

The Almanac


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

OCTOBER 21, 2009 | VOL. 45 NO. 8



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SHAPING THE FUTURE



High school district election could dramatically reshape policies on budget accountability, teaching methods and charter schools, including Everest Public High School (shown here).

[SEE VOTER'S GUIDE, SECTION 2]



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Inside

This week's news, features and community events.

FIRST SHOT



Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

Somewhere to perch

Daniel Kozlowski is the young man responsible for the new benches gracing the little reading garden outside the Atherton branch library. The 17-year-old Menlo Park resident, a member of Boy Scout Troop 222, took on the challenge of replacing the old benches as his Eagle Scout service project. The new benches are made from wood salvaged from felled elm trees, and were built with the help of about two dozen volunteers, Daniel says.

Menlo Park

- Council urged to oppose huge Cargill development. **Page 9**
- Menlo Watch: Green committee launches "cool roof" campaign. **Page 9**
- The Manhattanization of Menlo Park? Activists fight "big city" plans. **Page 5**

Election 2009

- Voter's Guide to local elections. **See Section 2**
- Fire board candidates respond to flap over campaign ads. **Page 5**

Schools

- Daniel Vinson, former Woodside School District superintendent, dies at 62. **Page 5**
- Sequoia Union High School District redesigns its Web site. **Page 12**

Community

- Around Town: Bill Lane remembers Sunset magazine. **Page 13**
- "Fiddler on the Roof" comes to Woodside. **Page 14**

Also Inside

- Around Town**13
- Calendar**26
- Election endorsements**18
- Police Calls**16

On the cover

Students vote on their school mascot at the new charter school, Everest Public High School in Redwood City. Charter schools are among the leading issues in the Sequoia Union High School District election for two members of the school board. See the Voter's Guide in Section 2 for information on this and other local elections.

CALLING ON THE ALMANAC

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

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WINE

Random Reds

It's fall! Time to segue into cool weather reds. Here are a few random reds we feel offer exceptional taste, at great price points.

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Local News

MENLO PARK | ATHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

The Manhattanization of Menlo Park?

■ As activists campaign in opposition to long-term plans for the downtown area, city officials struggle to assuage concerns of residents and business interests.

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

If you've strolled through the Menlo Park farmers' market in recent weeks, you've probably seen a few women chatting up passersby, standing next to an easel with signs that read: "Existing Farmers Market Threatened!" and "Vote Your Vision for Menlo Park Downtown." If you're reading this, chances are you might even be among the close to 500 residents (and counting) who have completed

the short survey the women have been handing out on the future of the downtown area.

If you haven't talked to them, you might not know that the woman organizing the effort is Nancy Couperus, a founder of the farmers' market and a downtown property owner. (She is often joined by Menlo Park residents Margaret Carney, a co-founder of the market, and Phyllis Van De Mark, president of the club that sponsors it.)

You also might not know that the survey they are handing out

features a choice many would find distressing: between a charming small town with successful local businesses, and one with chain stores and a big-city atmosphere.

The survey is the women's attempt to get the pulse of the community on the city's effort to develop a long-term plan for the downtown area, and the stretch of El Camino Real within Menlo Park's borders. Concerned that residents weren't aware of the planning effort, which calls among other things for somewhat denser development downtown, they have taken to the market to spread the word themselves.

Ms. Couperus has also helped organize downtown property

and business owners, 12 of whom lobbied the City Council Oct. 13 to oppose key parts of the plan — especially a proposal to build two parking garages downtown, which some fear could make it more difficult for customers to access stores.

"Now that we understand the direction of this (plan), even if the details are not precisely spelled out, it's imperative to educate as many residents as possible about ... its implications, before it's too late," Ms. Couperus said in an interview.

The advocacy effort she spearheaded has put City Council members in an uneasy position. They can't do much beyond trying to assure business inter-

ests that plans are far from set, lest they give the impression that they are meddling in the community-directed, consultant-shaped planning process. A draft of the plan is scheduled to be released in the spring, with a council vote slated for fall 2010.

Meanwhile, Ms. Couperus intends to continue campaigning in opposition to a preliminary version of the plan, released last month.

Survey says ...

While thanking downtown business interests for expressing their concerns, council members have also voiced frustration at

See **DOWNTOWN**, page 8

Fire board candidates respond to flap over campaign ads

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

With a contract dispute unresolved and an election looming, the union that represents 93 firefighters in the Menlo Park Fire Protection District has provoked the ire of one board member by launching what he views as a misleading election campaign.

Lawn signs and print advertisements produced by the union announce that "Menlo Park Firefighters support" Jack Nelson, Robert Silano and Jon Mosby for seats on the five-person fire board.

In failing to specify that it's the Menlo Park Firefighters Association that supports the candidates — rather than all firefighters — the union purports to speak for the entire district, outgoing board member Peter Carpenter asserted in a string of e-mails last week.

"I am appalled by the arrogance of the union that it feels it can



speak in the name of the District, or even in the name of all of the firefighters, given that many of our leading firefighters are chiefs and not members of the union," he wrote in one e-mail. He has asked for a public apology from the union, and has asked the three candidates to "repudiate these illegal actions (that were carried out) on their behalf."

Negotiations between the union and the district are at an impasse; union members are working under a contract that expired in July 2008. Six candidates are running for three seats in the Nov. 3 election.

Jack Nelson, one of the three candidates endorsed by the union, said he didn't see an issue with the advertisements. "They are Menlo Park firefighters," he said. "I really don't see it as misleading."

See **FIRE**, page 6



Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

Dance like an Incan

Natalie Jones and her fellow kindergarteners dressed in Incan attire for Laurel School's recent Peruvian Festival. The kids performed a traditional Huino Indian dance as part of cultural celebrations organized by the teachers of the Atherton public school's bilingual Spanish immersion program. It's the second year of the Menlo Park City School district's language immersion program, which has first-grade classes at Encinal and kindergarteners at Laurel. The festivities were funded by Jeanie Ritchie grants.

Daniel Vinson, former Woodside School superintendent, dies at 62

Daniel Vinson, the retired superintendent of the Woodside Elementary School District, died Oct. 11 surrounded by his family. He was 62.

Mr. Vinson led the one-school district in the dual role of superintendent/principal for four years, beginning in 2004. He retired after school ended for the year in June 2008.

During his tenure, Mr. Vinson steered the school through an ambitious bond measure and modernization campaign that added more than a dozen classrooms and a new administration building, as well as other facilities, to the campus.

Shortly before he retired, Mr. Vinson was named the grand marshal of the annual Wood-



Dan Vinson

side May Day parade, a community event that begins at the elementary school campus. "Over the past year, many have shared lovely stories about him, and that is enough to give me an appre-

ciation for his talents, warmth and generosity of spirit," said Diana Abbati, Woodside's current superintendent/principal.

Anne Campbell, the superintendent of the neighboring Portola Valley School District, called Mr. Vinson "a consummate gentleman."

"He was just one of those delightful people, he always had

a twinkle in his eye," she said.

Born in Alameda, Mr. Vinson attended Chico State University, where he earned his bachelor's degree in social science. He earned a master's degree in educational administration from San Jose State and his doctorate in education from the University of San Francisco.

See **VINSON**, page 6

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**Fire board candidates respond
to flap over campaign ads****FIRE**

continued from page 5

"This district has more important issues and challenges than to spend a great deal of time on a distraction to voters about the signs," Mr. Silano wrote in a statement, noting that the ads refer people to the association's Web site. "I am honored to have their support."

"I'm gonna have to go across the street and look at it, I hadn't noticed that," Mr. Mosby said when told of Mr. Carpenter's concern about the signs' wording. "They are backing us, and I don't see a big conflict."

The firefighters' union did not respond to a request for comment.

Noting that Mr. Carpenter was endorsed by the union in 2001, Mr. Nelson said: "Everybody's trying to figure out why he's on his high horse." He went on to commend Mr. Carpenter's service to the district, and said he was disappointed when he heard that Mr. Carpenter would not seek re-

election.

Union endorsements are always a quid pro quo bargain, according to Mr. Carpenter — something he said he learned firsthand when the union asked him to "repay the debt" in contract negotiations after it endorsed him. "Been there, done that," he wrote.

He has asked the board to consider referring the matter to the district attorney. "This makes a travesty of our electoral process," he wrote.

The board will take the subject up at its Oct. 20 meeting, scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. in the fire station at 300 Middlefield Road.

In e-mails, Mr. Carpenter went far beyond his concerns over the campaign materials, maintaining that it's a violation of California law to "accept" any endorsement from a union, and a further violation to vote on contract negotiations after accepting an endorsement.

"The union's been endorsing people for decades," Mr. Nelson said, noting that candidates aren't involved in the union's decision-making process. ■

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continued from page 5

Before being hired in Woodside, he was the superintendent of the Rancho Santa Fe School District in Southern California.

He is survived by his wife, Sara Jane Vinson of Saratoga; his children, Alison Gaconnet of San Diego and Andrew Vinson

of Windsor; his brother Tim Vinson of Redwood Valley; and three grandchildren.

Services were held at the Saratoga Federated Church. The family prefers memorial donations be made to UCSF Foundation (in memory of Daniel Vinson for brain tumor program), P.O. Box 45339, San Francisco, CA 94145-0339.

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The chickens and goats at Woodside's Goat Hill should be fine if they're moved to a new home, but drive-by visitors to the corner of Hacienda Drive and Woodside Road may never see them again. The property is in foreclosure and farm operations are set to close on Nov. 1.

Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac



The end is near for Woodside's Goat Hill

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

The goats, chickens, geese and large black llama that grace the pasture at the corner at Hacienda Drive and Woodside Road in Woodside may soon be gone.

The property, including the house hidden behind the trees above the pasture, is now in foreclosure. Though nothing official has been communicated to her, Lisa Green, the Redwood City massage therapist who owns and cares for the farm animals, said in an interview that she expects to have ceased operations and be gone by Sunday, Nov. 1.

Ms. Green has used the pasture free of charge, courtesy of Woodside residents and property owners Scott and Mimi Cacchione. In its own way, the pasture has been a working farm, with Ms. Green selling eggs and goat's milk and opening the gates selectively to visitors seeking experience with real farm animals.

She will open up elsewhere, she said, possibly in Woodside, possibly in Pescadero, but visitors won't be allowed in. To move the animals, she will borrow a horse trailer. "They'll miss their friends," she said. "They'll be bored."

Woodside council sticks with \$10,000 fine for cutting trees

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

It could have been worse, much worse.

Such notions may have lent some comfort to Dr. Eric and Jacquie Weiss. The Woodside couple learned Tuesday, Oct. 13, that the Town Council would, in fact, fine them \$10,000 for the felling of some 10 trees with diameters larger than 9.5 inches without first having obtained a \$60 permit.

The fine "feels large and impactful" and something like a punishment considering that at least one arborist had commended the character of the cutting that had been done, Dr. Weiss told the council after the 6-0 vote reaffirming a Sept. 8 decision.

(Councilwoman Deborah Gordon recused herself because her employer, Stanford University, owns the Weiss property and because Dr. Weiss occasionally does work for the Stanford Travel/Study Program.)

"I think the trees in this town are a very valuable community asset," Mayor Peter Mason said before the vote and after a discussion about the fine structure in nearby communities. "This is not an unreasonable number and I think it applies to the current situation."

In remarks before the vote, Dr. Weiss asked to be fined some small multiple of the cost to replace the

Officially from the bank involved with the foreclosure "have no interest" in talking with her, she said she was told by a real estate agent.

For \$3.2 million and a rezoning of the property, it could be hers to start a nonprofit, but fundraising efforts have not done well. "We have had enormous verbal buy-in. I've been handed hundreds of business cards," she said. "We have had absolutely no concrete buy-in."

She said she would bring the animals back if somehow the property were to be rescued, but, she added, that would require the residents of Woodside "to get behind this in a concrete way."

Encouragement has come from at least one member of the Town Council, she said.

Asked about what might be a daunting effort to have the place rezoned, should she find the money, Ms. Green replied: "You've got to hope and you've got to dream or nothing happens. Mountains are moved every day."

A deputy from the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office suggested contacting the Ronald McDonald house, which she has done, but she hasn't heard back from them, she said.

To get involved, Ms. Green asks that you join the Facebook group "Goat Hill Coalition." ■

trees. A \$10,000 fine is 160 times that cost, he said.

After the vote, he noted that there may have been too many trees in the grove for its own health, and that his was an innocent mistake that did not result in malicious damage.

Mr. Mason responded. "The trees that you've chosen to chop down may have been the healthiest trees in that stand."

Had the council stuck with the by-the-book fine of \$112,500, the couple "certainly" would have had to move, Dr. Weiss said, then added: "Ten thousand dollars is a lot. It's a lot, a lot."

It may well be a lot, but \$10,000 for 10 trees is what a Los Altos resident would pay, not including the cost of five replacement trees for each one cut down, according to a preliminary study by town staff. Other communities have fines of \$500 per tree and also require the purchase of replacement trees.

Woodside is in a class by itself with the current structure of \$5,000 for the first tree, \$7,500 for the second and \$10,000 for each one thereafter, the staff report said. Further study on the fine structure is ahead.

"It does seem to be excessive when you look at these other jurisdictions," Town Manager Susan George said. ■

REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Gloria Darke



Negotiations?

Dear Gloria,

Q: We recently purchased a home at what I consider to be a very good price. However, we have since had several inspections including a termite, pool and two home inspections. I do not wish to go forward with the purchase of this home unless the seller will pay to have everything repaired as suggested by the reports. Is this common practice? How do buyers usually handle this?

John T., Redwood City

Dear John,

A: Everything is negotiable up to a point. I am making an assumption that you did not buy a brand new home; therefore, you should not expect that it would be in the condition of a brand new home. Inspectors come from the point of view of saying "if this house was perfect the wiring would be redone, there would be new plumbing, the windows should be dual pane, etc." However, you presumably

did not pay for a house with all these upgrades and it's probably not within reason for you to ask that everything be done. Just the fact that you had two inspections done suggests to me that you are either a little overly cautious or that perhaps you are looking for a reason not to move ahead with this purchase. It is not appropriate for a buyer to prepare a wish list of items he would like repaired or upgrades he might want done to the house. It is appropriate to look at major items which may have not been disclosed and that may be considered defects. This would definitely include the foundation, which is probably the biggest item. Even things like furnace, hot water heater, plumbing leaks are not major expenses and can generally cost under \$10,000 to replace/repair. Prepare a list of items that if they are not corrected by the seller that you would not wish to proceed with the sale. But don't include everything little thing that you can upgrade or repair as you live in the house.

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

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851-7519/851-1698

Community members fight 'big city' development

DOWNTOWN

continued from page 5

having to field calls and letters from residents who reportedly come away from the farmers' market thinking that the city is out to ruin the quaint, community-centric character of the downtown area.

Are Ms. Couperus and her compatriots doing the city a service by informing residents about what's going on at City Hall — or a disservice, by spreading misleading information?

"People need to get a grasp of the big picture: are we going to remain a small town, with low-density (development), or are we going to be more like Redwood City and Palo Alto? That's why I framed it that way," Ms. Couperus said.

The two- and three-story buildings along Santa Cruz Avenue, new downtown apartments, and "infill" development that preliminary plans call for would give Menlo Park a big-city feel, she says. "That's just a fact."

She also argues that plans to close Chestnut Street to vehicular traffic and to build a small covered marketplace would kill the farmers' market.

She said she viewed her survey's results as an objective indication of how residents feel about the downtown plan.

Of course, truth, like beauty, is often in the eye of the beholder.

Consultants say they're trying to make the center of the city more lively and welcoming — not to turn it into a bustling metropolis. They dispute the claim that the marketplace would deliver a death knell to the farmers' market.

While the results of her straw poll may not sway the City Council, Ms. Couperus sees them as an affirmation of her own preference for a downtown unchanged from its current state in most essentials. An overwhelming majority of residents don't support the plan as she portrays it, she said.

"While your visioning workshops may have shown support for the 'emerging plan,' I'm convinced, as are many others, that the plan is out of touch with the majority of Menlo Park residents," she told the council.

That's the same complaint that helped sink the "Smart Growth" planning effort in the late 1990s.

At the meeting, Councilman Rich Cline asked business interests to work with the city, rather than wage a parallel campaign.

"You already have residents or business owners who start parading down the street, try-

ing to color what we're doing in their own mind, and then getting survey results," he said. "But we are not even close to being done. We're still in the think tank."

