



BRIAN HOWARD, early employee of Apple Computer, dies at 65. | PAGE 13

The Almanac

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

FEBRUARY 17, 2010 | VOL. 45 NO. 25



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Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

What lies beneath

Brad Haaland checks out a heap of strawberries, sugary breakfast cereal and chocolate-mint candy smothering the bowl of nonfat frozen yogurt held by his friend Nick Goldman at the grand opening of The Mix Frozen Yogurt Treatery on Feb. 11 in West Menlo Park. The new business on Alameda de las Pulgas aims to provide high-end frozen yogurt at a family-friendly gathering spot, say owners Susannah Albright and Jamie Schein. Ms. Schein, the president of the Las Lomas School District board, says they use many local vendors to stock their yogurt shop.

Sequoia high school district superintendent Patrick Gemma plans to retire in June

Patrick Gemma, the superintendent of the Sequoia Union High School District since February 2003, has announced that he will retire on June 30, the end date for his current contract with the district, according to a district statement.

The governing board will begin the process of searching for a new superintendent at its Wednesday, Feb. 17, meeting, spokeswoman Bettylu Smith said.

Among the milestones during Mr. Gemma's tenure:

- District voters approved two bond measures for \$235 million.
- A share of that bond money funded new performing arts

centers at both Woodside and Menlo-Atherton high schools.

■ M-A and Woodside added remedial classes to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act.

■ Two charter schools — Summit Prep and Everest — opened in Redwood City, the second of which Mr. Gemma fought relentlessly in 2009.

Board president Olivia Martinez said Mr. Gemma played a "pivotal" role in developing the



Pat Gemma

district's vision and set of goals for the new century. "His leadership will be missed but his legacy will continue for many years to come," she said.

Mr. Gemma retires after 38 years in California education, including positions as assistant superintendent, principal, vice-principal, and special education teacher, Ms. Smith said.

Mr. Gemma added that he is "looking forward to rejuvenating over the summer and spending more time with my aging father and family, reconnecting with friends, and contemplating which interests and challenges I might like to pursue next."

Also Inside

- Editorial 14
- Guest opinions 15
- Letters 14
- Obituary 13
- Police Calls 13

On the cover

Whitney Quaresma is a regular customer at Cafe Zoe in Menlo Park's Willows neighborhood. The cafe has become a gathering place in the Willows, shaped by the disparate influences of the community it serves. Photo by Michelle Le. See Section 2.

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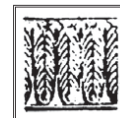
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Local News

MENLO PARK | ATHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

Menlo Park council formally opposes Cargill proposal

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

Menlo Park's City Council took an unambiguous, unilateral stand Feb. 9 against a proposal by agribusiness giant Cargill to develop hundreds of acres of Redwood City salt ponds.

Council members in a 4-1 vote denounced the proposal to build a mini-city that would include 8,000 to 12,000 new residential units on the edge of the Bay just north of Menlo Park, saying that it cuts against a half-century of regional planning philosophy. The San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission designates the land as salt ponds; the council called for "full restoration" of the land.

Councilman John Boyle, who cast the dissenting vote, said he also has major reservations about the proposal.

But he dismissed the resolution as a "public position" that carried no legal weight, and could have damaging consequences. Passing it would weaken Menlo Park's ability to negotiate with Redwood City over revisions to the proposal, he argued.

"There will be lots of oppor-

tunities to shape this project still," he said. "We ought to be very clear about our reservations and our demands, but we should engage, rather than confront."

Council majority members disagreed, saying the resolution will not preclude the city from collaborating with Redwood City, and maintaining that they did not intend to slight the neighboring city. They said they wanted to make a clear statement about their views on developing the Bay, rather than let Cargill set the parameters of that debate.

The vote echoed council members' stance on the California high-speed rail project. A majority of council members supported the city joining a lawsuit against the agency overseeing that project, while also pursuing collaboration — a stance Mr. Boyle argued was incongruous.

Making a parallel between the two issues, Mayor Rich Cline in an interview said: "I don't want to have a discussion on the subtleties of what kinds of shovels they'll use to build it. If this is the proposal, we have to reject it. Resoundingly, we have to reject it."

Rhetoric grew lofty in a num-

See **CARGILL**, page 10

High-speed rail officials will present plans in Menlo Park on Friday

Local residents interested in the design of the California high-speed rail system can get an early look at the rail agency's plans in a meeting Friday, Feb. 19, in the City Council chambers.

The meeting is tentatively scheduled to begin at 3:30 p.m., but "an earlier start time for the meeting may be arranged," the city wrote in a press release. People are encouraged to check Menlo Park's Web site for updates the day of the meeting: www.menlopark.org. Information will also be posted on The Almanac's Web site:

TheAlmanacOnline.com.

At the meeting, rail officials are expected to present and discuss preliminary information on how high-speed trains could run through Menlo Park and the surrounding area. The rail agency held a similar meeting in Palo Alto on Feb. 9, and is expected to release a formal analysis of the design options on the Peninsula March 4.

People from neighboring communities, such as Atherton and Palo Alto, are welcome to attend and ask questions, the city said.

State Supreme Court rejects Stanford trails lawsuit

By Jay Thorwaldson
Palo Alto Weekly

Stanford University can proceed with building a new trail link to the foothills along Page Mill Road, according to a state Supreme Court ruling issued Feb. 11.

The ruling rejects claims in a

lawsuit filed by the Midpeninsula-based Committee for Green Foothills that Stanford and Santa Clara County missed a crucial deadline in starting work on two trails on the south and north boundaries of Stanford lands.

The trails are required as mitigation for a "general use permit" granted to Stanford by Santa

Ax falls on Las Lomas district budget, but more cuts needed

■ Another \$300,000 in new state cutbacks likely to bring more pain to district.

By Renee Batti
Almanac News Editor

Just as Las Lomas School District board members were preparing to begin the painful process of cutting the district budget by about \$1.2 million at the board's Feb. 10 meeting, they were hit with a new blow: They were told that they needed to add another \$300,000 in cuts to the earlier target figure.

District staff had given the board a list of recommended cuts to be made over the next two budget years, totaling \$1.1 million — just shy of the \$1.2 million in cuts Superintendent Eric Hartwig said would be

needed for the district to get out of deficit spending by 2011-12. The board unanimously approved nearly all of the proposed reductions, although it blunted the severity of the summer school program's cut.

The reductions, 75 percent of which will be put in place in the 2010-11 fiscal year, include: a hiring freeze except when required by law, including a reversal of a plan to hire more teachers to address the spurt in enrollment; larger class sizes; cuts in or elimination of some enrichment programs; and shortening the school year by three instructional days and furloughing employees up to five non-instructional days

(effective 2011-12, if successfully negotiated with employee unions).

But after the vote, the board began to discuss options for further spending cuts in response to Mr. Hartwig's earlier announcement that he had learned, only that morning, that the state was likely to withhold another \$300,000 in its already-reduced funding for the district.

Mr. Hartwig said he was told by School Services of California, which analyzes state and federal funding for schools, that California schools were likely to lose an additional \$240 per pupil from the state because the \$7 billion the governor had expected in federal relief funds fell far short of the mark. With the district's

See **CUTS**, page 10



Photo by Dave Boyce/The Almanac

Open question

A Portola Valley committee toured the former Spring Down equestrian facility adjacent to Town Center on Thursday, Feb. 11, as a prelude to three meetings to discuss exactly what activities should be allowed on the 6-acre plot bought with money reserved for the purchase of open space.

The trail is actually a bike lane that follows Page Mill and a trail that veers off at Deer Creek Road and winds up over a steep parcel of land along the site of a horse-pasturing operation.

The Supreme Court overturned an appeals court ruling that a key deadline had been missed.

The Committee for Green Foothills lawsuit actually chal-

lenged only the northern trail alignment. But the university maintained both trails were linked as part of the same county requirement and that Stanford could not proceed with the southern trail until the lawsuit was resolved.

Mr. Horton said start of construction on the southern trail

See **TRAILS**, page 10



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Town Center rental rates rise

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

■ PORTOLA VALLEY

The public had nothing to say ahead of the Portola Valley Town Council's unanimous decision at its Wednesday, Feb. 10, meeting to sharply increase the cost to the public to rent the community hall at Town Center.

Starting March 1, renting the main room for a day will rise to \$1,800 from the current \$1,200, and the two smaller activity rooms that now go for \$75 an hour will increase to \$200 per hour. Non-residents will pay more.

Non-residents will not be paying more for memorial services because henceforth that privilege will be available to residents only, and they will pay more — 900 percent more when the current rate of \$100 jumps to \$1,000.

If use of the facilities in 2010 echoes 2009, the new rates could raise an additional \$10,000 for the town, Assistant Town Manager Janet McDougall said in a staff report.

The town can use the money. The current budget year is the first in 15 years in which

revenues have dropped. Home-construction and state-derived revenues are down and expenses are up, including a 33 percent increase over three years for law enforcement services.

Council members expressed degrees of reluctance, but in the end relied on Ms. McDougall's analysis that current rates are undercutting rentals for other local institutions, including churches. Three of the last four memorials in the community hall were for non-residents, she noted.

Rates for comparable facilities nearby ran the gamut, according to the staff report. "It's a bit apples and oranges and kumquats," Mayor Steve Toben noted before the vote, "but it's a reasonable analysis that yields reasonable results."

"We haven't heard any objections, that I'm aware of, come in on this," he added.

Councilwoman Maryann Moise Derwin voted for the increase but said she remained "uncomfortable" with the sharp increase for memorials. ■



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Attorney looking to reopen rail suit

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

The attorney who represented Menlo Park, Atherton, and several environmental groups in a lawsuit over the proposed California high-speed rail project is looking to re-open the case, in light of recently discovered information about ridership projections. Whether the two local jurisdictions will join him remains to be seen.

Oakland-based attorney Stuart Flashman said he began investigating the possibility of revisiting the case after new information came to light about the data on which the High-Speed Rail Authority based its ridership model. The information could have had a significant impact on the ridership model, which in turn could have influenced the board's decision to run trains along the Caltrain corridor, rather than the Altamont Pass, Mr. Flashman maintained.

Elizabeth Alexis, co-founder of Californians Advocating Responsible Rail Design, said she learned two weeks ago that the model the rail authority used to project ridership figures was different than the one the agency has disclosed in public documents. Ms. Alexis obtained a memo from a consultant working with the rail agency, indicating that regional transportation officials made a conscious decision not to pub-

lize the most recent methodology in the final report.

"We don't know what was behind that decision, but the result is that the public and ourselves were all deceived," Mr. Flashman said, adding that he had long doubted the ridership numbers, but couldn't find conclusive evidence that they had been manipulated. "If we had known about these changes, we would have screamed bloody murder."

Rail authority officials first said the changes to the ridership model were too minor to warrant republication, then attributed the discrepancy between the published document and the information Ms. Alexis received to a "typographical error."

The lawsuit in which Atherton and Menlo Park participated alleged that the decision to run high-speed trains along the Caltrain corridor was based on a faulty environmental review process. The results of the ridership study were part of that review process, according to Mr. Flashman.

A Sacramento County Superior Court judge ruled in October that work on the high-speed rail line between San Jose and San Francisco could proceed, despite flaws in the environmental impact report.

Mr. Flashman is drafting a writ of error coram nobis that he hopes to file in Sacramento County Superior Court, provided he can persuade the original plaintiffs in the case to sign

on. It's a very rare procedure most often used in divorce proceedings, Mr. Flashman said, when a spouse finds out information about his partner that hadn't been disclosed — that she had a Swiss bank account, for example.

"Essentially what it's about is, there was a factual error in the record, and as a result, we didn't get a fair trial," he said. "If we had had this evidence, the case would have gone entirely differently."

Atherton's City Council is scheduled to vote in closed session on whether to join the new motion at its meeting Wednesday, Feb. 17, according to City Attorney Wynne Furth.

Menlo Park has not yet placed the item on an agenda, though the Feb. 23 meeting is a possibility. Mayor Rich Cline said he wanted to make sure the council has the opportunity to engage in a thorough, informed discussion on it, adding that it's no sure thing that the city will join on.

Noting that trains would cut alongside the Belle Haven neighborhood and through Flood Triangle under the Altamont alignment, Mr. Cline added that even a successful lawsuit wouldn't be a panacea.

"The fact is, I don't think the outcome for Menlo Park rests on Altamont being the right of way," he said in an interview. "Until we've seen real answers rather than explanations (from the rail authority), it really doesn't matter which way they're coming for us." ■

Safeway stock clerk sentenced for dealing drugs

Cayetano Figueroa-Fernandez, a 32-year-old stock clerk at the Safeway supermarket on El Camino Real in Menlo Park, was sentenced to eight months in San Mateo County jail on Monday, Feb. 8, after pleading no-contest to two felony counts of selling methamphetamines to an undercover informant in the store parking lot in May 2009, prosecutors said.

Superior Court Judge Susan Etezadi's sentence included three years of supervised probation at a cost of \$75 per month, fines totaling \$540, restrictions on weapons possession, registration as a drug offender, and the loss of Fourth Amendment rights regarding search and seizure, according to a report from Chief Deputy District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe.

Mr. Figueroa-Fernandez is free on \$40,000 bail and is scheduled to surrender to authorities on March 20, Assistant District Attorney Karen Guidotti said in an interview.

The probation officer will have the discretion to modify his jail time to a participation in a drug rehabilitation program if there is reason to believe that narcotics addition is a contributing factor in Mr. Figueroa-Fernandez's case, Ms. Guidotti said.

During his probation, Mr. Figueroa-Fernandez's home and vehicle may be searched with or without probable cause, and authorities may seize, without a warrant, any evidence of further criminal activity or violations of his probation, prosecutors said.






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REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman



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A: Many sellers are asking this same question. Most of them watched their home values decline in late 2007 and early 2008, and have been waiting since then for the market to turn around and their values to go back to what they were a few years ago. But now many are thinking that the market may not

change for the foreseeable future and that they might not do any better next year. They want to know what their homes are worth and if it is a value that suits their needs and plans, they might as well sell now.

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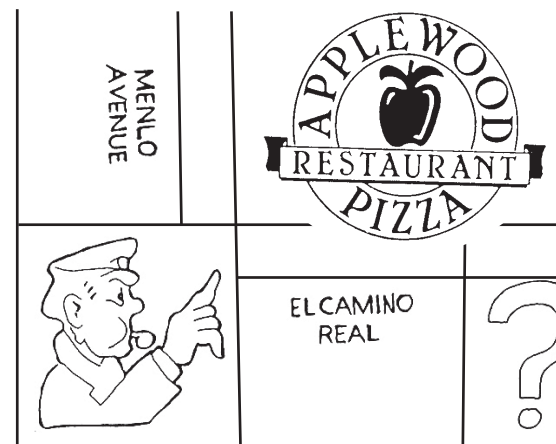
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Stanford Hospital Health Notes

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Surgery Can Be Effective Tool in Fight Against Weight

Rabbi Nat Ezray's decades of struggle with weight began early. He joined Weight Watchers in the fifth grade. In the 30 years to come, he would lose and gain weight several times over, each time gaining a bit more until his 5 foot 6 inch frame carried 280 pounds.

"I felt hostage to it," Rabbi Ezray said, "and powerless in the face of it, even though I did diet after diet."

He had tried to keep fit, jogging and playing racquetball. But his body was breaking down. He developed sleeping problems, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, acid reflux and diabetes—all issues very common in people who are seriously overweight. Still, while he would often lose the extra pounds, he would regain them.

"I felt powerless in the face of it, even though I did diet after diet."

— Rabbi Nat Ezray, bariatric surgery patient at Stanford Hospital & Clinics

In 2002, when he was just 42, he had a heart attack. His cardiologist told him, "You're one of the brightest, most motivated people I've met, but I just don't think you can lose this weight on your own."

Rabbi Ezray fit a profile shared by many. His face-off with weight was years long and, in spite of his best efforts, the weight he lost always came back. In recent years, as the rabbi of Congregation Beth Jacob, Ezray was managing a demanding schedule that wholly filled his days.

Still, Rabbi Ezray tried, even after doctors inserted stents in his heart to open up blocked arteries. For a second time, he tried a liquid diet. He continued to see a counselor to talk about the role of food in his emotional life. And, finally, he investigated a suggestion his cardiologist had made years earlier to have his gastrointestinal system surgically altered.

A physician friend recommended Rabbi Ezray see John Morton, MD, MPH, director of bariatric surgery at Stanford Hospital & Clinics. Bariatrics, from a Greek word meaning weight, refers to the study, prevention and treatment of obesity. Morton's treatment and research focus also includes minimally invasive surgery and quality. His interest in weight and its health impacts dates back to high school, when he saw what many pounds of extra weight did to his best friend.

Not a quick fix

What Morton tells anyone interested in gastric surgery is that it is "no magic bullet... We can't operate our way out of the obesity problem. It's part and parcel of a lifestyle change. These surgeries are simply tools." At Stanford, Morton said, "We don't want to shoe-horn anybody into a specific operation. You have to take into consideration the risks and benefits."

When prospective patients come to Stanford to discuss bariatric surgery, they face a set of hurdles designed to test their motivation and discipline. They must attend an information seminar to learn about the surgery and the most successful methods to reach and maintain their weight loss goals. They must be evaluated by a psychologist and a nutritionist. They are also required to lose 10 percent of their weight before surgery.



After bariatric surgery, combined with lifestyle changes, Rabbi Nat Ezray finds that his energy has dramatically increased and his anxiety about his health much diminished.

Stanford also follows the bariatric surgery guidelines established by the U.S. National Institutes of Health. That organization recommends surgery for people with a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or more and for people with a BMI of 35 who also have serious health issues related to their weight like Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure.

BMI is a way of comparing height to weight. Clinical guidelines set out a BMI of 25 to 29 as overweight. Anything over that is considered obesity. Someone who is 5 feet 4 inches tall and weighs 204 pounds (BMI 35) will be a candidate for surgery if those obesity-related health issues are present.

Weight is not the only measure. It also matters where it is. Abdominal fat has the most negative impact on overall health.

Rabbi Ezray was also concerned about the risks of surgery. "I did all the

research," he said. He learned that Stanford's Bariatric Surgery program is the only one in Northern California recognized by the American College of Surgeons as a Level 1A Center for Excellence. Morton has performed more than 1,000 bariatric surgeries, with no serious post-surgical complications. Those complications can often happen, Morton told Rabbi Ezray, "because patients haven't been properly screened or prepared."

"We can't operate our way out of the obesity problem. It's part and parcel of a lifestyle change."

— John Morton, MD, MPH, Director, Bariatric Surgery at Stanford Hospital & Clinics

Morton has also made it a priority to keep his clinical team together, to build the collective experience. "The more cases you do, the better you are," he said. "We have also researched



Every day, Rabbi Nat Ezray devotes at least an hour to exercise, whether on running on an elliptical machine or lifting weights or sweating through crunches.

Are you a candidate for bariatric surgery?

You might be—if you have:

- a body mass index of 35 or above and have weight-related health issues including Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, depression, arthritis, low back pain, stress incontinence, acid reflux, degenerative joint disease or high cholesterol and triglyceride levels
- a BMI of 40
- a history of dieting, with weight loss followed by weight gain; and weight restricting your activity

The Stanford Bariatric Surgery program requires all its patients to lose 10 percent of their weight before surgery to make certain patients have the ability to follow the continuing diet and exercise that is key to successful maintenance of their weight loss. Patients must also have a psychological evaluation.

For more information on obesity and weight loss surgery, visit stanfordhospital.org/weightloss

Putting your health at risk

You don't have to be obese to have extra weight trigger changes that can threaten your health—a BMI of 25, or 10 percent over ideal body weight, can be enough for some people, depending on family history. The more overweight you are, the more you raise your risk of harm.

Side effects include:

- Type 2 diabetes—can cause heart and kidney disease, nerve damage and stroke
- high blood pressure—increases risk of stroke and heart disease
- osteoarthritis in hips and knees
- sleep apnea and breathing limitation
- higher risk of certain cancers



Norbert von der Groeben

John Morton, MD, MPH, became interested in the health effects of weight while still in high school.

where problems can occur and created protocols to prevent those. For us, patient safety is first."

Choices to be made

One of the most frequently performed bariatric surgeries, the gastric bypass, first appeared in the mid-1960s. Now surgeons, staple off all but a small portion of the stomach and connect that directly to the intestines. That reduces caloric absorption and reduces exposure to hormones physicians suspect influences appetite and blood sugar.

The bypass has shown to have the most immediate effect. Other approaches reduce the stomach's size but do not involve the intestine, and are



Norbert von der Groeben

reversible. The weight loss associated with those surgeries is less.

About 70 percent of the bariatric surgeries at Stanford are the gastric bypass. After considering his options, Rabbi Ezray chose that one. Even before the surgery, however, he had examined what his prior stumbling blocks were and figured out how to address them. One thing he did, he said, was to approach food mindfully, "to sit down when I eat and really value it. I loved that the surgery would slow me down and I would appreciate taste and texture."

He would also make his exercise time as high a priority as possible, "part of a true devotion to health being first on my list," he said.

He was home about four days after the surgery and recovered quickly, he said. Also quickly, his high blood pressure and cholesterol levels dropped so he didn't need to take as much medication. He no longer needs any diabetes medication. The positive impact on Type 2 diabetes of surgery-assisted weight loss was first documented in the 1990s.

A life renewed

Stanford has a comprehensive after care program. After surgery, patients are seen five times for check-ups in their first year, and then annually. The Bariatric Surgery program also organizes a support group for patients to see them through the changes in their lives.

Rabbi Ezray wants to lose a few more pounds, but otherwise, he could not be happier. The people who helped him at Stanford "were very kind and compassionate," he said.

"I don't have to hold on to the fear that I was going to die young. I feel like I've been given a second chance."

— Rabbi Nat Ezray, bariatric surgery patient at Stanford Hospital & Clinics

He is still not eating certain foods: no red meat or ice cream or alcohol, and almost no processed foods. He rises early several days a week to stretch and do 45 minutes on his elliptical exercise machine; frequently he adds

weight training to develop his core muscles.

And now, as he talks with people in his congregation, they'll often be walking with him. "I had a lot of energy before, but boy, do I have a lot of energy now!" Rabbi Ezray said. "I didn't realize how much energy it took to fight the daily fight with food."

His congregation gave him great support when he told them about his surgery, he said. "I didn't realize how much anxiety people felt about my health."

And he has realized something else. "I don't have to hold on to the fear that I was going to die young," he said. "I feel like I've been given a second chance."



Norbert von der Groeben

One of Rabbi Nat Ezray's favorite parts of his job is telling stories to the children of his congregation. He does it with great enthusiasm and a much stronger confidence in his future health.

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.



Stanford University Medical Center

Stanford University School of Medicine and Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford.

CUTS

continued from page 5

hit estimated at \$300,000, the board would be prudent to work further reductions totaling that amount into the two-year cut-back plan, he said.

The board reviewed a series of more severe options for reductions that included layoffs, reduction in counseling, reducing custodial service from daily to every other day, and reducing the school day at La Entrada from eight sessions to seven.

Although no additional cuts were approved that night, board President Jamie Schein said later that the board is seeking more information and guidance from the staff, and will "continue to look for cost savings."

Summer school

Before voting on the staff's recommended spending cuts, board members agonized over the proposed slashing of the summer school program.

The proposal limited summer school enrollment, beginning this year, to special education students and others the district is required by law to school year-round. Under that scenario, the district could save about \$32,000, Mr. Hartwig said.

But board members questioned whether the district really would save in the long run under such a plan. If children who need the extra help that summer school traditionally provides can't enroll in the scaled-back program, "my concern is that it will cost the district more than \$32,000" in the end because of the remedial programs that would be needed for those students once school begins in the fall, board member John Macdonald said.

The sentiment was echoed by other board members, and in the end they asked the staff to come back with a summer school plan that will include fewer students than the typical number — about 90 last year — but will allow those most in need of extra help to attend. The plan, they said, should look for other efficiencies in addition to a cutback in enrollment.

Although the two-school Las Lomas district is one of the wealthiest school districts in the Bay Area, it hasn't escaped the pain of the financial downturn. Mr. Hartwig reported that "almost zero local revenue growth" is predicted for the 2010-11 fiscal year, and the district is projected to "deficit spend" this year by about \$481,000. ■

CARGILL

continued from page 5

ber of impassioned speeches during the period for public comment, with several residents, environmental advocates, and politicians imploring the council to take a stand, and disparaging Cargill's proposal. With the debate centering on

issues of leadership and environmental justice, council members weren't inclined to take up Mr. Boyle's call to examine the text of the resolution.

"When there's an opportunity to show leadership, it's incumbent upon us to do so," said Councilman Andy Cohen. "It is not an option to shrink from the task, and to wait for a later opportunity, which may never arrive." ■

TRAILS

continued from page 5

will depend on weather conditions this spring.

Meanwhile, the northern trail has been stalled due to a refusal by San Mateo County to accept a multi-million-dollar offer by Stanford to rebuild parts of Alpine Road to make way for a paved pedestrian/bike path link instead of a trail along Los Trancos Creek.

Brian Schmidt, legislative advocate for the Committee for Green Foothills, said Thursday he is disappointed in the ruling, but that San Mateo County's position still remains as a chal-

lenge to the alignment proposed by Stanford.

"The end of litigation means that San Mateo County's previous decision and any potential change of mind will ultimately decide the trail issue," he said. "If San Mateo County continues to reject the sidewalk expansion, Stanford must provide an equivalent amount of money to Santa Clara County Parks Department to mitigate for impacts caused by the massive new development permitted on campus since 2000."

Mr. Schmidt said he understands San Mateo County will take up the alignment question again later this year. ■

Ceramic tiles proposed for exterior of community hall in Portola Valley

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

As examples of elegance in municipal architecture in San Mateo County, there are likely few worthy competitors to the simplicity of line, artful fenestration and subordination to the natural surroundings of the new complex at Portola Valley's Town Center.

The Town Hall, library and community hall, completed in 2008, have won Emeryville architects Larry Strain and Jim Straja 10 awards, so far, for architecture and sustainable design. Recently, the U.S. Green Building Council awarded the complex its highest rating.

But as with all artists who work for money, an architect's work, once sold, is subject to the intents and purposes of the owner — in this case, the residents of Portola Valley.

The Town Council on Wednesday, Feb. 10, heard from a group of residents on the town's Cultural Arts Committee who want to add bits of local history to the community hall's redwood exterior: specifically, ceramic tiles depicting local wildflowers and other scenes and designed by Portola Valley school kids in the 1960s, some of whom still live in town.

"We're just trying to, like, build



Photo by Susan Thomas

Portola Valley's Cultural Arts Committee is proposing that ceramic tiles like this one from a 1960s local art class decorate the exterior of the community hall at Town Center.

more community here," committee co-chair Dierdre Clark told the council. "We're not just putting art on the walls."

Added Susan Thomas, the committee's other co-chair: "I personally think that the way they're made, they look wonderful on the natural wood of the building."

The tiles "are a tradition that enriches rather than takes away from any part of the building"

former Portola Valley School teacher Robin Toews said. Some of the original artists remain appreciative, she added. "They were really delighted to see how lovely their work was, and still is."

The architects are not delighted. In an e-mail to Councilman Ted Driscoll and Town Manager Angie Howard, lead architect Larry Strain described the tiles as "pretty cool," but suggested that they be mounted near the playground or inside where children's art and science classes are held.

"As you know," he continued, "a lot of thought went into the design of the buildings. ... Elements on the facades — windows, doors, vents, signs — were carefully organized and arranged to create simple, clear facades that contribute to the overall design of each building and the town center as a whole."

"We think it would be a mistake to mount the tiles on the exterior of the buildings, especially as currently configured."

At the suggestion of Mayor Steve Toben, the council handed off the proposal to a group that will include members of the Town Center design team, the Cultural Arts Committee and Mr. Strain, if he is willing. One meeting should be enough to reach a consensus, Mr. Toben said. ■

Megan Mitchell lived for years with bipolar disease

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

The 17-year ordeal of living with bipolar disease is over for Megan Mitchell.

Ms. Mitchell, the daughter of Kent and Jo Ann Mitchell of Portola Valley and a graduate of Ormondale, Corte Madera and Woodside High schools, has died, apparently by her own hand, at the age of 34.

A memorial service is set for noon on Saturday, Feb. 20, at Family Farm at 1400 Portola Road in Woodside.

Deputies from the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office found Ms. Mitchell's body beneath the Eugene Doran Bridge in San Mateo shortly after midnight on Wednesday, Feb. 10. Her vehicle was parked nearby.

Ms. Mitchell endured rapid and frequent mood swings, her father said in an interview. Her medications, meant to create

stability, sometimes worked and sometimes didn't, but she always cooperated and was "religious" about following her treatment regime, said

Mr. Mitchell, who is a former mayor of Portola Valley.

"We're devastated," Mr. Mitchell said. "This disease is insidious. It got to the point where the collective effect of the drugs began to do things to her physical well being. There were no options. It was awful."

"She just was a beautiful girl and she just couldn't go on," he said. "It just becomes overwhelming. She was so brave. I mean I could never have done what she did. No amount of



Megan Mitchell

money could have made me fight as long as she fought."

Ms. Mitchell was diagnosed at 17 and lived with her condition through another year and a half of high school, four years at the University of California at Berkeley, and after she graduated with a bachelor of science degree in forestry and water conservation, her father said.

She loved horses, hiking, the ocean and the family cabin in Sonoma County, he said. She had all the psychological help available, he added.

"As difficult as it's been, we were blessed to have 17 years" to work with her and support her and give her every opportunity, Mr. Mitchell said. "I wouldn't trade places, if you know what I mean. ... It is what it is, and we did our best and she did her best."

Ms. Mitchell is also survived by her older brother Adam Mitchell of Los Altos. ■

JOIN THE CONVERSATION AT TOWN SQUARE
TheAlmanacOnline.com

Atherton police chief, city manager reach out to public

By Andrea Gemmet
Almanac Staff Writer

Atherton officials are stepping up their public outreach efforts, announcing a community meeting at 6:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 22, with City Manager Jerry Gruber and police Chief Mike Guerra.

Town officials have been under pressure to improve communication with residents following a recent string of bad press, from a month-long delay in releasing information about a \$230,000 settlement to a former police officer, to criticism from a resident suing the town over the handling of a domestic dispute.

Peter Carpenter, the president of the Atherton Civic Interest League, has called for the creation of a police oversight commission to restore trust in the department.

Mr. Gruber said the public is invited to make comments and express concerns at the question-and-answer-style meeting on Monday. It's an opportunity for the public to get to know a little more about the new police chief and his background, as well as learn about the services available from town hall and the police department, Mr. Gruber said.

"I think it's important that Mike and I meet with the community several times a year," Mr. Gruber said.

Chief Guerra has been on the job since December. His appointment to the chief position was announced at the same time as then-Chief Glenn Nielsen's decision to retire was made public. The lack of public involvement or an open application process in choosing a new chief drew criticism from some residents.

Mr. Gruber defends his decision, saying that he thinks history will show that Chief Guerra will be the best police chief Atherton has ever had. By not hiring an interim chief and contracting with a search firm to find candidates, he saved the town about

\$100,000, Mr. Gruber said. However, he does have some regrets about how he handled it.

"I could have done a better job soliciting resident input," he told The Almanac. "It was the right decision, but I think it's important the residents feel that they're part of the process and the council feels well-informed."

Chief Guerra said his admiration for the management team put together by Mr. Gruber is the reason he took the job. He's focused on keeping crime from neighboring jurisdictions from infiltrating Atherton, he said.

Currently, the town is in the final stages of selecting a new second-in-command for the department. The hunt for a new police lieutenant, the job formerly held by Chief Guerra, is down to three candidates following a two-month process that involved advertising for candidates and subjecting finalists to questioning from three panels, including one composed of residents.

In the meantime, Chief Guerra is doing both jobs at no additional pay, Mr. Gruber said.

In his 25 years with the police department, Chief Guerra said he's gotten to know a lot of Atherton residents, but he hopes to meet more by holding regular community meetings.

Defusing concerns about the police department is only part of the agenda for Mr. Gruber. Financial matters are a pressing issue for Atherton, as the town struggled to cut costs and bridge a projected \$2 million revenue gap last year. State take-aways and flat property tax revenues have inspired close scrutiny of the town's expenditures.

"We're going good," said Mr. Gruber. "We've brought salary costs down considerably. We're running a tight ship here, we really are."

Mr. Gruber said he's ready to focus on the town's future.

"If we keep looking backward, how are we ever going to look forward?" he asks. ■

Gang member arrested, suspected of raping MP girl

An Inglewood gang member has been arrested on suspicion of raping a runaway girl from Menlo Park and holding her against her will, according to an article posted on the Los Angeles Times' Web site.

Kevin Escobar, 20, was arrested Wednesday night, Feb. 10, by Los Angeles police detectives, the Times reported. He befriended the girl

and brought her to Venice Beach, plying her with drugs and alcohol, the Times quotes LAPD Detective Kurt Wachter as saying.

The detective said the 14-year-old girl ran away from her Menlo Park home on Jan. 7, and was reunited with her family Jan. 30. Menlo Park police said they could not comment on the investigation.

WEDDING

Preimesberger-Cynaumon

Megan Elizabeth Preimesberger and Matthew Edmond Cynaumon were married Oct. 17 in a sunset ceremony at Valley Presbyterian Church in Portola Valley, before 200 friends and family members.

The Reverends Mark and Cheryl Goodman-Morris officiated. Music was provided by keyboard/harpist Barbary Grant, singer/pianist Matt Hall, and vocalists Kristi Hobbs and Don Gustafson.

Courtney Avilla was her sister's matron of honor. The bridesmaids were Kirstin Hill, Ashley Howard, Kelly Bowen, Ellen Preimesberger, Jaimee Hilken, and Jamie Balch.

Shaunak Parikh and Jared Fanning were best men. The ushers included Ryan and Andrew Preimesberger, Benjamin Bullock, Matthew Hall, and Colby Hilken.



Newlyweds Matthew Cynaumon and Megan Preimesberger are shown on a San Francisco cable car.

A dinner dance followed at the San Mateo County History Museum in Redwood City.

The bride works for a health care organization in Orange County as a case worker specializing in autistic children. She is a graduate of Concordia University-Irvine and Menlo-Atherton High School. She is the daughter of Chris and Becky Preimesberger of Red-

wood City.

The bridegroom is the son of Jan and Greg Cynaumon of Anaheim. A graduate of Concordia University-Irvine and Orange Lutheran High School, he is employed in sports image marketing at Brand Affinity Technologies.

Following a honeymoon in the Bahamas, the couple is living in Irvine.

Slocum won't seek re-election; Church goes for post

Warren Slocum, a man who wears many hats in San Mateo County, announced Feb. 10 that he won't seek re-election this fall. Mr. Slocum is the chief elections officer for the county, as well as the assessor, recorder and county clerk. His term ends in January 2011.

The very next day, county Supervisor Mark Church announced that he will run for the four-position post in the November election, and said he is already endorsed by all

four of his colleagues on the county Board of Supervisors. An attorney, Mr. Church was first elected to Board of Supervisors in 2000, and will be termed out of office in 2012. He is a former Millbrae mayor and councilman.



Warren Slocum

In a statement released Feb.

10, Mr. Slocum said he's ready to "consider doing other things." He was first elected in 1986, and has served in government since 1976, he said.

"During my terms of office, I have had the good fortune to work with some of the best and brightest elected officials and the finest men and woman in government. The residents of San Mateo County are blessed with a stable, well-run county government," he said.

Death penalty is upheld

A San Mateo County Superior Court judge Feb. 8 upheld a jury's recommendation to sentence 26-year-old Alberto Alvarez to death for killing East Palo Alto police Officer Richard May in 2006.

Family members of the officer, including stepfather Frank Merrill, reside in Atherton.

Jurors in December recommended the death penalty for Mr. Alvarez after convicting him Nov. 25 of first-degree murder with the special circumstance of killing a peace officer.

Had Judge Craig Parsons not upheld the death sentence, Alvarez would have faced life in prison without the chance of parole.

May was killed the afternoon of Jan. 7, 2006, after he responded to a report of a fight at a taqueria on University Avenue in East Palo Alto.



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City manager defends, explains pay strategy

By Sean Howell

Almanac Staff Writer

MENLO PARK

In the wake of allegations by a city union that Menlo Park is asking its rank-and-file workers to shoulder the burden of the city's financial stress while rewarding upper-level management, City Manager Glen Rojas defended and explained city policy when it comes to executive compensation.

Service Employees International, the union that represents 152 city employees, has been in negotiations with the city since October 2009, when its previous contract expired. It ran a letter on its Web site dated Jan. 21, alleging that the city is "not willing to commit that executive staff will not get any raises, one-time payments or bonuses." Noting that the union has offered a two-year pay freeze, it asks: "Why isn't executive management committed to help out the same way we are willing to help out?"

When The Almanac asked him to clarify the city's position in regard to executive pay, Mr. Rojas said that, first of all, the city has committed to freezing for two years the salary and bonuses for the 15 management employees not represented by unions. Executive managers did not receive cost-of-living salary increases or bonuses during the current fiscal year, and will not receive them during the upcoming fiscal year, which ends June 30, 2011, he said.

Executive management "is not represented by a union, you're not

going to see it in a formal contract, but we have budgeted no increases, including for me," he said.

Renee Morales, a liaison between workers and the SEIU, said union negotiators told him the city was only willing to commit to a one-year pay freeze for managers. A call to the union was not returned.

Mr. Rojas noted that most department heads, including some long-tenured employees, receive salaries that are below the median for the same position in comparable cities.

He added that forgoing bonuses is no small concession, because they factor into the calculation of lifetime pension payments. In a normal economic climate, a management employee who didn't receive a bonus might wonder whether she was in danger of losing her job, he said.

He pointed out that some line-level and middle-management employees can receive performance raises even if the unions agree to a salary freeze, due to a "step increase" clause in union contracts.

"We're trying to find the fairest possible deal for everybody, including the city and its employees, in the long-term," Mr. Rojas said. "That's the bottom line."

"I don't want to create animosity, we're all trying to figure it out, but the budget's not looking real good at mid-year." ■



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VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

The component of an eyeglass frame known as the "bridge" connects the two lenses and supports the glasses on the nose. Because this centrally positioned part distributes 90 percent of the weight of the glasses, it plays a big role in determining the comfort and fit of the frames. A saddle bridge, which is molded into the frame, is best suited for heavier glasses because it spreads weight along the sides and top of the nose. A key-hole bridge eliminates pressure on top of the nose by distributing weight along the sides. Adjustable

nose pads afford the greatest flexibility and comfort. They are often fitted with silicon pads that can grip the sides of the nose to prevent slippage.

Eyeglasses are a customized product. The shape of eyeglass frames, the style of bridge, and how the frame sits on your face can affect how you see and minimize some facial features while enhancing others. Bring your eyewear prescription to MENLO OPTICAL at 1166 University Drive, on the corner of Oak Grove Avenue and University Drive. Because we are locally owned, we emphasize individualized attention and quality products. We can help you select the right frames for you and also ensure that they fit properly on the bridge of your nose. Please call us at 322-3900 if you have any questions about this week's column.

P.S. