years to practice optometry.

■ **Nicole Kalinske** of Atherton

recently received a bachelor of arts in child development and community health, both magna cum laude, from Tufts University in Massachusetts.



## Nature, Creativity and Health An Evening with Richard Louv

September 25th at 7:30 pm  
Smithwick Theater  
Foothill College, Los Altos Hills

Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*, has inspired a national movement to reconnect children with nature.

This event is part of a month-long 'Let's Play Outside' campaign with Play Days throughout the Bay Area starting September 15th.

For information, visit [cincbayarea.org](http://cincbayarea.org) or call 650.969.6592

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## Parkinson's Disease and Urinary Bladder Problems?

A new experimental study is being conducted in the Urology Department of the Stanford University Hospital and Clinics by Dr. Rodney Anderson. Patients who have a diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease and urinary bladder problems of frequency, urgency or urinary incontinence are invited to inquire about their qualification to participate. There is no cost to participating.



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OF KNOWLEDGE AND  
SELF-DISCOVERY

# Locals receive Golden Acorn Awards

By Sean Howell  
Staff Writer, The Almanac

**B**usinesses, organizations and individuals will be recognized for public service and business excellence Sept. 21 at the Golden Acorn Awards banquet, sponsored by Menlo Park's Chamber of Commerce, and held at the new Rosewood Sand Hill hotel in Menlo Park.

Selected by a committee made up of chamber members, the recipients will be honored in the fields of business excellence, community service, public service, and work by a nonprofit organization.

### Community service

The Gary T. and Elissa Williams Memorial Award for Community Service will go to **Frances Bohannon Nelson**. Ms. Nelson has supported a number of charitable organizations through her stewardship of the Bohannon Foundation and her personal involvement in the community, including the Peninsula Boys & Girls Club, Job Train, Peninsula Volunteers, Rebuilding Together, and Second Harvest Food Bank, according to the chamber.

Ms. Nelson has served on the boards of several organizations, including Peninsula Volunteers, and has supported the Belle Haven Community School. She has worked with the Bohannon Development Co. since 1943, serving as president for 25 years. She currently serves as chairman.

### Public service

Menlo-Atherton High School's

Kiwanis Key Club has expanded into a thriving community service organization under the watchful eye of **Jon Johnston**, an adviser to the club since 2000. Mr. Johnston, an inspector with the Menlo Park Fire Protection District since 2000, is the winner of this year's public service award.



Jon Johnston

Since Mr. Johnston began working with the Key Club in 2005, he has helped bring its membership from seven to over 70, according to the chamber. The club has participated in or sponsored a clothes drive for underprivileged children, a fundraiser for families affected by California wildfires, the Menlo Park Pancake Firefighters Breakfast, and the Menlo Park Relay for Life. Students sponsor children around the holiday season, visit the elderly, and work on projects with Rebuilding Together.

### Nonprofit organization

**Project Read**, an outgrowth of the Menlo Park Library, has helped more than 2,000 learn to read in English, or improve their reading skills, since its inception in 1985. The winner of the award for a nonprofit organization, it pairs tutors with foreign-born students, helping them to read books and newspapers, and attain their educational and professional goals.

All of the tutors are volun-

teers. The program is funded by the California State Library Literacy Services, by Menlo Park's Friends of the Library foundation, and by the city of Menlo Park, among other entities and individuals.

### Business excellence

Founded in 1952, **Hirzel Fine Jewelry** has been a fixture in downtown Menlo Park for over half a century. Founder George Hirzel started as a watchmaker, but over time the business became more devoted to gems.

Employee Carl Weimer bought the business in 1993, moving it to its present location and expanding its size. Among the services the business offers: appraisals, custom design, special orders, jewelry and watch repair, engraving, and cleaning. It is the recipient of the Albert J. Giannotti Award for Business Excellence. ■

### Correction

An earlier article about the Golden Acorn Awards incorrectly gave Jon Johnston's first name as Joe.

