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The Almanac

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

JANUARY 13, 2010 | VOL. 45 NO. 20



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THE SIREN CALL

OLLIE BROWN, RIGHT, HEARD THE CALL TO SERVICE AS A FIREFIGHTER MORE THAN SIX DECADES AGO. LAST MONTH, HE RETIRED — FOR THE THIRD TIME — FROM THE MENLO PARK DISTRICT. [SECTION 2]

TOWN OF WOODSIDE

2955 WOODSIDE ROAD
WOODSIDE, CA 94062

INVITES APPLICATIONS FOR COMMITTEES

BICYCLE COMMITTEE

Meets third Thursday of each month, 7:30 p.m.; appointed for two-year term.

The Committee advises and recommends to the Town Council on the policies for planning, developing, maintaining, and usage of Town's bikeways system.

CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH COMMITTEE

Meets fourth Monday of each month, 6:00 p.m.; appointed for two-year term.

The Committee advises and assists the Town Council, Planning Commission, and staff on conservation, open space, noise, public services and facilities as pertaining to the elements of the Town's General Plan.

LIVESTOCK AND ANIMAL CONTROL COMMITTEE

Meets fourth Wednesday of each month; 5:30 p.m.; appointed for two-year term.

The Committee advises the Planning Director on applications for commercial stable permits, dog kennel permits, and exception requests to the private stable regulations.

OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

Meets fourth Thursday of each month, 6:00 p.m.; appointed for two-year term.

The Committee advises and assists the Town Council, Planning Commission and staff in implementing the policies and goals of the Open Space and Conservation elements of the General Plan, specifically with respect to acquisition and maintenance of conservation easements and open space preservation.

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

Meets on call of Chair; appointed for two-year term.

The Committee advises the Town Council and staff on issues of community public safety, including police and fire services provided within the Town.

RECREATION COMMITTEE

Meets first Thursday of each month, 7:30 p.m.; appointed for three-year term.

The Committee guides the activities of the community recreation programs.

TRAILS COMMITTEE

Meets second Thursday of each month, 3:00 p.m.; appointed for two-year term.

The Committee reviews land divisions, subdivisions and conditional use permits for locations for equestrian, pedestrian and bicycle trails and makes recommendations to the staff and to the Planning Commission.

WOODSIDE HISTORY COMMITTEE

Meets second Thursday of each month, 9:30 a.m.; appointed for two-year term.

The Committee advises the Town Council and staff regarding actions, policies and plans relating to historic preservation.

Committees are volunteer positions and serve in an advisory capacity to the Town Council.

Interested residents may request information and applications Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m.-12 noon and 1-5:00 p.m., from the Town Clerk's Office at Town Hall, 2955 Woodside Road, or telephone (650) 851-6790, or through the Town's web site at www.woodsidetown.org. Deadline for applications is Friday, January 15, 2010, 5:00 p.m.

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This week's news, features and community events.

FIRST SHOT



Expressions of Uganda

The youth performance troupe Spirit of Uganda, made up of 22 dancers and musicians ages 8 to 18, will perform Thursday, Jan. 14, at 6:30 p.m. at Menlo-Atherton High School performing arts center. The event is a fundraiser for the group's sponsoring nonprofit organization, Empower African Children, which develops educational and other programs that support thousands of Ugandan children, many of whom are orphans. See **Page 7** for the story.

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Former firefighter Ollie Brown (right) of Menlo Park retired last month from the board of the Menlo Park Fire Protection District, ending a career in fire services that he considered his calling since boyhood. He is shown with fellow retirees who make up the "Coffee Bunch," which meets daily for conversation and conviviality at Le Boulanger in Menlo Park. Photo by Michelle Le. See story, **Section 2**.

CALLING ON THE ALMANAC

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

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■ E-mail news, information, obituaries and photos (with captions) to: **editor@AlmanacNews.com**
■ E-mail letters to the editor to: **letters@AlmanacNews.com**

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TOWN OF WOODSIDE

2955 Woodside Road
Woodside, CA 94062

INVITES APPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING COMMISSION

District 3

The Planning Commission participates in the administration of the planning laws and policies of the Town. It is responsible for recommending to the Town Council ordinances and resolutions necessary to implement the General Plan and adopted development policy. The Commission also conducts necessary public hearings to administer the planning laws and policies of the Town and acts upon applications for zoning amendments, conditional use permits, variances, subdivisions, and other related functions as may be assigned by the Council.

The Planning Commission meets on the first and third Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.

District 3 encompasses the area east and south of Woodside Road, Bear Gulch Creek (south of Woodside Road), west of Mountain Home Road and Manzanita Way, and Sand Hill/Portola Roads, and the Family Farm/Hidden Valley areas east of Portola Road.

Interested residents may check residency requirements and request information and applications Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m.-12 noon and 1-5:00 p.m. at the Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, 2955 Woodside Road, on the Town's web site at www.woodsidetown.org or by telephoning (650) 851-6790. Deadline for applications is Friday, January 15, 2010, 5:00 p.m.

TOWN OF WOODSIDE

2955 Woodside Road
Woodside, CA 94062

INVITES APPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING COMMISSION

Districts 4

The Planning Commission participates in the administration of the planning laws and policies of the Town. It is responsible for recommending to the Town Council ordinances and resolutions necessary to implement the General Plan and adopted development policy. The Commission also conducts necessary public hearings to administer the planning laws and policies of the Town and acts upon applications for zoning amendments, conditional use permits, variances, subdivisions and other related functions as may be assigned by the Council.

The Planning Commission meets on the first and third Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.; Commissioners are appointed for a four-year term.

District 4 encompasses the Emerald Lakes area, the Cañada Road area north of Arbor Court/Olive Hill Lane, including the Runnymede Road and Raymundo Drive areas.

Interested residents may check residency requirements and request information and applications Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m.-12 noon and 1-5:00 p.m. at the Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, 2955 Woodside Road, on the Town's web site at www.woodsidetown.org or by telephoning (650) 851-6790. Deadline for applications is Friday, January 15, 2010, 5:00 p.m.

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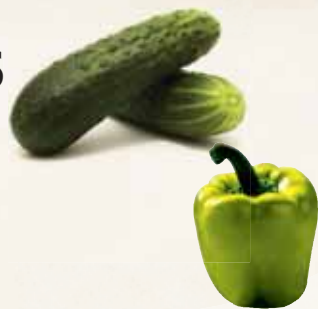
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Local News

MENLO PARK | AHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

In defending police suit, city runs tab to about \$350,000

■ All but \$11,500 goes to attorneys' fees, costs, other trial-related expenses; insurance covers full sum.

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

In a suit that may have revealed more about our litigation-happy society than about the law enforcement abuses it sought to expose, the city of Menlo Park and five of its police officers have successfully defended all but one of 23 claims resulting from a 2007 incident in which the officers broke up a party.

Still, the city's tab for the civil case ran to nearly \$350,000 in payments to plaintiffs and their attorneys, and in costs to defend the city and its officers, according to Finance Director Carol Augustine. The city burned through its \$250,000 per claim self-insured retainer, and an insurance pool made up of Bay Area cities covered the remainder, Ms. Augustine said.

The jury returned its verdict in U.S. District Court on Aug. 25 after a two-week trial. A hearing followed to determine appropriate fee awards for the seven

attorneys representing 10 plaintiffs, and for the city's attorneys.

The jury found that Nicholas Douglas, a Menlo Park police officer, had used excessive force against Maria Medina, one of 10 people to sue the city in the wake of the Sept. 1, 2007, incident at her home. Officer Douglas reportedly choked Ms. Medina with his baton, using her as a "shield or 'buffer' against possible assaults," according to court documents.

Another plaintiff, Rodolfo Medina, accepted a settlement offer of \$1,500 before the case went to trial.

But attorneys hired by the city successfully defended 22 other claims against the officers and the city itself, including allegations of unlawful seizures, unlawful entry, malicious prosecutions, and inadequate officer training.

After refusing the city's settlement offer of \$15,000, Ms. Medina asked for \$34,000 in future medical expenses in addition

to a "significant" but unspecified sum for general damages. She was awarded \$10,000. The other eight plaintiffs who elected to go to trial received nothing, after declining what Mr. McClure characterized as "nominal" sums in settlement offers.

The case was filed in federal court because it involved claims of civil rights violations, according to Mr. McClure.

The civil suit followed a criminal suit decided in May 2008, with five of the partygoers accused of resisting or obstructing police officers. Four were acquitted; Rodolfo Medina accepted a lesser charge of disturbing the peace.

In addition to Officer Douglas, four other members of the Menlo Park police force were named in the civil suit: Sgt. Ron Prickett, Officer Thomas Crutchfield, Officer Ron Venzon, and Reserve Officer Jonathan Baxter. The city successfully defended all claims against those officers. All five officers named in the case are still working for the department, according to police spokeswoman

Nicole Acker.

Mr. McClure said he could not comment on "any personnel actions that may or may not have been taken" as a result of the case. In general, he said, the city tries to learn from lawsuits like this one in the hopes of avoiding a similar situation in the future. "I can only assume that this case was no exception," he said.

The police department referred all questions to Mr. McClure.

Other costs

On Oct. 2, U.S. Magistrate Judge Wayne Brazil ordered the city to pay Rodolfo Medina and Maria Medina \$99,000 in attorneys' fees and costs related to the excessive force claims they prevailed on.

He ordered plaintiffs to pay \$20,000 in fees and costs the judge awarded the city for the charges it successfully defended.

The award to the plaintiffs was a far cry from the \$759,000 their attorneys had requested. The lead attorney, Arturo

See **LAWSUIT**, page 8

City of Menlo Park poised to buy foreclosed home

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

■ MENLO WATCH

Menlo Park's City Council at its Jan. 12 meeting could approve the purchase of a home in the Belle Haven neighborhood. It would be the first such purchase through the city's \$2 million neighborhood stabilization program, designed to counteract a rash of foreclosures in the city.

The home on Hollyburne Avenue would cost \$250,000, according to city management. The money would come from the below-market-rate fund, paid into by land developers.

The city plans to carry out \$160,000 in repairs using environmentally friendly building practices, before re-selling the home to a person or family on the city's below-market-rate wait list.

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

Council postpones sprinkler discussions

Discussion on two hot-button issues involving sprinklers has been pushed to the Jan. 26 City Council agenda.