"We're in the right place, folks," he added. "It's not time to panic. ... If we unify and work together, we can get something done. If we don't, and we campaign on our own, we won't. That's what I promise."

Businesses miffed

Still, business and property owners have expressed not only dismay at the lack of involvement of longtime commercial interests, but also a fundamental distrust in the idea of a consultant making critical planning proposals — a criticism that has dogged past planning efforts, as well.

Two of the ideas they have decried most often also happen to be ones initially suggested by consultants, rather than residents: plans for a covered marketplace, and for a boutique hotel downtown.

Business interests have implied that the city is forgetting its roots, overstepping its bounds, and thinking too big. At the Oct. 13 council meeting, Mark Flegel and Richard Draeger reminded council members of their monetary investment in the city, their standing in the community, and their past involvement in planning efforts.

Council members have acknowledged that the city overlooked key downtown interests, but they declined to slow or redirect the planning process at this early date.

"I am frustrated that there's no real chance for dialogue in the official process with the community, but I think the (business owners) can help us solve some of these problems," Mayor Heyward Robinson said. "The last thing we want is to get to approving a specific plan that a segment of downtown businesses don't support."

Still, he added: "Everybody's got to be serious about trying to help us make it work. I don't think we'll have a productive interaction with people who just want to say 'no.'"

None of the business interests "oppose change just because change is being proposed," Ms. Couperus said. "There are certainly things that could be done visually, to make (the downtown area) more attractive ... (but) our feeling is, let's not fix what's not broken." ■

DISPATCHES from the home front



Photo by Barbara Wood

Members of the flock hang out in front of Barbara Wood's vegetable garden in Woodside.

Tales from the chicken coop

My hens roam the garden during the day, eating up nasty slugs and snails and leaving organic fertilizer and eggs with beautiful dark-yellow yolks behind.

When twilight approaches, the hens return to their coop, where they roost for the night, safe from local critters. I love the quiet, contented clucking made by the drowsing hens when I lock them in.

You may have noticed I said hens, not chickens — there is no rooster, primarily because they are noisy, but also because they can be mean.

I do, however, have two hens who think they are roosters. Last summer I started hearing early morning crowing through an open window. I couldn't believe one of my neighbors, who hadn't previously owned chickens, had a rooster! A few days later, suspicious because the sound seemed so near, I snuck out to the chicken coop to listen. It was one of my hens crowing.

Fortunately, the neighbors say they are not bothered by the noise, which is good because I now have two crowing hens.

The second was given to me by a woman, who somehow knew I am a sucker for lost causes, and who asked if I could take two hens. One, whom she kept referring to as *he*, had been attacking anyone who went near her. Since the hen, Shadow, was being *cooped* up all day and had only one other hen for companionship, I thought roaming free with my flock might *mel-*low her out.

Shadow not only thinks she is a rooster; she thinks she is a mean rooster. She has attacked me, from the back, as well as a couple of my houseguests, and my neighbor's cat, who she

swiped on the behind with her claw as she was passing by. (Your chicken kicked my cat's butt, the owner said.)

We have come to a truce, however. It seems to have been arranged by my crouching down to Shadow's height, safe behind a French door, and making faces at her. She attacked, but the glass apparently convinced her I'm invulnerable, and she hasn't tried since.

This odd behavior, I've been told, can occur when a flock of chickens is made up solely of hens and the dominant hen starts acting like a rooster.

Another strange hen behavior occurs when they become *ibroody* and decide to sit on eggs day and night, which is an exercise in futility without a rooster around to fertilize the eggs. A

broody hen sitting inside the coop in the nesting box is fine; but one who has stashed eggs in the yard and refuses to come in at night is liable to become a chicken dinner for a raccoon or coyote.

A few weeks ago a friend, who shall remain nameless, was driving west on Woodside Road just as a coyote was trotting east with one of my hens in its mouth. The immediate instinct of this friend, who you will soon be able to tell is a male, was to flip a quick U-turn and try to run over the coyote. He chased it on to Albion and ran over it with a load thump.

Alas, the coyote did not die, but it did drop the already very dead chicken before it slunk off.

Apparently the coyote has fully recovered, however, because it was seen just the other night on Albion, perhaps looking for its lost dinner.

Barbara Wood is a freelance writer, photographer and gardener from Woodside. Her column runs the third week of the month.

Council urged to oppose Cargill project

By Sean Howell

Almanac Staff Writer

Two members of Menlo Park's City Council and a former mayor are urging the council to take a stand against a project that would create a community rivaling the size of Menlo Park on the city's border.

Kelly Fergusson and Andy Cohen submitted a resolution to the city Oct. 11, in opposition to a proposal by agriculture distribution giant Cargill/DMB to build a small city with up to 12,000 residential units on a 1,436-acre wetland site just outside Menlo Park.

The resolution calls for "full restoration" of the Cargill-owned salt ponds.

The council will take up the issue at its meeting Tuesday, Oct. 20.

Former council member Steve Schmidt (1996-2004) drafted the resolution in July. The version submitted by Mr. Cohen and Ms. Fergusson includes slight modifications to Mr. Schmidt's.

"We have determined that the project would impose significant harm on Menlo Park and the greater region, and believe it is important for Menlo Park to clearly and promptly communicate its position to Cargill/DMB, the City of Redwood

■ MENLO PARK

City, as well as other local and regional organizations," Ms. Fergusson wrote in the letter to the five-person council.

An environmental impact report on the project is expected early next year, initiating Redwood City's formal review process.

Resolution: key points

The draft resolution paints the proposal to develop the site as regressive. It warns of harm to fish and wildlife, to the climate, and to neighboring jurisdictions.

Restoring wetlands and salt ponds in the bay has been a "high priority for federal, state and regional agencies and most bayside cities" since the 1960s, the resolution states.

It notes that Redwood City's general plan designates the land Cargill is proposing to develop as open space. It mentions that Menlo Park voters in 2005 chose to maintain the 160-acre Bedwell Bayfront Park, adjacent to the Cargill site, as passive open space.

Efforts are under way to restore 1,600 acres of a neighboring former salt pond at the western edge of the Dumbarton Bridge.

The resolution also points out

that the site is not near a public transit corridor.

A host of environmental agencies oppose Cargill's proposal, including The Sierra Club and Save the Bay. The citizen group Friends of Redwood City, which in the early 1980s overturned Redwood City's approval of plans to develop Bair Island, is also campaigning against the project.

"It's definitely appropriate for us to take a stand," said Heyward Robinson, Menlo Park's mayor. "I don't want to say it's not in the Redwood City council's purview to manage it, but we are interconnected, and we need to be conscious of the environmental impacts."

Project details

Under Cargill's proposal, 436 acres would be restored as wetlands or natural habitat, with the remaining 1,000 acres given over to development, schools and other public facilities, roads, sports fields, parks and open space.

Cargill has harvested salt at the site since the 1940s, but the operation is no longer profitable, a consultant to Cargill told The Almanac in 2006.

Go to redwoodcity.org/saltworks for more information on the project.

Green committee launches 'cool roof' campaign

Simply converting your dark-colored roof to a reflective "cool" one would have the same effect on preventing atmospheric warming as taking two or three cars off the road, according to Menlo Park's Green Ribbon Citizens' Committee.

With that in mind, the volunteer group hopes to convert 35 roofs across the city to "cool roofs" over the next 12 months — the equivalent of taking nearly 100 cars off the road, the group estimates.

A celebration commemorating the conversion of a house at 2141 Sterling Ave. is scheduled for 2 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 24.

The dedication will coincide with some 3,000 events across the world, part of a campaign by the advocacy group 350 (350.org).

Dark roofs generate heat that is trapped by greenhouse gases. But "cool roofs work just like arctic ice, to safely reflect light from the sun back out into space so it can't heat the atmosphere," committee members Kate Forrest and Mitch Slomiak wrote in a press release.

According to Mr. Slomiak, roofs can be converted either by installing new reflective shingles,

■ MENLO WATCH

or by simply coating shingles with reflective paint — the method used at the Sterling Avenue house. He acknowledged that some residents might be concerned about the aesthetics of having a white-colored roof, but suggested that that could change if the concept takes hold.

For more information, visit the group's Web site: menlogreen.typepad.com.

Council could approve new office building

A plan for a two-story office building on the east side of El Camino Real, near Buckthorn Way, could see approval from the City Council at its meet Tuesday, Oct. 20.

The 10,100-square-foot medical and professional office building at 1706 El Camino Real would replace a vacant one-story building, previously occupied by Gaylord India restaurant.

The project underwent an extensive redesign in response to community concerns raised in

late 2007. Its architecture "reflects a contemporary Santa Barbara ... style with a cement plaster exterior finish," according to the staff report.

The project has been designed to meet LEED Silver green building standards, though the developer does not plan to go through the costly certification process.

The project would not require a general plan amendment or zoning change.

Clarification

An article in the Oct. 14 Almanac titled "A decision, but little clarity on future of El Camino Parcel" cited a "successful referendum drive" to repeal a general plan amendment for a site along El Camino Real.

From the perspective of those who led the drive, it was successful, in that the City Council suspended the amendment to the general plan.

But while petitioners received enough signatures to send the issue to a vote of the people, it never made it to the ballot, as organizers opted to negotiate with developers instead.

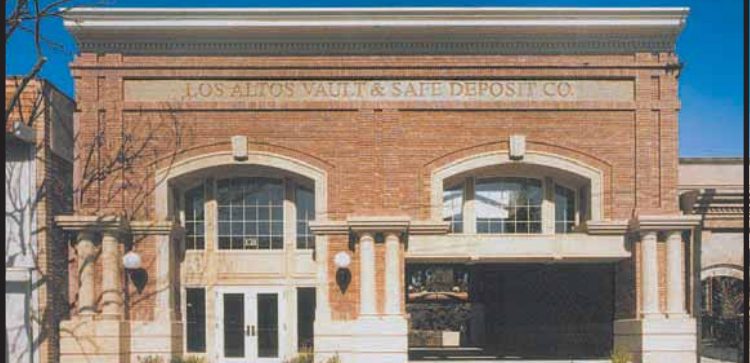


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Countering the Unpredictable: Brain Seizure Care Now Complex

"I just tried to make a phone call," Jessica Lovit told her mom, "and the phone fell right out of my hand. It was the weirdest thing." It was early summer and Lovit had just begun classes at a community college. Within days of that first fumbled phone call, this vivacious 20-year-old would learn unexpected and difficult new lessons about her body.

Deep in her brain, a tumor was disrupting the normal pathways and balances

"Epilepsy can happen to anyone at any age—out of the blue."

— Robert Fisher, MD, PhD, Stanford Epilepsy Center Director

of electrical impulses, propelling the muscles of Lovit's right arm, then her right leg, and then, one Sunday afternoon, as her mother watched in helpless horror, Lovit's whole body was gripped in violent, uncontrolled jerking motions.

Physicians at Stanford Hospital's Epilepsy Center would ultimately discover the non-cancerous brain tumor as the source of Lovit's seizures.

After a two-part tour de force surgery combining physical manipulation and imaging technology, Lovit is back in school doing her best to catch up and to adapt to her condition.

She and her family still grapple with the ground level question, one Lovit's mother, Robin, kept asking as her daughter's seizures increased, "How does this happen all of a sudden? How does this happen out of the blue?"

What Epilepsy Isn't

Each week at Stanford, the Epilepsy Center's director, Robert Fisher, MD, PhD, and the collaborative team of neurologists, neurosurgeons and nurse practitioners see a dozen new patients like Lovit who arrive with that question. The first part of the answer, Fisher said, is that what happened to Lovit "can happen to anyone at any age out of the blue."

Epilepsy is not a disease, he said, "It is a symptom of something wrong with the brain. That something wrong is a seizure, an electrical storm in the



Jessica Lovit, 20, was enthusiastically approaching summer school when unexplained seizures in her right arm and leg radically disrupted her plans.

brain, and epilepsy is a disorder of recurrent seizures."

And, as a distressing adjunct for those who have epilepsy and for their families, it is far more complex than its stereotypically inaccurate definition as a disease that can be caught, or one that means normal life cannot be continued.

Depending on where in the brain a seizure begins, a particular part of the body will respond or emotions and perceptions be altered. Seizures can last from a few seconds to minutes. Some are triggered by light or sound or smell.

More than 200,000 people are diagnosed with epilepsy each year in the U.S., adding to the millions who suffer from a form of the disorder. Epilepsy can appear at any age, or after an accident or illness. Left uncontrolled, seizures may disrupt a person's life, causing injury or sometimes even death. For many people, however—two out of three—medications offer varying degrees of seizure control. For certain others, surgery can help.

Opening New Windows

Many people will never know the cause of their epilepsy. But research is

shedding light on the brain's cellular biochemistry, peeling apart the mechanism of interactions within the brain's 100 trillion electrochemical contact points. Understanding those interactions is fostering the emergence of new medications, surgery and treatment mechanisms implanted within the brain.

With increasing sophistication, the Stanford Epilepsy Center's physicians are able to record and track the spikes

"We've gone from very limited and not very successful options to what is now a complex specialty."

— Neurosurgeon Michael Edwards, Stanford Epilepsy Center

of electrical current that flag seizure location within the brain's tightly packed curves and crevices. In Lovit's case, Fisher and his colleagues used such imaging to locate the problem area in her brain.

The Center's treatment protocols are designed to provide as many aids as possible to mitigate the effects of epilepsy, some of which are social. Fear

of having a seizure in public leads some to restrict their life's activities and the Center works with patients to cope with that fear. "There is still a lot of myth and misunderstanding about epilepsy," said Center clinical nurse specialist Mimi Callanan. "The patients we see are remarkable. They deal with the challenge of epilepsy with grace and do what they need to do to get through their days. They go to school or work every day, hold a job and have families. They're amazing."

Decades ago, when Stanford neurosurgeon Michael Edwards' seven-year-old stepbrother was diagnosed with epilepsy in the late 1950s, very little effective treatment was available and the side effects from medications did little but produce a constant state of drowsiness. Edwards hadn't planned to go into medicine, but his profound feelings about the suffering epilepsy could bring led him to study it and how surgery might make a difference. "I know how negative that spectre can be over your head," he said, "never knowing when you're going to have a seizure."

Edwards performed Lovit's surgery, very aware that epilepsy and seizures are not well understood by the public. "It's a terrible disorder for anybody, but it's really a terrible disorder for young people," Edwards said. "I really feel very positive when we find patients where there may be something surgical we can do. If there's a structural lesion in the brain, surgery can mean a more permanent solution."

Finding the Best Path

The first question physicians must answer is whether the seizures could be



After she was diagnosed with a tumor that caused recurring seizures, Jessica Lovit has faced surgery, balancing medications and learning how to live a new way.

Stanford Hospital & Clinics is known worldwide for advanced treatment of complex disorders in areas such as cardiovascular care, cancer treatment, neurosciences, surgery, and organ transplants. Consistently ranked among the top institutions in the U.S. News & World Report annual list of "America's Best Hospitals," Stanford Hospital & Clinics is internationally recognized for translating medical breakthroughs into the care of patients. It is part of the Stanford University Medical Center, along with the Stanford University School of Medicine and Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford. For more information, visit stanfordmedicine.org.

Understanding Epilepsy

- **Symptoms:** recurring seizures that can affect parts or whole body, including emotions and perception; triggers can include sound, smell or light.
- **Treatments:** medication, surgery, diet.
- **Role of genetics:** some forms of epilepsy seem to have a genetic component.
- **National statistics:** Three million people in the U.S. have epilepsy. Men are more likely to develop the disorder than women; the incidence highest before age 2 and after age 65.
- **Research:** Areas of basic interest include post-traumatic injury epilepsy, brain circuits underlying onset and spread of seizures, prolonged seizures, development of abnormal brain rhythms; clinical research includes forms of brain stimulation.
- **Resources:** The Center's Web page at stanfordmedicine.org includes video lectures by Fisher and an extensive descriptions of types of epilepsy, seizures and treatments. Also, see www.epilepsy.com and www.epilepsyfoundation.org.

For more information, call the Stanford Hospital & Clinics at (650) 723-4000 or the Epilepsy Center at (650) 723-6469.

caused by one of the two dozen imitators of epilepsy. Those include fainting spells, transient ischemic attacks (warning strokes), cardiac arrhythmia, narcolepsy, movement disorders and a variety of psychological disturbances. Then, physicians classify the seizure as either focal (starting at one point in the brain) or generalized. If no structural abnormality is found, such as a blood clot, birth defect or tumor, then physicians are left with brain chemistry as the causal trigger for seizures and medication as primary treatment.

Treatment programs are individualized for the patients. Anti-seizure drugs are the mainstay, but surgery, special diets, electrical stimulation and other therapies can be useful.

The surgery that helped Lovit is something that has changed the lives of many who had to rely on medication for many years. "It can offer people control they've never had in their lifetimes, who've had decades of seizure problems," said Bonnie Pamiroyan, a

family nurse practitioner at the Epilepsy Center. "Their need for medication can be greatly reduced or perhaps even eliminated. They can finally drive a car. The world opens up to them. It's amazing to see the transformation from being constantly battered and hit by seizures."

For surgery to be effective for seizure control, the seizures must consistently come from an identifiable region of brain, and that region must be safe to remove. "It is still a point of

"I just want to keep going, to live a normal life. I don't want just to sit at home and be depressed."

— Jessica Lovit, patient, Stanford Epilepsy Center

experience and courage to know what can be taken safely out of the brain," Fisher said. During Lovit's surgery, her physicians made recordings of her brain waves as they removed tissue to track the changes in electrical activity, to protect her full physical function. "We're getting better at it all the time," Fisher said.

Combining new abilities to find seizure origins, to safely remove brain tissue and to balance the side effects of medication has expanded options for those facing epilepsy. "We've gone from very limited and not very successful options to what is now a complex specialty," said Edwards. "It's the difference between walking in and saying, 'We can do A, B, C and that's it,' and saying, 'We can do A through Z and then there's some more.'"

The Center's research, which includes basic research on mechanisms of epilepsy as well as clinical trials, is now investigating methods to deliver medications directly to the brain and to influence electrical activity with brain implants.



In a post-operative visit with Jessica, Dr. Fisher checks her ability to move her fingers, feel sensation and walk.

"I just want to keep going," Lovit said, "to live a normal life. I don't want just to sit at home and be depressed." As do many others for whom treatment has not yet completely eliminated seizure activity, Lovit is working through the alterations in her emotional and physical state. "The meds sometimes make me feel very tired and spacey," she said. "It takes a lot of me to stay focused in class, but I just think, in a very narrow way, 'I've just got to keep going.'"



Dr. Robert Fisher shows Jessica Lovit (at right) and her mother, Robin, the imaging map he and his colleagues made of her brain to find the origin of her seizures.

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High school district redesigns its Web site

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

There's a new Web presence out there for a fairly old San Mateo County institution: the Sequoia Union High School District.

The redesigned Web site is smooth, with greenish gray accents and a soft-focus image along the top border of sunlight streaming through redwood trees.

Clicking the mouse is less important, at least on the home page. As the cursor moves over the headings arrayed under the district's name, menus now appear automatically.

The home page includes a news crawl. Its initial content: an invitation to come back soon, and advertisements for the district's Facebook page and for following Superintendent Pat Gemma on Twitter.

Along the left side and bottom of the page are links to frequently consulted pages and time-sensitive matters, including a calendar and district news.

The site design is based on a template by Schoolwires, a Pennsylvania company that focuses on Web sites for K-12 school districts. The district paid \$10,280 for the template, and has used it for five school sites, including Menlo-Atherton High School, Sequoia district spokeswoman Bettylu Smith said in an e-mail.

A year of software upgrades will run another \$6,470.

Ms. Smith managed the customizing and is responsible for the content, she said. Assisting her was Kirsten Owens. An advisory group included a board member, staff and parents.

The site has a new address: sequoiadistrict.org — though the old one (www.seq.org) still works.

The pages on the budget list categories for \$103 million in spending priorities for the 2008-09 school year. The district spent \$41.8 million on classroom

instruction, for example, and \$8 million on special education, \$5.6 million on school administration, and \$5.3 million on counsel-

ing and guidance, according to the Budget Summary.

The budget summary does not break expenses down by school or by individual program, as Sequoia Trustee Sally Stewart has called for.

Charter schools received close to \$2.8 million. The previous Web site made no mention of charter schools, but the redesigned site lists them alphabetically, with links to their home pages. To find them, you must first click on the Schools heading or the Overview menu item and scroll down.

The Parent Resources page

Continued on next page



The Roundtable at
Stanford University

The Road Back

From Economic Meltdown to Recovery:
How will we get there?

Date: Oct. 24, 2009
Time: 9:30 to 11 a.m.
Place: Maples Pavilion, Stanford University

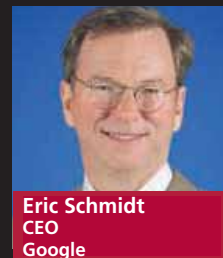
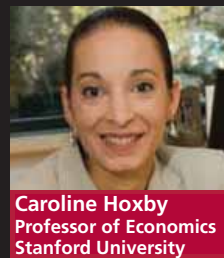
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- Tickets available for \$10 each at Stanford Ticket Office: 650-725-2787
- Students, faculty and staff may obtain free tickets with ID card.
- Reunion Homecoming participants will be admitted with Reunion name tag.

Scholars, politicians, and government officials will long debate the question of whether the economic collapse of 2008-2009 has fundamentally altered the world's established economic and social paradigms. At home and abroad there will be questions as to whether the U.S. will remain in its traditional economic and political leadership role, or be overshadowed by new engines of economic growth and prosperity.

As we emerge from the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, what changes can we expect to see, and are there silver linings to be found?

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French Program Info Nights: 10/6 & 11/3
Chinese Program Info Nights: 10/20 & 11/17

Bill Lane remembers Sunset magazine

The Museum of American Heritage will present "Bill Lane remembers Sunset," an evening with Bill Lane of Portola Valley, former publisher of Sunset magazine, at 6:30 p.m. Monday, Oct. 26, at the museum.

Mr. Lane will present an insider's perspective on the changes, influences and personalities that created Sunset, an institution that has shaped the lives and activities of generations of Westerners.

The evening, free for museum members and \$5 for others, is sponsored by Cody Anderson Wasney Architects. The Museum of American Heritage is located at 351 Homer Ave. in Palo Alto. For more information, call 321-1004 or visit www.moah.org.

'Paint Allied Arts' slated for Oct. 24

The second annual plein air "Paint Out" and exhibit by artists of the Portola Art Gallery will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 24, in the gardens of Allied Arts Guild, 75 Arbor Road in Menlo Park.

More than 30 artists from the Bay Area are taking part in the one-day event, painting the gardens and historic Spanish-style buildings at Allied Arts Guild.

At 1 p.m. there will be an awards ceremony and reception, when the new, completed, and framed paintings, as well as other art, will be available for sale. Twenty percent of the sales will benefit Lucile Packard Children's Hospital.

Portola Art Gallery is celebrating its third year at Allied Arts Guild and 28 years as a gallery. Local artists taking part in "Paint Allied Arts" include Susan Elwart-Hall of Atherton; Carolyn Jones and Alice Weil of Menlo Park; Cynthia Hamilton of Portola Valley; and Cynthia DeBenedetti of Woodside.

Portola Valley forum on health care reform

A public forum on the moral dimensions of health care reform

Continued from previous page

connects visitors to links for state Department of Education Web sites and the nonprofit EdSource. Some of the documents have broken links because they extend to more than one line.

The Virtual Tours page links to audio slide shows of notable facilities in the district, including the new performing arts center at M-A and the robotics program and Green Academy at Woodside High. ■

AROUND TOWN

Author Jeff Kinney at Menlo Park Library

is set for 6 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 21, in the Parish Hall at Christ Episcopal Church at 815 Portola Road in Portola Valley. The event is free and open to all.

Dr. Donald Barr, a physician and associate professor in sociology at Stanford University, is scheduled as the guest and principal speaker. Dr. Barr is a published author on the topic of health care.

Jeff Kinney, author of the New York Times bestselling series "Diary of a Wimpy Kid," will be at the Menlo Park Library at 5 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 20, to sign his latest book, "Diary of a Wimpy Kid Dog Days." The free event is co-sponsored by Kepler's Books.

With pre-teen dialog and narration, Mr. Kinney walks the

See TOWN, page 14

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

Adoption of the Community Development Agency Implementation Plan for Fiscal Years 2009-2010 through 2013-2014

The Menlo Park Community Development Agency (Agency) will be conducting a public hearing on the following item:

Public review and consideration of adoption of the Agency's proposed new five-year implementation plan (Implementation Plan) for the redevelopment of the Las Pulgas Community Development Project Area (Project Area) covering Fiscal Years 2009-10 through 2013-14.