### INFORMATION

The 37th annual Golden Acorn Awards banquet, sponsored by the Menlo Park Chamber of Commerce, will be held Monday, Sept. 21, at the Rosewood Sand Hill hotel, 2825 Sand Hill Road at Interstate 280, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Reservations are \$125. For more information, e-mail [info@menloparkchamber.com](mailto:info@menloparkchamber.com) or call 325-2818.

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## ELMA MAE REYNOLDS



Elma Mae Reynolds, a 47 year resident of Menlo Park, California passed away peacefully surrounded by her family on September 10, 2009. She was 80 years old.

She was born in Fresno, California, daughter of Elmer and Stella LaJoie. She graduated from San

Domenico High School in San Anselmo, attended Dominican College, and graduated with an Elementary Education degree from Santa Barbara Teachers' College.

Elma taught school, primarily kindergarten, in Reedley and Hawaii. She met her beloved husband, Val Reynolds in Honolulu. They married in 1955. In 1983, Val preceded her in death.

She is survived by her children, Melanie (Bob Rowe) Reynolds of Helena, Montana; Harrison Mark (Jane) Reynolds of Menlo Park, California; Jeffrey Val (Nancy) Reynolds of San Diego, California; Susan (Terry) Gould of Winnetka, Illinois; and Anne (Scott) Jasper, of

Carmel, California.

She is preceded in death by her parents and her sister, Evelyn Crivelli.

Elma took great pride and much enjoyment in her 14 grandchildren. She took many trips around the country to visit them. Her grandchildren include Matthew, Robert, Michelle, and Scott Reynolds; Maggie and Sam Rowe; Alex and Nick Reynolds; Ellis, Hilary, and Claire Gould; and Christopher, Kevin, and Brian Jasper.

Elma was a member of The Church of Nativity Parish. She worked for many years as an instructional aide at Laurel School in Menlo Park.

A Rosary will be held at 7:00 p.m. on Friday, September 18 in the chapel at Spangler Mortuary in Menlo Park. Viewing hours will be held from 4 – 7 p.m. on the same date. A funeral mass will be held on Saturday, September 19 at 9:00 a.m. at The Church of the Nativity in Menlo Park. Burial will be held at 11:30 a.m. on Monday, September 21 in Reedley. For additional information or directions, please contact Spangler Mortuaries at (650) 323-6500 or [www.spanglermortuary.com](http://www.spanglermortuary.com).

In Elma's memory, the family is requesting that donations be made to the Northern California Alzheimer's Association ([www.alz.org/norcal](http://www.alz.org/norcal)).

PAID OBITUARY

**■ POLICE CALLS**

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

**ATHERTON**

**Auto burglary report:** Credit cards stolen, 200 block of Austin Ave., Sept. 4.

**Residential burglary report:** Point of entry was dog-door, Maple Ave., Sept. 10.

**Grand theft report:** Two computers stolen from unlocked vehicle in driveway, 100 block of Tuscaloosa Ave., Sept. 4.

**MENLO PARK**

**Residential burglary reports:**

■ Tools stolen from locked garage, 1200 block of Mills St., Sept. 4.

■ Three bikes and accessories with total value of \$2,500 stolen from carport, 400 block of Waverley St., Sept. 6.

■ Firearms, cash, two laptop computers and personal items with total value of \$21,000 stolen from unoccupied residence, 1000 block of Almanor Ave., Sept. 7.

**Auto burglary reports:**

■ Apple iPod earphones and sunglasses stolen, 1000 block of Fremont St., Sept. 4.

■ GPS unit and purse stolen, first block of Nancy Way, Sept. 7.

■ About \$20 in change stolen, 700 block of Central Ave., Sept. 8.

■ Purse and sunglasses stolen, 300 block of Cotton St., Sept. 9.

■ Remote control toy boat stolen, 1200 block of Bay Laurel Drive, Sept. 9.

■ Cash, credit cards, makeup and Apple iPod with total value of \$690

stolen, 1600 block of Marsh Road, Sept. 9.

**Grand theft reports:**

■ Two bicycles stolen with total value of \$520, in 800 block of Coleman Ave., Sept. 7.

■ Bike value at \$2,020 stolen from apartment patio, 1000 block of Florence Lane, Sept. 8.

■ Bike valued at \$400 stolen from bike rack, 2200 block of Sharon Road, Sept. 10.

**Fraud reports:**

■ Bad checks totaling \$5,000 received, La Michoacana Market at 1305 Willow Road, Sept. 4.

■ Credit card fraud of \$270, first block of Willow Road, Sept. 7.

■ Identity theft, 1000 block of Tehama Ave., Sept. 10.

**Child Protective Services reports:**

■ 1300 block of Henderson Ave., Sept. 9.

600 block of Roble Ave., Sept. 9.

**PORTOLA VALLEY**

**Assault report:** Resident struck on left wrist and head with two wooden baseball bats after refusing demand for \$500 for bail bond, first block of Oak Forest Court, Sept. 2.

**LADERA**

**Fraud report:** Business credit card used for \$7,000 in unauthorized purchases, 3200 block of Alpine Road, Sept. 4.

**WEST MENLO PARK**

**Auto burglary report:** Window smashed and golf bag and clubs valued at \$2,070 stolen, 3500 block of Alameda de las Pulgas, Sept. 2.

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**Vikings Pop Warner football report**

*This report is from Adam Greenlow of Menlo Park, a player on the Pee Wee Vikings' Pop Warner football team. He is a seventh-grader at St. Raymond School. All players named are with the Vikings.*

The Menlo-Atherton Vikings played against the Tri-Cities Titans and the Junior Midgets against the Andrew Hill Raiders on Sept. 12-13 at Menlo-Atherton High School. Following are the game summaries.

**Tiny Mites:** In a game where you don't keep score of the points, Justin Sinclair had an amazing run for a touchdown. Justin also crossed the goal line with a sneaky quarterback keeper. Joe Posthauer, Nick Andrighetto, Braden Fitzgerald, and Sebastian Thompson played tight defense.

**Mitey Mites:** The Vikings' unbelievable first drive lasted 10 plays and took one quarter. The drive went 70 yards, starting with the big push of the frontline, consisting of Owen Mulleneaux, Samuel Davison, James Miller, DJ Houston and Alejandro Ross. It ended with Blake Stenstrom punching in a touchdown. Keyshawn Ashford wrapped the game up with two 45-yard touchdowns to leave Tri Cities in their tracks. The final score was 18-6.

**Junior Pee Wees:** The JPW played their best game of the season but lost 21-0.

Treisean Bishop had some great long runs, which were made possible because of Lea Brown's stellar blocking. Don Tate Tussing had a great performance on defense.

**Pee Wees:** The Pee Wees played a hard fought game, but couldn't put in a final score to win. Penalties cost the Vikings in the first half, but in the second half the yellow flags were not seen as often. Memo Teu scored on a 17-yard run for the first touchdown of the game. Robby Beardsley threw the ball to Benjamin Burr-Kirven, who ran 35 yards and had to cool off his feet in the end zone. Burr-Kirven also got a critical pick when the Titans could have driven down and scored a touchdown. The defense got a safety to put two points on the board. After one touchdown, Stavro Papadakis kicked for two points. In the last minutes of the fourth quarter, Adam Greenlow caught a long pass thrown by Robby Beardsley and ran in the extra couple of yards to score. But, it wasn't quite enough to win and the Vikings lost 23-26.

**Junior Midgets:** After a scoreless first half, the Vikings managed to pull off a great 20-6 win against Andrew Hill. Matt Odell had a pass reception from Royce Branning that put points on the board with a 60 yard touchdown. Isiah Nash had two interceptions and brought one to the house. In the third quarter, a big drive ended with Alex Andrighetto scoring on a 40-yard run. Ryan Foster had some nice sacks. Zhiir James pummeled a few kids and Malcom Gates and Keesean Johnson had outstanding games.

**Have lunch at Amici's, help the hungry**

All the proceeds from lunch sales at Amici's East Coast Pizzeria in Menlo Park on Tuesday, Sept. 22, will go to feed people in need in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

The profits from all sales between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. will go to the Second Harvest Food

Bank, according to Menlo Park's Chamber of Commerce. Second Harvest distributes food primarily to low-income families through a network of regional nonprofits, according to its Web site.

Amici's is located at 880 Santa Cruz Ave., near University Drive.



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Subscriptions are \$60 for one year and \$100 for two years.



**WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?**

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

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Editor at the Almanac, 3525 Alameda de las Pulgas, Menlo Park, CA 94025.

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## Making history, a page at a time

Have you ever driven down an oddly named street and thought to yourself, “How’d they come up with that name?” Or walked past a utilitarian ranch-style house incongruously tucked behind an opulent brick gate more suited to an English manor and wondered, what gives?

California may not be dotted with Civil War battlefields or houses where George Washington slept, but even our local landscape is full of remnants of earlier times, with stories that could easily fade away with the passing of the years.

It falls to a hardworking handful of volunteers to track down these tales, documenting and preserving our shared history. Local history committees collect and painstakingly catalog old photos, newspaper clippings and first-hand accounts of great deeds, eyebrow-raising scandals, or just everyday life.

With the arrival of a weighty new book tracing 200 years of Atherton’s history, we are reminded of the great communal benefit derived from the work of a dedicated few. The book is a treasury of nearly forgotten titans, early settlers and imaginative innovators, of playboys and immigrants, of civic-minded philanthropists and the frivolous rich. It lets us peek behind the curtain of modern life and

uncover surprising insights into how the town came to be, and the people who shaped it.

Portola Valley town historian Nancy Lund and Menlo Park author Pamela Gullard devoted the past six years to “Under the Oaks: Two Hundred Years in Atherton,” a mighty undertaking with little chance of great monetary reward. It’s not the first such labor of love by the duo, who have also written books chronicling the histories of Portola Valley and Palo Alto.

While official archives and local history museums are invaluable assets to the creation of such books, it would be impossible without the participation of generous people who lend out cherished old family pictures, scrapbooks or diaries to fill in the gaps of our shared history.

It is thanks to long-time residents who acquiesce to be interviewed about the old days, and descendants like Atherton resident Earl Douglass, who willingly supplied an unpublished memoir of his famous grandfather, the inventor Leon Douglass. They are the people who know why there are so many streets named Selby in town, and that Atherton was named not for author Gertrude Atherton but for her father-in-law, because the name of Fair Oaks was already taken. They know that sprawling summer estates inevitably give way to subdivisions. And they know that by giving us an understanding of the past, we may better imagine our future.

**EDITORIAL**

*The opinion of The Almanac*

**LETTERS**

*Our readers write*

**Health care reform foe’s rhetoric could backfire**

*Editor:*

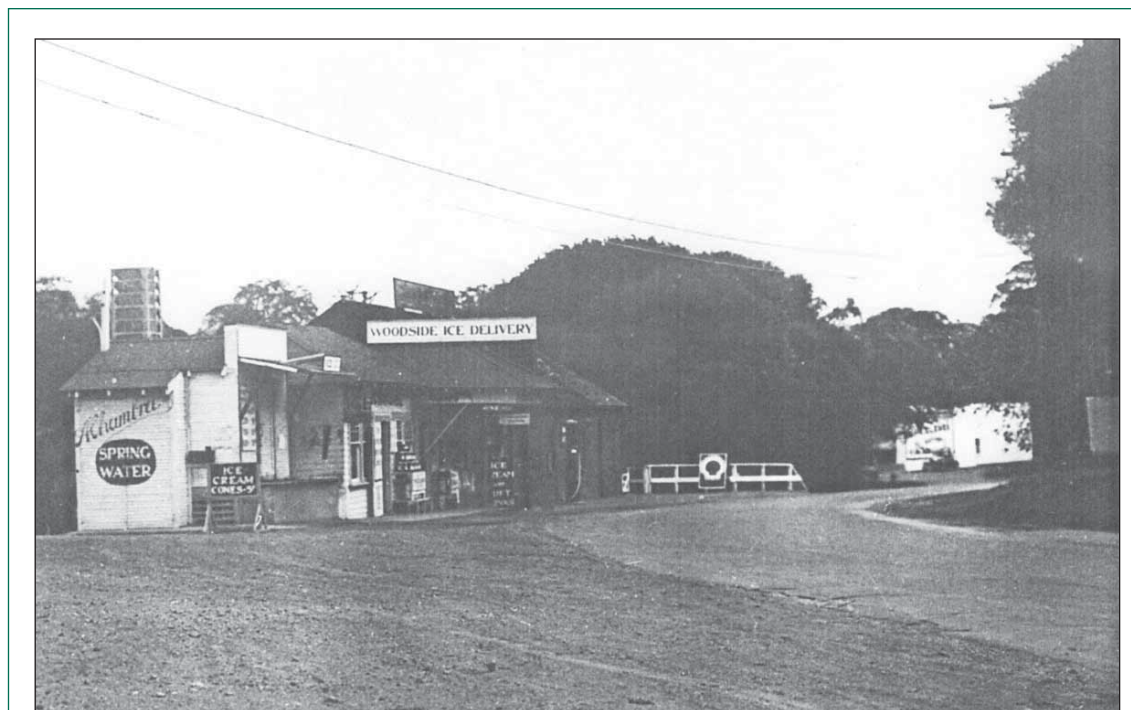
By all means grant Mark Williams a “viewpoint” column in the Almanac (letters, Sept. 2), and perhaps even an entire page so he can “fill you in,” as he says, on the facts, “fully and unemotionally,” about the “disastrous” health care legislation. Noting his pejorative reference to “liberals,” I suspect we’d in effect be subjected to the out-gassing of a certain talk-radio host and to the often venomous rants emanating from a certain TV channel. In so doing he would make the case for health care reform even more valid to the rational among us.

**Stan G. Scott**  
Maywood Lane, Menlo Park

**Fergusson’s grand jury rant an embarrassment**

*Editor:*

When the San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury recently sent a report on escalating municipal employee costs to all 20 cities in the county, most cities responded positively and constructively. Not



J. Volpiano Collection

**Our Regional Heritage**

This undated photo shows the scene at the northeast corner of Woodside and Whiskey Hill roads in the early 1900s. Note the white barrier near the top of the present Woodside grade.

so in Menlo Park, where council member Kelly Fergusson launched into an embarrassing rant against the grand jury at the Aug. 25 City Council meeting. (The video recording of the meeting is available on the city Web site, [menlopark.org](http://menlopark.org).

Click on “Watch Public Meetings,” select the 8/25 meeting and fast forward to 3 hours, 52 minutes.)

Accusing the jurors of “shoddy” work, she claimed that the report had been “politically driven” and that they had “failed miserably” to

fulfill their role as watchdogs for the public. As disturbing as Ms. Fergusson’s outburst was, it was also no surprise, given her refusal to support any meaningful public

See **LETTERS**, next page

## Portola Valley schoolhouse reflects a generous community spirit

By Nancy Lund

As the 20th century began, the one-room schoolhouse that had served the residents of Portola Valley since 1894 was overflowing. Fifty-three children! Up from 40 in 1895.

Thus, the school board voted to build a second one-room school alongside the first. On January 23, 1909, the voters (all men since women didn't have the vote) approved a bond to appropriate \$3,500 for its construction, 20 in favor, 1 opposed. A second vote the following June raised the bond to \$4,000, still 20 to 1.

This new schoolhouse would survive to allow modern-day residents to celebrate its centennial.

The board hired LeBaron Olive, a "certified" architect, to draw up plans and supervise construction. His design was Mission Revival with a twist: using wood instead of more traditional stucco, appropriate for a little country town in the redwoods. The new school had no plumbing or electricity, but it did have a battery-operated doorbell at the double-entry front door. The final cost was \$3,602.11.

The new building became the primary school, and older students attended the 1894 school next door. These two one-room schoolhouses stood side by side on Portola Road from 1909 until 1950.

After World War II, the two schoolhouses were no longer adequate. Population in the valley soared and the number of students was rising rapidly: 24 in 1944, 62 in 1949, 149 in 1951, 230 in 1953, 464 in 1957. The 1894 school was dismantled to make way for the first wing of the modern Portola Valley School.

Even that was insufficient. More classrooms were necessary.

In 1954 the state granted a loan

began. As new wings of Portola Valley School rose and accommodated the students, the school was closed in 1957. It still had service to render: the first temporary Town Hall in 1964, superintendent of schools' office, school board meeting room, storeroom, and for 15 years it was the Valley Art Gallery, exhibition space for a consortium of local artists.

It is an official Point of Historical Interest in San Mateo County and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Drawings of its exteriors and blue prints are housed in the Library of Congress.

As it approached its 90th birthday, the Little Red Schoolhouse was showing its age. Large parts of the foundation were gone; the remainder could be crumbled away with fingers. Paint was peeling; the heating system was beyond repair. Birds lived under the roof and in holes in the siding.

Once again, residents displayed their affection for the old school. More than 400 families contributed to a fund to completely restore it and return it to its original white exterior. The first Blues and Barbecue in 1997 celebrated its completion and the community spirit that made it possible. ■

### ■ PANEL OF CONTRIBUTORS



Nancy Lund is town historian for Portola Valley

for more construction. One of the requirements of the loan was the demolition of the 1909 school. A San Mateo County official said: "I can't call those [rooms in the old school] classrooms. I think the district and the board have a moral obligation to house the children in a safe building."

Perhaps with some regrets about the loss of the 1894 school, the board decided to put the conditions of the loan to a vote. Those 1954 voters refused the loan and saved the school, 185 to 88.

It was then that its era as "the Little Red Schoolhouse"

### LETTERS

Continued from previous page

discussion of unsustainable, long-term public employee costs.

According to the San Mateo County Superior Court Web site, two types of reaction to a grand jury action can be expected: "Malevolent and unfaithful public servants are uneasy, while honest citizens and the conscientious public servants are reassured." So, which category best describes Ms. Ferguson's behavior?

**Frank Tucker**  
Politzer Drive, Menlo Park

### Public discussion of employee costs important

Editor:

The upcoming Menlo Park employee contract negotiations should be of interest in this era of cost-consciousness. Kudos to the Almanac for its editorial (Sept. 8) advocating that the City Council find ways to seek resident feedback prior to its closed door sessions.

More coverage by the Almanac — particularly regarding the contents of the grand jury report on public employee costs — would be helpful. Most of the coverage centered on the council's emotional dismissal of the report.

For those of you who want to leave this to the council, be aware that they recently approved increased pension payouts, at a time when most employees no longer have pensions. (Even the federal government no longer offers them). Some of the pension cost is shared by the employee, but what is the cost to the taxpayer? The council also recently approved 25 to 30 percent salary increases for police/sergeants.

In these times, it is important that the council make long-term, financially responsible decisions. And citizens need to be informed of what is going on. I would hope more information would be readily available and we could have a more open discussion of these decisions that impact us all.

**Joy Koso**  
Continental Drive,  
Menlo Park

### Lucky to have Marion to help keep us informed

Editor:

It's Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2009. The Almanac arrived this morning at The Sequoias in Portola Valley. I always try to grab one before they're all gone. It's automatic for many of us to look quickly to see what Marion Softky is honing in on this week with her distinctive, articulate style of writing.

Then we remember! Marion has retired. Sort of. We can't imagine Marion not writing about something vital which interests all of us. For years I've wondered — how can Marion sit through so many droning-on dragged out council meetings, planning commission meetings, trails meetings, Architectural and Site Review meetings and not fall asleep?

In between her excellent reports, which she always brings to life, Marion has written about people. People and their places. People and their horses and dogs. Stories about these beautiful lands we live on and try to

## Proposed zoning change threatens downtown's 'village' character

By Nancy Couperus

Are you aware that a planning process is under way to change the very character of Menlo Park — a change from the present village character to a big-city ambience?

A zoning change is being proposed that would enable high-density development by allowing three-story buildings in the downtown area, and four- and five-story buildings along El Camino Real.

To support this extra density, the proponents of high-density development want to add more parking capacity by constructing multi-storied parking garages on the existing surface parking plazas. And, on the remaining surface plazas they propose building high-density mixed-use buildings (residential/retail, residential/office). Eliminating the convenient open surface parking, which provides easy access to stores, will impact shoppers and change the character of the downtown.

Experience in other communities has shown that customers prefer the ease of surface parking that brings them to the front or back door of a business. Experience has also shown that multi-story garages can increase walking distances to reach desired stores and increase traffic congestion on the streets that provide entrance to the structures.

The transition to more urban high-rises will drive out smaller independent businesses that will be unable to afford the high rents that will need to be charged to pay for redeveloped properties. Inevitably, they will be replaced by national chains — the only businesses that will be able to afford the higher rents. As "Hometown Penin-

sula" states: One-of-a-kind retail businesses and service contribute greatly to making the (Menlo Park) downtown unique.

The change in the building heights, the issues associated with the parking structures, and the loss of the existing plaza surface parking areas for community activities such

as the farmers' market would result in a drastic change in our friendly village character and push it towards the look and feel of a big city.

Who benefits from over-development? Obviously, the developers do, but not necessarily the residents or local businesses.

Look around at neighboring cities — Palo Alto and Redwood City — and decide if you want Menlo Park to be over-developed in the way that these two cities have been moving, as calls for mixed-use, high-density residential, oversized buildings have been the order of the day.

Think about the quality of life that you as a resident now enjoy, and imagine how over-development in your downtown area will affect your quality of life in the future if the development interests prevail.

If you too are concerned about this potential drastic change to the character of Menlo Park, please visit the Web site [www.preserveMPdowntown.org](http://www.preserveMPdowntown.org) to see what you can do about staying informed and making your voice heard.

And, if you can, attend the final community workshop on Thursday, Sept. 17, 6:30 to 10 p.m., at 700B Santa Cruz Ave. (enter from rear parking plaza, behind Ace Hardware). ■

**Nancy Couperus is a downtown property owner and a founder of the Menlo Park Farmers' Market.**



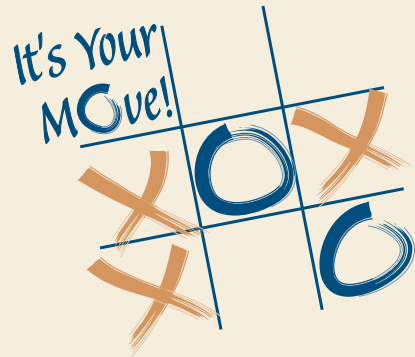
care for. Tales of the plight of developers who try to put too much onto too little open space. And best of all, reports on the success of those who try to preserve our open spaces — POST, the MidPeninsula Regional Open Space District, the Committee for Green Foothills, and if I've left out an open space

organization, please forgive.

How lucky we are here in this region. Best of all, our thanks to Marion Softky, who has, for so many years, kept us aware of and thankful for our heritage with her wonderful readable style of writing.

**Trish Hooper**  
Portola Road, Portola Valley

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Coldwell Banker  
#1 Agent Team, SF Peninsula 2008  
#7 Nationally



Information deemed reliable, but not guaranteed.