The ordinances — governing

fire sprinklers in residential and commercial buildings, and water-efficient landscaping — had previously been scheduled for the Jan. 12 agenda.

The council will not meet on Tuesday, Jan. 19.

Construction begins on new gym

Construction is under way on a new gymnasium in Menlo Park's Civic Center, and work to expand the parking lot nearest the library and the new gym is just about complete.

The city is replacing some landscaping with asphalt to make room for 14 new parking spaces to partially offset the 17 spaces that will be lost to the gymnasium. It held a groundbreaking ceremony for the new gym Friday, Jan. 8.

Through the parking reconfiguration, the city also upgraded spaces for people with disabilities, according to Engineering Services Manager Lisa Ekers.

Part of the southern end of the parking lot will be occupied by construction vehicles while the gym is being built, Ms. Ekers said. ■



Photo by Michelle Le

Menlo Vacuum and Fix-It manager **George Lynch** repairs a vacuum in the back room of the shop.

In age of Costco, handling each appliance with care

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

Browsing the shelves and cubbies in the back room of Menlo Vacuum and Fix-it might be something like listening to a Philip Glass composition. It's clear that there is a guiding principle to the arrangement on the shelves of the motors, belts, electrical plugs, lamp pieces, and hundreds of other doodads that most non-mechanics would be hard-pressed to identify. But it's equally clear

that attempting to understand how exactly the system came about, or what its basic tenets are, would be beyond even the most seasoned handyman.

Not even store manager George Lynch can explain it, and he's worked there since 1986.

"Somebody just walking in here wouldn't know what was going on," Mr. Lynch said, giving a tour of the cramped workshop in which he and Ron Ballweber, the shop's only other

See **FIX-IT**, page 8

Big raises for reassigned city supervisors

By Sean Howell

Almanac Staff Writer

The city of Menlo Park has restructured its management operations — a move that city officials say will save money, though it will also result in significant pay increases for two management employees during a difficult budget year.

In taking over the community services department in addition to her duties as community engagement manager, Cherise Brandell will see an increase in salary from \$106,000 to \$146,000 per year, or 38 percent.

The city has also created a new position, deputy city manager, to be occupied by Public Works Director Kent Steffens. Mr. Steffens, who served as interim city manager for much of 2007 following the resignation of David Boesch, will see a 10 percent pay increase, from \$161,000 to \$177,000.

In part, the restructuring is an effort to compensate for the departure of former Community Services Director Barbara Santos-George in July, without making a new hire. Ms. Brandell will receive the full salary for the community services director position, and the city essentially won't be paying for the position of community engagement manager, according to City Manager Glen Rojas.

With the city unlikely to come up with a balanced budget this year — and with negotiations ongoing with line-level workers, who have already volunteered to accept a two-year pay freeze — the raises may not sit well with some residents and employees.

Mr. Rojas defended the raises, saying that they are the result of job promotions. "This shouldn't be looked upon as, 'they're getting raises, and we're not,'" he said, asked whether he thought middle managers and line-level staff members would be unhappy with the raises.

"This is part of a sustainable long-term budget, a long-term plan," Mayor Rich Cline said. "If you pull (the raises out of context), these decisions can look

crazy. But if you look at it as a totality, this is actually an expense reduction."

Calls to Rene Morales, city workers' representative to the Services Employees International union, and to Sharon McAleavey, who recently negotiated a contract with a virtual salary freeze on behalf of the city's middle managers, were not returned by The Almanac's press deadline.

Reorganization

Mr. Rojas said he feels confident in Ms. Brandell's ability to handle the community services department because she supervised a "large staff" in the neighborhood services department in Battle Creek, Michigan, before arriving in Menlo Park in 2008. She made \$75,000 per year in Battle Creek.

The housing department, which formerly reported

to the director of community development, will now report to Ms. Brandell.

In his new role, Mr. Steffens will continue to oversee the public works department, but will spend more time working on issues related to high-speed rail and major land development projects, according to Mr. Rojas.

Assistant City Manager Starla Jerome-Robinson will directly supervise the community services, library, and personnel departments, freeing up Mr. Rojas to spend more time working to achieve "council goals," he said.

While several other city staffers in the community services and public works departments are taking on positions of increased responsibility, those employees are not receiving raises, according to Personnel Director Glen Kramer.

The city documented the reorganization effort in a December staff report, but did not report Ms. Brandell's raise. The Almanac learned of Mr. Steffens' promotion when it received a copy of a Jan. 4 memo sent to the city's department heads.

Mr. Rojas said he had intended to notify the press eventually. ■

'If you look at it as a totality, this is actually an expense reduction.'

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Duboc calls for ballot initiative on public pensions

After months of toying with the idea in e-mails she sends to supporters, former Menlo Park council member Lee Duboc is calling for a ballot initiative to roll back pension benefits for new Menlo Park employees, with the exception of police.

In an e-mail sent around 1 p.m. Monday, Jan. 11, Ms. Duboc asks if people would be willing to contribute at least five hours and \$50, because "the unions will spare no effort or expense in attempting to derail any such effort."

The goal, she said, would be to change the retirement age for all new, non-police city employees from 55 to 60, and to offer those employees 2 percent of their salary multiplied by years of service in annual pension payments, instead of the current 2.7 percent.

"If you agree that the proposed changes are fair and that passing a 'grass roots' pension reform initiative is the way towards limiting future fiscal stress on our city please get back to me as soon as possible," she wrote.

Menlo Park man arrested again for drug trafficking

Menlo Park police raided a Belle Haven home and arrested a 30-year-old man on federal drug trafficking charges on Tuesday, Jan. 5, the second time in the past several months that the man has been charged with that crime.

Police Sergeant Eric Cowans and Officer Ed Soares were on their way to carry out a raid on the home of Ronald Hampton around noon when Mr. Hampton's car cut in front of them, according to Sgt. Cowans. They followed Mr. Hampton into East Palo Alto, where they arrested him before returning to the home on 300 Hamilton Ave. with about

10 other officers to carry out the raid.

"It was just a coincidence" that they spotted Mr. Hampton, Sgt. Cowans said.

Police would not reveal how much methamphetamine they found in Mr. Hampton's home, but it was enough to warrant federal charges, according to Sgt. Cowans.

Mr. Hampton was originally targeted in the March raids on the "Taliban" gang in Menlo Park, East Palo Alto and other Bay Area cities, an operation that netted about 40 arrests. At the time of his most recent arrest, Mr. Hampton

was on federal probation stemming from his original arrest after the "Taliban" raid, Sgt. Cowans said.

Asked whether he expects other members of the gang to begin operating again in the region after serving their sentences, Mr. Cowans said: "It depends on the person. Some people take it seriously, and we never see them again; others don't. It's hard to say."

He called Mr. Hampton's earlier sentence of probation a "slap on the wrist," saying that some of the others arrested in the raids are serving sentences of 10 years or longer.



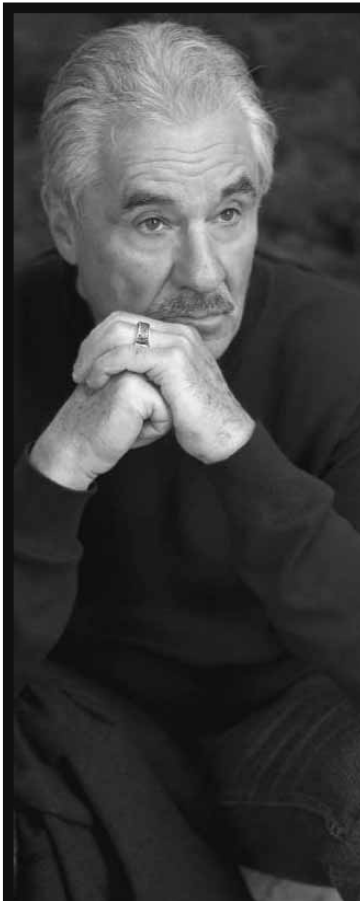
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WOODSIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Woodside Preschool Registration

You are invited to attend a Woodside Preschool parent visitation morning on **Friday, January 22nd from 8:45 to 10:00 a.m.** (parents only).

From February 1st through February 12th, 2010, Woodside School District will be accepting applications for the **FALL 2010 PRESCHOOL.**

The Woodside Preschool is a half-day, fee-based program running from 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. Your children must be at least 2 years, 9 months old as of September 2, 2009 to apply.

Preschool students are placed in either the 2-day, 3-day or 5-day program based on age. Priority is given to students who live within the Woodside School District boundaries.

Interested families may pick up an application at the school office beginning February 1st.

For more information about the preschool program, call **Cathy** at **851-1571 x294.**

Ugandan dancers, musicians perform here

By Renee Batti

Almanac News Editor

They have all experienced the harsh realities of disease, privation and violence during their young lives. Many are orphans, their parents having succumbed to AIDS, or to injuries resulting from the civil war that wracks their country — the East African nation of Uganda.

But when the 22 young dancers and musicians of the Spirit of Uganda take the stage on Jan. 14 at the Menlo-Atherton performing arts center, the audience is likely to see, not despair and sorrow, but a dynamic display of joy.

Spirit of Uganda will perform at 6:30 p.m. on the high school campus in an event sponsored by Empower African Children and the city of Menlo Park, with volunteer organizational help from a group of local residents.

The performance is a fundraiser for Empower African Children, a Texas-based nonprofit that has helped develop educational and other programs that support thousands of Ugandan children and their families, according to information on the organization's Web site.

Elizabeth Ouren of Menlo Park is a volunteer organizer of the Jan. 14 event — and a serious fan of the performance troupe and its sponsoring nonprofit. She and her family first saw Spirit of Uganda perform at Stanford in 2002.

"We all were riveted by the performance and fell in love with the children," she says. "My son loved it so much he wanted to have a drumming birthday party" for his third birthday, she adds.

Ms. Ouren says her family has gone to every local performance the group has given since. They are "impressed and inspired by their personal stories," she adds.

"They have such big dreams and hope, despite the sad and challenging circumstances that have left them orphaned in Uganda."

Stories about the big dreams and hopes of some of the performers, who range in age from 8 to 18, can be found on a Facebook site created by Maddy Baum, a freshman at Castilleja School who, with her mother Elizabeth Baum. Although the children face tremendous challenges, many of them aspire to greatly improved lives as doctors, lawyers, and, of course, musicians. ■

■ INFORMATION

Go to tinyurl.com/MPUGanda to buy tickets at \$25. Spirit of Uganda performs Thursday, Jan. 14, from 6:30 to 8 p.m. in the Menlo-Atherton High School performing arts center, 555 Middlefield Road in Atherton. For information about the performance and the sponsoring organization, go to empowerafricanchildren.org.

Services set for Joan Sellman, former Almanac staffer

Services will be held at 1 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 23, at Woodside Village Church for Joan Sellman, a resident of Woodside for 50 years.

Ms. Sellman died Dec. 10 at Brighton Gardens in Santa Rosa, following an extended illness. She was 81.

Ms. Sellman was the wife of the late George W. Sellman, who served as superintendent of Woodside Elementary School for 23 years and for whom the school auditorium is named. The Sellmans were married Jan. 21, 1951, in Colusa.

Mr. Sellman died in 2005.

In the 1990s, Ms. Sellman retired after working in the business office of The Almanac for many years, dating back to the days when it was located in Woodside. She is remembered by her colleagues for her pleasant,



Joan Sellman worked in the business office of The Almanac for many years.

easy-going manner and her baking skills. Every holiday season, Almanac staffers looked forward to a tray of her home-baked treats, often beautifully decorated. Lemon bars were a big favorite.

Joan Sellman was born in Tracy and spent her early childhood in Hat Creek, Burney and Colusa. She graduated from Colusa High School, where she was one of two graduation speakers/valedictorians. She attended Yuba College

See **SELLMAN**, page 9

REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Gloria Darke



Protection against contract problems

Dear Gloria, We have identified a property we are interested in. When we purchased our home we assumed it was in good shape since it had recently been remodeled. After we moved in both the furnace and hot water heater broke within the first six months. We also had a delay in our financing through no fault of our own and had to pay the seller for the delay. How does one protect against problems not only with the property but within the contract?

- Linda G.

A: Linda G., That is a very good question. There is hardly ever an absolutely perfect offer where the buyer offers the seller all cash with no loan and accepting the house "as is" with no inspections or clearances. The exception to this was in the year 2000 when supply/demand was totally out of balance. Normally, every contract has restrictions, conditions and negotiations.

The contract or "Deposit Receipt" requires strict construction to protect all parties. What if the buyer has to get financing to complete the purchase? It's no secret that lenders have tightened up considerably on

their standards and the appraisers have gotten more conservative so it is important to have a financing contingency. On the other side, how does the seller protect himself from someone who may not be creditworthy enough to qualify for the required loan amount? Or, as happened in your last purchase, how do you protect yourself if the loan is delayed or the rates go up during the escrow period?

Buyers and sellers can protect their own specific interests with properly worded "subject to" and contingency clauses. These clauses must be specific as loosely worded contracts may not be much better than not having these contingencies at all.

Regarding the furnace and hot water replacements: you should always have a contingency for an inspection but inspectors cannot necessarily predict how much longer an appliance might last. They can usually tell the age and one can make an educated guess. The best thing to do is get a home protection plan which is basically an insurance policy for the first year you own the house to insure against the failure of appliance and major systems.

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

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3. Folger Gatehouse CEQA#2009-0004
3860 Woodside Road

CEQA2009-0004:
Review and adoption or denial of a Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring & Reporting Program for restoration of a structure that has been determined to be eligible for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources located at 3860 Woodside Road.

4. Barkley Field Conditional Use Permit CUP#2004-002
5001 Farm Hill Boulevard

Review of a Conditional Use Permit granted in 2004 to establish a public park (Barkley Fields and Park), and a request to modify conditions to allow amplified music at annual anniversary celebration at the park.

All application materials are available for public review at the Woodside Planning and Building Counter, Woodside Town Hall, weekdays from 8:00 – 10:00 AM and 1:00 – 3:00 PM, or by appointment. For more information, contact the Woodside Planning and Building Department at (650) 851-6790.

Handling each appliance with care

FIX-IT

continued from page 5

employee, go about their mysterious alchemy. “Some places have a number system, but we don’t do that ... I mostly go by sight.”

It has taken Mr. Ballweber 10 years to learn the system, and he still has to ask Mr. Lynch questions about where things are located from time to time,

he said, laughing.

While the wall of the workshop lined with parts may resemble that of some mad garage-bound inventor, adjacent shelves, lined with toasters, lamps, coffee makers, food processors, heaters, and other electronic appliances, reveal the parts’ more humble destinations. Mr. Ballweber and Mr. Lynch come across as the practitioners of a lost art, two men with a hard-wired connection

to objects at a time when the universe is being translated into an ever-more-detailed digital replica. The fix-it shop has been reduced to a curiosity, a fact that probably doesn’t reflect well on our use-it-and-junk-it culture.

Then again, the shop on El Camino Real is still there, nestled between a barber shop and a shoe repair shop. Vacuums awaiting repair spill out of the workshop and down the hallway, a tangible indicator of

the business’ current revenue stream. (Mr. Lynch says you could see the effects of the recession immediately upon walking in the door a year ago, with about a third as many vacuums as usual lining the walls.)

And while their customers may not be able to pick out the part their appliance needs from the workshop shelf, they value their products enough to take them in to be fixed, rather than toss them in a dumpster and drive to their nearest Costco.

“It’s amazing how much attachment people have” to

their products, Mr. Lynch said. “People can be very emotional about their appliances.”

While he has a pretty good feel for how your standard toaster or vacuum cleaner functions, “every appliance has its own idiosyncrasies,” he said.

He acknowledges that the whole “big box” mentality has probably been partly responsible for the decline of the fix-it shop, but points to a more practical concern as well: the increased importation of products from China. While American laws require manufacturers to keep parts on hand for several years after an appliance’s production, those laws don’t apply to imports, he says. That means he simply doesn’t have and can’t get the parts required to fix imported appliances, unless he’s able to scrap other defunct items for parts.

While Mr. Lynch says it’s true that they just don’t make certain appliances like they used to — “nobody really makes a good toaster any more, for any amount of money” — he’s not nostalgic for the vacuum cleaners of the 1960s and 1970s. A change in awareness in the late 1980s around asthma and allergies led to more efficient machines and better filtration systems, he asserts, though he still prefers the old vacuums to the recent development of bag-less cleaners. Mr. Lynch compares that trend to the move from vinyl records to CDs in the 1980s.

“The concept is, ‘it’s bag-less, it’s better,’” he said. “What they don’t tell you is, you have to buy filters, and they leak all over the place. It’s kind of a corporate fraud.”

He said he’s heartened by the recent vinyl revival — though, true to form, he cautions that the sound quality depends on the quality of the speakers and amplifier. Trading your CD player for a turntable won’t necessarily guarantee better sound quality, he said. ▀

LAWSUIT

continued from page 5

Gonzalez, sought \$181,000 for his time, arguing that the court should award attorneys high fees in order to compel good lawyers to take civil rights cases. He received \$12,000.

“By any reasonable measure, Plaintiffs’ success in this litigation was extremely limited,” Judge Brazil wrote. “This petition for fees and costs is unreasonable on its face — and remains thoroughly unreasonable after careful analysis.” ▀



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Menlo Park teen still missing, police report

A 14-year-old Menlo-Atherton High School student who was last seen walking away from her Menlo Park home on Jan. 6 has still not been located, police reported Jan. 11.

Jennifer Blair, a freshman at M-A and a graduate of Hillview Middle School, was last seen in the 400 block of Olive Street at around 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, according to Menlo Park police.

She is considered at risk

because of her age, though her absence is considered voluntary and there is no evidence of foul play, according to police.

She is a white girl with long brown hair and hazel eyes, around 5 feet 11 inches tall and weighing around 170 pounds. She was last seen wearing



Jennifer Blair

a purple hoodie, a black tank top, blue jeans and sneakers.

Police believe she may have headed to Redwood City, East Palo Alto or San Jose.

Her name is listed in the nationwide Missing and Unidentified Persons Database as a runaway/missing person.

Police are asking anyone with information on this case to call 330-6300 or the anonymous tip line at 330-6395.

Burglars ransack Atherton home with family on vacation

By Andrea Gemmet

Almanac Staff Writer

It was an unhappy ending to a holiday vacation for an Atherton family, who found their house ransacked and their car stolen.

The burglary was reported Jan. 4 when the residents of the home in the 100 block of Hawthorne Drive got back from their trip, said Atherton police Sgt. Sherman Hall. There was no sign of forced entry, but a back door was open, Sgt. Hall said.

The burglars took flat screen televisions, stereo equipment and jewelry that had sentimental value. "The suspects were pretty discerning, taking the good stuff and leaving the other stuff behind," said Sgt. Hall.

The burglars also stole the victims' car, a 1993 two-door Lexus sedan, he said.

Police haven't received a complete list of missing items, but the estimated value is at least \$10,000, not including the value of the stolen car, Sgt. Hall said.

While the residents did several things right, like stopping delivery of the newspaper and asking neighbors to keep an eye on the house, the home did not have an alarm system, Sgt. Hall said. Several houses on the street were on the police department's watch list, because residents notified police that they would be out of town. This house was not on the list, Sgt. Hall said.

"We were up and down the street a lot, checking on those (other houses). Unfortunately, this house wasn't on our radar," he said. ■

Director of California High-Speed Rail Authority resigns

By Andrea Gemmet

Almanac Staff Writer

Mehdi Morshed, the executive director of the California High-Speed Rail Authority, is stepping down at the end of March. On Jan. 7, Mr. Morshed, 72, sent his resignation letter to the board of the agency in charge of building a high-speed rail line from Los Angeles to San Francisco.

Mr. Morshed has spent the last 11

years heading the rail authority. For much of that time, the high-speed rail project was in danger of being shut down, he said in his letter.

"During the past 11 years, the project was declared dead many times. Annually, we were prepared to close the office," he wrote.

Despite the delays, Mr. Morshed said that there is no doubt in his mind that California will soon have the first state-of-the-art high speed rail service in the nation.

The passage of Proposition 1A, the \$9 billion bond measure to fund part of the high-speed rail project, as well as President Barack Obama's support of national high-speed rail projects, will assure the construction of California's rail line, he wrote.

With his goal accomplished, he is stepping down and ending his 46-year career in public service, he said.

PV may decide parking dispute along upper Alpine Road

The matter of roadside public parking and how much of it there should be in front of 4860 Alpine Road is the first item of business for the Portola Valley Town Council at its Wednesday, Jan. 13, meeting at 7:30 p.m. in the Historic Schoolhouse at 765 Portola Road.

Should there be a driveway into the property at one end of the town-owned roadside area, thereby preserving the stretch of uninterrupted parking for some 20 vehicles, or should the driveway cross the parking area at some point and divide it?

Town staff denied an encroachment permit for the second option as proposed by residents Rick Friedman and Annette Achermann, who have appealed to the council to reverse the staff decision. The slope of a driveway where staff proposed would be too steep, the couple has said.

Two council members have been working with them on a compromise plan that the council will consider.

Also on the agenda for Wednesday: amended policies for the use

of and rental of the community hall and the two activity rooms. A proposal would require room rental fees to include insurance costs, ban reheating of food outside the kitchen, and forbid anything but painter's tape to affix things to the walls.

The council will also discuss modifications to the outfield of the Town Center baseball diamond in light of a June 2009 incident in which a player injured his face after running over a collapsible fence and colliding with a tree.

SELLMAN

continued from page 7

and graduated from UC Berkeley in 1950. In her early years, she worked as a teacher and substitute teacher.

The couple moved to Woodside in 1959 after Mr. Sellman was hired as a teacher at Woodside Elementary School. While her

husband was busy directing students in the school's eighth-grade operettas, and, later, became director of Woodside Community Theatre productions, she was content to assume a smaller role. She sang in the chorus and designed and sewed costumes for the community productions.

Along with using with her culinary talents, Ms. Sellman enjoyed

playing tennis and reading, especially mystery novels, say family members.

She is survived by her children, Cindy Jensen, George Sellman III, and Jennifer Anderson; and four grandchildren.

Memorials in Ms. Sellman's name may be made to the Woodside Community Foundation or the American Cancer Society.

Charges filed against son of slugger Barry Bonds

Charges were filed Jan. 7 in San Mateo County Superior Court against the 20-year-old son of former San Francisco Giants slugger Barry Bonds in connection with a domestic fight in Menlo Park on Dec. 5.

Nikolai Lamar Bonds, who turned 20 on Dec. 18, faces five misdemeanor counts that could land him in county jail for at least two years if convicted, Chief Deputy District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe said.

He has been charged with one count of battery, one count of false imprisonment, one count of vandalism, one count of threatening a police officer, and one count of obstructing a police officer, Mr. Wagstaffe said.

The charges stem from an altercation at his mother Sun Bonds' Menlo Park house Dec. 5, where Nikolai Bonds lives as well, according to Mr. Wagstaffe. Police were notified at about 10 a.m. of an argument between the two.

Nikolai Bonds and his mother had apparently gotten into a

fight about some jewelry that had been taken from the house, Mr. Wagstaffe said.

"They were shouting and screaming, then he went into a bedroom and started smashing furniture," Mr. Wagstaffe said.

Sun Bonds called a friend, who called 911, and when she tried to leave the house her son allegedly prevented her from doing so, according to Mr. Wagstaffe.

"She tried to open the door and he would slam it shut," Mr. Wagstaffe said. "Then he spit in her face."

Responding officers detained Nikolai Bonds, who then allegedly threatened one officer and the officer's family, Mr. Wagstaffe said.

Bonds was taken into custody, posted \$50,000 bail and was released from custody at about 10 p.m. that same day.

He is scheduled to appear in court Jan. 12 in Redwood City for his initial arraignment.

— Bay City News Service

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Senior Correspondents

Marion Softky, Marjorie Mader

Staff Writers Andrea Gemmet,

David Boyce, Sean Howell

Contributors Barbara Wood,

Kate Daly, Katie Blankenberg

Special Sections Editors

Carol Blitzer, Sue Dremann

Photographer Michelle Le

Design & Production

Design Director Raul Perez

Designers Linda Atilano,

Laura Don, Gary Vennarucci

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Newsroom Fax: (650) 854-0677

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e-mail news and photos with

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School district buying time

The Menlo Park City School District can't catch a break. Four years after rising enrollment projections convinced trustees to mount a successful \$90 million bond campaign to finance new and improved classrooms, the latest projections show that even more elementary school students than predicted will show up over the next 10 years and reach a middle school peak in 2016.

The bubble is expected to subside after that, but by 2019, the district is expected to have 2,815 students, 9 percent more than the 2,553 registered this school year. So now the district has to decide whether to find more capacity or accept the previously unthinkable solution of increasing class sizes in all grades. It is a tough dilemma for school officials, who must choose from

the following options presented by Superintendent Ken Ranella:

1. Open a fourth elementary campus by taking back the currently leased O'Connor School property in the Willows, or selling it and purchasing a new piece of property. Under that option, the annual loss of about \$650,000 includes loss of rent from the German-American International School and the added expense of supervising a new school. It doesn't include the millions of dollars needed to renovate the O'Connor campus or build a new school.

2. Find a way to diplomatically drop the nearly 150 inter-district transfer students, including some 122 who are part of the Tinsley transfer program, a result of the 1986 court settlement of a desegregation lawsuit. Tinsley requires the Menlo Park district to accept 24 new students every year from the Ravenswood School District, which serves East Palo Alto and the Belle Haven neighborhood, in east Menlo Park.

3. Increase class sizes, install portables or use science labs and art rooms as classrooms.

Since property taxes, the district's primary revenue source, are not expected to grow much in the coming years, it would be difficult to financially support a new campus at O'Connor in two years, particularly with a major building project under way at Hillview Middle School. And cost estimates to upgrade O'Connor are \$2 million or more. Others say it could take up to \$10 million to do the job properly.

On the plus side: The district would gain a school site in the Willows neighborhood, where many new families are buying existing homes. And with a capacity of about 250 students, O'Connor could take up most of the added student load.

Perhaps the least palatable and unlikely solution suggested by Mr. Ranella is for the district to close the door on any inter-district transfer students, including 122 from the Tinsley program, as well as 20 or so who are the children of staff members.

Changing the desegregation ruling that covers a half-dozen other districts, including Portola Valley, Woodside and Palo Alto, would require the approval of a Superior Court judge. It also would be difficult for the district, one of the most affluent in the state, to make the case that it could not afford to accept students from East Palo Alto and Belle Haven.

Late last week, Mr. Ranella recommended an array of solutions for trustees to consider, anchored by a two-student increase in class size at all grade levels and the addition of four classrooms at Laurel Elementary School. He also recommended negotiating a shorter window to cancel the lease on O'Connor School in the Willows, but also suggested that a committee explore other, better-located sites to purchase. The Tinsley program would remain intact, although students leaving during first and second grade would not be replaced, as is the current policy.

Mr. Ranella's choice to slightly ramp up class size during the enrollment bubble, which is expected to peak in 2013 in elementary grades and in 2016 in middle school, is clearly a good solution. Adding four classrooms at Laurel may be more problematic, but doing so would accommodate 80 to 90 additional students.

The options trustees will consider this week are good ones that won't interfere with the district's overall performance. In the end, good teachers and bright students, the hallmark of the district, will adapt to the larger class sizes, which will remain lower than those at many other schools in the state. This, and the other measures recommended by Mr. Ranella, are a good mix to carry the district through the projected bubble of increased enrollment. The big question is whether the enrollment numbers will change again next year.

LETTERS

Our readers write

Commissioners share facts on city's BMR housing

Editor:

The recent legal action taken by the City of Menlo Park to retrieve a BMR condo unit in Menlo Square from default has raised some questions from city residents. Our intent is to provide factual information regarding the city-managed BMR program.

Between 1996 and the present date, 57 BMR units have been developed. Of those 57 units, seven have been resold to a second owner and one unit has been foreclosed. Two owners have received additional financial assistance, which was folded into their existing PAL loan. Currently, one unit has action pending against the owner for borrowing against the unit in excess of the BMR value of the home, a violation of the BMR agreement.

Loan applicants are carefully screened and eligibility is closely

monitored through established guidelines. Compared with the market rate foreclosure numbers, the city's BMR foreclosure of less than one percent is noteworthy.

Fees and interest collected by the city through the BMR program to date is \$11,403,791. One might ask those against BMR programs if they think that all government housing assistance should be ended. If the answer is yes, ask if that would include the largest housing government subsidy program, income tax exemption for mortgage interest.

**Patricia Boyle, Anne Moser
Members, Menlo Park
Housing Commission**

Thanks for Peninsula's 'Hometown Newspaper'

Editor:

At the beginning of a new year, I want to sincerely thank and congratulate the owners and staff of The Almanac for another year of giving very valuable and virtually unduplicated editorial service. You truly are a "hometown newspaper," and the four communities you are

dedicated to serve are the beneficiaries: Atherton, Menlo Park, Portola Valley and Woodside.

That is a real tribute in my book. Yet, each has a different early history and pace of development later into very distinct suburban communities, school districts, and local governments. I greatly admire that commitment to serve a mixed but common readership, given my background of serving a very special readership for Sunset Magazine.

At the same time, the four communities overlap with many common interests, including a close attachment to Stanford University.

Your excellent 2010 edition of Our Neighborhoods is proof of that blend of commonality in many ways — but with qualities that make us each very different. The Town of Portola Valley, being the latest community, is the "new kid on the block" and where The Country Almanac was founded to help bring a very rural area together to support our incorporation in 1964. In the subsequent early growth period, The Almanac has made an invaluable contribution to

my "home town."

But, each of the four communities you serve is distinctive and requires an editorial sensitivity to the unique history and subsequent development — and, importantly, our frequent common interests in county and state politics, overlapping interests in bond issues, many political candidates, and so on. My guess is, we are only beginning to become aware of our common interests in environmental issues with climate change regarding water and wild fires, cooperation for earthquakes and public transportation

Also, the "Shop Local" campaign headed up by Clark Kepler and others is good for the local economy."

A very Happy New Year to The Almanac ownership and staff and thanks for your unduplicated good editorial services for readers — including "public service" with your annual Holiday Fund — and, as published in your Dec. 30 issue, two full pages featuring local non-profit organizations.

**Bill Lane
Portola Valley**

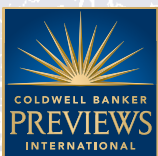
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