The public hearing will be held in the Council Chambers of the City of Menlo Park, located at 701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park, on the date listed below at which time and place interested persons may appear and be heard thereon. If you challenge this item in court, you may be limited to raising only those issues you or someone else raised at the public hearing described in this notice, or in written correspondence delivered to the City of Menlo Park or the Agency at, or prior to, the public hearing.

City Council: Tuesday, November 3, 2009 at 7:00 p.m.

The proposed Implementation Plan sets forth, for the five-year planning period comprised of fiscal years 2009-10 through 2013-14, the specific goals and objectives of the Agency for the redevelopment of the Project Area, potential programs and projects, estimated expenditures proposed to be made during the planning period, and an explanation of how the goals and objectives, programs, and expenditures will eliminate blight within the Project Area, and implement the affordable housing requirements of the California Community Redevelopment Law (Health & Safety Code Section 33000 et seq.). The proposed Implementation Plan has been prepared, and this notice is being provided, in accordance with Health and Safety Code Section 33490.

For questions or additional information, or to receive or review a copy of the proposed Implementation Plan, please contact Dr. Douglas Frederick, Housing Manager, at 650-330-6724 or email at dwfrederick@menlopark.org.

DATED: October 1, 2009

Margaret Roberts,
City Clerk

PUBLISHED: October 7, 14, and 21, 2009



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**NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING
AND
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
CITY OF MENLO PARK
PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING NOVEMBER 2, 2009**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Planning Commission of the City of Menlo Park, California, is scheduled to review the following items:

PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS

Use Permit/Steve Borlik/1235 San Mateo Drive: Request for a use permit for interior modifications and a second-story addition to an existing nonconforming, single-story residence that would exceed 50 percent of the replacement value of the existing structure in a 12-month period in the R-E (Residential Estate) zoning district. The proposed remodeling and expansion are considered to be equivalent to a new structure.

Use Permit/Douglas Dietz/261 Marmona Court: Request for a use permit to construct first- and second-story additions to an existing single-story, single-family, nonconforming residence that would exceed 50 percent of the replacement value of the existing structure in a 12-month period on a substandard lot in the R-1-U (Single-Family Urban) zoning district. The proposed remodeling and expansion are considered to be equivalent to a new structure.

Use Permit/Gurdial Dosanjh (High 5 Star Pizza)/877 Hamilton Avenue: Request for a use permit to add on-sale beer and wine sales to an existing restaurant in the C-2-S (Neighborhood Commercial, Special) zoning district.

PUBLIC MEETING ITEMS - None

NOTICE IS HEREBY FURTHER GIVEN that said Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on public hearing items in the Council Chambers of the City of Menlo Park, located at 701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park, on Monday, **November 2, 2009**, 7:00 p.m. or as near as possible thereafter, at which time and place interested persons may appear and be heard thereon. If you challenge this item in court, you may be limited to raising only those issues you or someone else raised at the public hearing described in this notice, or in written correspondence delivered to the City of Menlo Park at, or prior to, the public hearing.

The project file may be viewed by the public on weekdays between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Friday, with alternate Fridays closed, at the Department of Community Development, 701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park. Please call the Planning Division if there are any questions and/or for complete agenda information (650) 330-6702.

Si usted necesita más información sobre este proyecto, por favor llame al 650-330-6702, y pregunte por un asistente que hable español.

DATED: October 15, 2009 Deanna Chow, Senior Planner

PUBLISHED: October 21, 2009 Menlo Park Planning Commission

Visit our Web site for Planning Commission public hearing, agenda, and staff report information: www.menlopark.org

'Fiddler on the Roof' comes to Woodside

By Kate Daly

Special to The Almanac

It truly takes a village to put on "Fiddler on the Roof," the full-blown Broadway musical being staged by the Woodside Community Theatre the first two weekends of November.

Director/choreographer Bill Starr says what makes this show so outstanding is "it has heart."

A veteran of Broadway himself, and graduate of Menlo-Atherton High School, Mr. Starr says at the core is the cast of 50 local villagers who, although amateurs, are filled with "energy, commitment, and talent," plus some fascinating behind-the-scenes stories.

Canada College student Brandon Keith, for example, is legally blind, yet he leaves his white cane off stage and jumps right in to act, dance and sing with the chorus.

Another student, Kit Sanderson, a sixth-grader at Woodside Elementary, is a leukemia survivor. Her mother, Dana, is delighted to see her daughter have enough stamina to be involved in a WCT show, and says Kit is having such a good time, "I think she'll do every one from here on."

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SHOWTIMES

The Woodside Community Theatre's production of "Fiddler on the Roof" will be staged at the Performing Arts Center at Woodside High School, 199 Churchill Ave. Show times are 7:30 p.m. on Nov. 6, 7, 13 and 14, with Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. on Nov. 8 and 15. Tickets are on sale online at woodsidetheatre.com or by calling 529-4828. Ticket prices are \$22 for adults, \$20 for seniors, and \$15 for children. Discounts are available for groups of 20 or more.

This production marks WCT's seventh season since the organization regrouped after taking a break for a few years. Mark and Mindy Bowles of Woodside and Donna Losey, a Woodside High School parent, revitalized the group.

They are co-producing this show with Woodside High grad Claudia McCarley (who is also starring as Golde, and taking Yiddish lessons from production volunteer Alison Ross of Atherton to help nail the accent).

Mark Bowles wears more than one hat, too. He calls himself the "technical poobah" because he is backstage coordinating the stage crew when he's not performing the role of innkeeper.

He describes the set designed by Akio Patrick of Woodside as "fabulous and big ... with six structures the size of a small house that take three or four people to move them."

The set recreates the village of Anatevka in 1905, where the poor

dairyman, Tevye, is challenged with raising five daughters in the Jewish tradition amid growing anti-Semitism in czarist Russia.

Daniel Matis of Pacifica plays Tevye, a role he says he's been "wanting for 30 years," after appearing in two other productions of the show back East. He hasn't performed on stage in 25 years, due to "marriage, children and work," but calls himself the "singing Jewish plumber," and feels ready for the part.

Jerry Bock wrote the music, Sheldon Harnick the lyrics, and Joseph Stein the book.

Songs such as "If I Were a Rich Man," "Matchmaker" and "Sunrise, Sunset" carry the show, accompanied by a live orchestra of 25 musicians once again led by Richard Gordon of Woodside.

Half of the cast has done a previous WCT show, including Nate Moss who just proposed to choral director Kerie Darner.

Continued on next page

TOWN

continued from page 13

reader through middle school life through the eyes of Greg Heffley, who writes in a diary that his mother makes him keep. Mr. Kinney was recently named one of Time magazine's 100 most influential people.

The Menlo Park Library is located at 800 Alma St. in Menlo Park. For more information, call Michelle Barrese, 330-2530.

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Open House
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www.shschools.org
Inquiries and reservations: admission@shschools.org

Continued from previous page

They met three years ago when they both performed in "Anything Goes."

Since then, WCT has rented the expansive stage at the Performing Arts Center at Woodside High School.

Local cast members include: Darlene Batchelder of Woodside as Yente; David Fleishhacker of Woodside and San Francisco as Lazar Wolf; Woodside Elementary students Cari Sprague, Jessie Marguet, Cameron Hofer, Julia Hansen, Samantha Frenkel-Poppell and Jaclyn Hovsmith; and Woodside High students Brigitte Losey and LeeAnn Patrick.

Corte Madera students Alex Rubin and Tony Sinclair come from Portola Valley, as do cast members Lorien French and Mischa Stephens.

Menlo Park residents David Bray and Shelly Welch are returning WCT actors.

Nueva School student Emily Ross of Atherton is back, as well.

Karen Patrick of Woodside is working on costumes with Liz Matchett who used to teach at Woodside Elementary and is married to Hillview Middle School music specialist Richard Vaughan, now known in this show as the Fiddler. ■



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Contract awarded for area recycling center

A contract to operate a revamped regional recycling facility in San Carlos that serves Menlo Park, Atherton, and several other com-

munities has been awarded to South Bay Recycling, based in Southern California.

South Bay will take over the

contract for the Shoreway Recycling and Disposal Center from Allied Waste in 2011. A major overhaul of the recycling center

is currently under way, and is expected to be completed in early 2011.

Eight of the 12 member jurisdictions of the regional waste management agency, including Menlo

Park, have signed off on the selection, which required a two-thirds vote.

Atherton, the West Bay Sanitary District, San Mateo County, and Burlingame have yet to vote.

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Kepler's Bookstore, Menlo Park

■ 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

Grand theft report: Copper power cord stolen, intersection of Middlefield Road and Prior Lane, Oct. 12.

MENLO PARK

Fraud reports:

- Unauthorized use of credit card for loss valued at \$328, reported at main police station at 701 Laurel St., Oct. 9.
- Identity theft, 1200 block of Henderson Ave. and 1300 block of Chico St., Oct. 13 and 14.

Residential burglary reports:

- Computer and monitor valued at \$1,300 stolen, 400 block of Oak Court, Oct. 10.
- DVDs, video games and pots stolen for total value of \$200, 100 block of Newbridge St., Oct. 15.
- Spousal abuse report: 1600 block of Marsh Road, Oct. 12.

PORTOLA VALLEY

Child neglect report: Parent warned by sheriff's deputy after third-grader had been left at school for third time this school year, Ormondale School at 200 Shawnee Pass, Oct. 8.



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- **Measure S** renews our **existing** parcel tax at the same rate for four additional years — **no increase in parcel tax rate.** A two-thirds' majority is needed to pass Measure S.

- **Measure T** gives the Town the legal authority to use the parcel tax revenue by increasing the Town's appropriations limit. **This does not increase the parcel tax rate.** A simple majority is needed to pass Measure T.

Specific Uses of Parcel Tax are: Police services, road repairs, drainage improvements, disaster preparedness and public safety programs.

YOUR VOTE COUNTS — don't depend on your neighbor to carry these Measures to victory. Make sure that BOTH Measures S & T pass this November 3, 2009.



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

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, and occasionally on the Town Square forum.

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

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letters@almanacnews.com and note this it is a letter to the editor in the subject line.

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Editor at the Almanac,
3525 Alameda de las Pulgas,
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CALL the Viewpoint desk at
854-2690, ext. 222.

Editorial endorsements**Sequoia High School District**

With the seats of retiring members Sally Stewart and Gordon Lewin certain to be filled by newcomers, voters have a rare chance to bring a fresh approach to the strategic direction of the Sequoia Union High School District.

The openings come as the district is facing major challenges in funding, due to flat or declining property values, and state finances in the tank.

In addition, the new board must address an above-average dropout rate at a time when earning a high school diploma is critical if students hope to find even the most menial job and become contributing members of society.

Then there is the yearlong struggle with Everest, a new sister charter school to the highly successful Summit Preparatory Charter High School, and seen as a threat by district Superintendent Pat Gemma and some board members.

In our view, this is the district's major issue at this time. The district's attempt to frustrate Everest's grass-roots support has wasted resources, including probably several hundred thousand dollars in a court fight with Everest that should not have been necessary. The district must face up to charter schools and develop a strategy that collaborates with them and can address petitions for more charter schools that will come, given the long waiting lists for entry into Summit Prep and Everest.

Eight candidates are running for two openings on the Sequoia board. The winners and their colleagues will oversee a \$100 million-a-year budget in a district that serves more than 8,000 students.

After interviews with the six active candidates, Chris Thomsen of Menlo Park and Bob Ferrando of Atherton clearly stand out as the most qualified to resolve the debilitating charter school stand-off. Both have children in Summit Prep. Mr. Thomsen also has a son at Menlo-Atherton High School and Mr. Ferrando has a daughter at Encinal Elementary School. Both candidates have solid administra-

tive and financial credentials, skills that are badly needed on the Sequoia board today.

Mr. Thomsen, a former biotech entrepreneur and now the executive director of Stanford University's Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, has a wealth of educational experience. He knows how organizations work and how to bring about change when necessary.

Besides making it a board priority to address the district's 27 percent dropout rate (compared with 21 percent state-wide), Mr. Thomsen would work to develop a budget that could track expenditures by program and by school, something that has not been done to date.

To heal the charter rift, Mr. Thomsen said he would work toward having comprehensive schools such as Menlo-Atherton and Woodside meet the needs of students who would otherwise consider charter schools.

With a child in both camps, Mr. Thomsen views himself as a candidate who can bridge the gap between the two institutions.

Mr. Ferrando is the chief financial officer for a Bay Area roofing company. He said he would bring a private sector view to the job, in part by supporting a move to program-based budgeting and by recognizing charter schools as investments that appear to be giving good value for the dollars spent.

The district, he said, also needs to provide more opportunities in technical education because the "reality is not everybody is college bound." People in technical careers also need to be articulate, tech-savvy critical thinkers, he said.

When comparing charter schools with the district's comprehensive schools, Mr. Ferrando said diversity is the key, and charters offer a vital and popular alternative. The student owns the money for his or her schooling, not the district, he noted, and the district should embrace Summit and Everest.

The Almanac urges voters to elect Chris Thomsen and Bob Ferrando to bring a wide-ranging and valuable set of skills to the Sequoia board. ■

**Nachtsheim, Harris and Ianson for fire board**

With negotiations at an impasse, the race for three seats on the Menlo Park Fire Protection District board has boiled down to a contest between union-backed candidates and three others who might not favor granting firefighters an 11 percent pay increase over the next three years.

Three candidates, Stephen Nachtsheim, James M. Harris and Rexford Ianson, turned down union endorsement, saying they want to remain independent during what will continue to be tough negotiations for a new contract. With district finances looking more and more shaky as local property values level off and plummet in East Palo Alto, these candidates are reluctant to add more costs to a district that already is looking at slipping into a negative cash flow position.

The union-backed group, Jack Nelson, Jon Mosby and Robert J. Silano, acknowledge that costs need to be contained, but all accepted union endorsement and are open to approving a contract that might include a pay increase. All three candidates have put in hours as volunteers on fire district-related activities, such as the disaster-relief CERT program.

However, in our view, what the district needs now are board members who will take a much harder look at the rising costs of employee compen-

sation, including retirement, and are willing to find ways to save in other areas, like adopting a two-tier retirement system and sharing some staff with nearby fire departments.

Mr. Nachtsheim, Mr. Harris and Mr. Ianson say that as board members they will resist union pressure, but work hard to negotiate a fair contract that serves district residents and local firefighters. Mr. Nachtsheim and Mr. Harris have strong financial backgrounds, and Mr. Ianson is a retired firefighter who declined endorsement from his former union.

Mr. Nachtsheim, a former Intel executive and now CEO of a Fortune 1000 company, became interested in fire district affairs after working on disaster preparedness for his Walsh Road neighborhood in Atherton. As a member of numerous corporate and nonprofit boards, he said he would bring a business approach to the district, such as consolidating some office operations with nearby departments. He said he sees a danger that falling property taxes and rising retirement costs could create a worst-case shortfall of up to a \$5 million in the next two to three years.

Mr. Nachtsheim also says the district needs to plan for population growth

See **FIRE**, next page

Vote yes on Atherton parcel tax

Every four years Atherton voters must renew the city's parcel tax if they want to keep their government running the way it does today.

As one of the few Peninsula cities with virtually no sales tax revenue, Atherton depends on the tax for nearly \$2 million a year in revenue, which, unlike property tax, does not have to be shared with the state. The relatively modest parcel tax, which must be approved by a two-thirds of the voters for passage, is also deductible, which should not go unnoticed in Atherton.

The tax helps pay the costs of various services in the city, from police to road repair and drainage projects. Without it, Mayor Jerry Carlson said, it would be very difficult for the government to function. There is no organized opposition to the parcel tax measures and no one bothered to write a ballot argument against them.

We urge a yes vote on Measure S, to renew the tax, and Measure T, which authorizes the town to collect and spend it.

Renew Portola Valley utility tax

For those who volunteer and work for Portola Valley's town government, passage of Measures P, Q and R in the Nov. 3 election is viewed as absolutely necessary if the town is to maintain its current level of services.

The measures reauthorizes the town's 24-year-old utility tax that costs the average homeowner about \$250 a year. The 4.5 percent assessment on utilities, including gas, electric and water, would be used to keep the government running, while income from an additional 2 percent tax would be funneled into the town's fund to purchase open space.

The tax is opposed by Ed Wells, the town's first treasurer, and some of his fellow conservatives, who say the town has plenty of money and could easily survive without the tax income, a case he makes in the adjoining guest opinion.

But regardless of Mr. Wells' numbers, the town's budget director and top administrator, as well as council members and former mayors, disagree, and say his analysis is a sham that mixes budget numbers with actual income.

We support town officials on this one, and urge Portola Valley residents to vote yes on Measures P, Q and R (a vote for all three is necessary to pass both measures) and continue to support their government in this relatively painless way.

FIRE

continued from previous page

in East Palo Alto and find money to upgrade the station there, and find ways to respond if bridges over U.S. 101 are damaged in an earthquake.

James Harris would bring significant business experience to the board. As CEO of his own company, Mr. Harris has the kind of "hand on the tiller" experience needed on the board. He notes that since 2006, district revenues are up 5.2 percent, while expenditures are up 8.9 percent. That is the problem that has to be fixed, he said.

Firefighter compensation, which is two-thirds of the district's budget, is a concern, he said, noting that district firefighters are not underpaid, with 50 engineers reaching \$178,000 a year in total compensation. Twenty-four captains and nine chief officers are paid more than \$200,000, he said.

Besides putting controls on compensation, Mr. Harris said he is not sure how to address a station upgrade project that is on hold after a grant application was turned down. He agrees that two stations are needed east of U.S. 101 and said he would apply a business-like approach to look for the funds to upgrade or add to stations.

Incumbent Rexford Ianson has impressed us over his four years on the board. A former firefighter and union member, he has shown his independence in fiscal matters and brings a much-needed "inside the fire house" look to the board.

Mr. Ianson said a union-filed charge against the board has slowed negotiations with firefighters, and until it is resolved, "nothing can happen." Although he said the board is ready to talk to the union anytime, the district is handicapped by not knowing what the financially strapped state government might take away, and whether property tax income will decrease due to slumping home values.

Another possible way to reduce expenditures is to adopt one of the less costly retirement formulas offered by PERS, he said. Other savings could come from sharing technical support, accounting and human resources work with other nearby departments. Changes in the retirement formula would not affect recruiting he said, noting that there were over 100 applicants for the last opening.

The Almanac recommends Stephen Nachtsheim, James M Harris and Rexford Ianson for the Menlo Park Fire Protection District board. ■

Arguments for, against Portola Valley tax

PRO: Vice Mayor sees trouble ahead if tax measures not approved

By Steve Toben

On a quiet autumn evening in Portola Valley, it's easy to think that our town is immune from the financial turbulence that is roiling cities up and down the state.

Beneath the surface, however, Portola Valley faces many of the same threats confronting local government throughout California. Some signs of trouble:

- The state of California has expropriated \$220,000 in property tax and gas tax revenue from Portola Valley to help balance the state budget.

- State bond money for local capital projects has disappeared.

- Building permit revenues are down 40 percent.

- Reserves have dwindled to 40 percent of the operating budget, the lowest level in decades. By comparison, Woodside's reserves equal 100 percent of its operating budget.

The cost of law enforcement services, which are contracted from the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office, will skyrocket 30 percent over the next three years.

All of this underscores the critical importance of the town's utility users tax (UUT), first passed in 1985. The UUT is a tax on telephone, gas, electricity and water bills, and it has two parts. The first consists of a 4.5 percent charge to fund basic services — law enforcement, road repairs, trail upkeep, and maintenance of fields and the facilities at Town Center.

The second part consists of a 2 percent charge to fund the acquisition of open space. This fund has enabled the purchase of six acres of valuable property adjacent to Town Center, among other

acquisitions.

Every four years the voters are asked to renew their support for the UUT. This year, three measures appear on the Nov. 3 ballot. Measure P would keep the tax rate for basic services at 4.5 percent, rather than jumping up to 5.5 percent

Measure Q would approve the UUT for core services — police, roads, facilities, and basic upkeep.

Measure R would approve the UUT for the continued purchase and preservation of open space. Measure R cannot be implemented unless Measure Q also passes.

We urge Portola Valley residents to vote yes on all three measures. Let's be clear: if the UUT is defeated on Nov. 3, immediate cuts to the town budget will be necessary. Residents could see reductions in sheriff's patrols, deferred maintenance of streets, declines in the quality of playing fields, increases in the costs of classes, slower processing of permits, and lost opportunities for open space acquisition.

For decades Portola Valley has maintained strict discipline in managing expenditures. The town has the lowest costs per capita of any city in San Mateo County. To balance the budget this year, the Town Council has frozen staff salaries, canceled capital projects, eliminated hires, and reduced program expenditures across the board. The town has never taken on debt and has never considered the enactment of a parcel tax, which would compete with the school district's parcel tax.

We face uncertain times, but renewal of the UUT will help ensure a stable future for Portola Valley. On Nov. 3 voter turnout could be key. Please vote yes on Measures P, Q and R.

Steve Toben is the vice mayor of Portola Valley

CON: Opponent says town already has plenty of money

By Ed Wells

On Nov. 3, Portola Valley residents will be asked to renew the 6.5 percent utility tax (UUT) with 4.5 percent for general purposes and 2 percent for open space, but with no limit on the amount per household.

Our 6.5 percent utility taxes are based on monthly billings for water, gas, electric and telephone use, and will steadily increase with rising utility costs. Cal Water has already announced a substantial rate hike for next year.

PG&E and Cal Water sales in Portola Valley have increased almost 40 percent in the last four years. With this cost escalation, our utility taxes (and the town's revenues) are now about 15 percent higher, even with the recent reduction in the utility tax rate from 7.5 to 6.5 percent.

The town now proposes to extend the combined rate of 6.5 percent for four years. But after that, if Measure Q is not defeated, it reverts to a total rate of 7.5 percent (5.5 plus 2.0 percent).

In addition to the escalating burden on residents, this utility tax is very unfair to our local businesses that have to pay 6.5 percent on their utilities, while there is no such tax on their competitors in Woodside, Ladera, or Menlo Park. A no vote on Measure Q will also help local businesses keep their costs down.

The proponents of more taxes have wasted a lot of space trying to discredit our figures. All of our data come from the town's budget and audit reports or from the county controller. Our fund balance sources were sent to voters in our letter dated Sept.

24, 2009, which are available on request.

Those who were here right after the November 2005 utility tax election will remember the "revelation" that the county had "just agreed" to repay \$1.8 million of withheld taxes plus increase our share of taxes from 4 to 7 percent. This was "unanticipated."

Our new 7 percent tax allocation has produced \$2.7 million more property taxes than expected. Another, \$1.8 million came as property taxes from two new rebate programs. This totals \$6.3 million. The proponents didn't bother to ask us to verify our sources or our analysis.

Property tax income has increased from \$385,780 10 years ago to \$1.7 million this year, or 360 percent. Compare this to the current \$583,360 budget for all the sheriff's services. The town is in a strong financial condition. With its property tax growth, it can easily manage without the utility tax revenue.

Now, we should work on voter-approved, independent, open space funding. We can look at what is working for the town. "Blues and Barbeque" shows that we can work together for open space.

The election Nov. 3 is not just about the Portola Valley utility taxes for open space. And it's not just about cancelling an unfair tax on our local businesses and fixed-income families, a tax based on the rising cost of our basic utilities. And it's not just about the town's financial resources. It is also about our voters' rights to decide how we should pay for programs we support.

Vote NO on Q.

Ed Wells is a Portola Valley resident, the town's first treasurer, and a municipal finance consultant.



Woodside, 15.75 acres
FOR SALE \$24,000,000



West Atherton, 1.6 acres
FOR SALE \$13,900,000



Woodside, Landmark Estate
FOR SALE \$8,500,000



Portola Valley, Rare Opportunity!
FOR SALE \$4,950,000



Woodside, Views of Stanford Land
FOR SALE \$4,100,000



Woodside, 1 Acre
FOR SALE \$1,195,000



Woodside, Custom Built, Over an Acre
FOR SALE \$4,495,000



Woodside, Twenty-Nine Oaks
FOR SALE \$3,450,000



Woodside, Mountain Home Road
FOR SALE \$3,995,000



Woodside, Equestrian Estate
FOR SALE \$3,000,000



Woodside, 17.6-Acre forest
FOR SALE \$1,995,000



Menlo Park, Excellent Schools
FOR SALE \$2,675,000



Woodside, Country Estate
FOR SALE \$4,250,000



Woodside, Pristine Ranch-Style Home
SOLD \$3,275,000



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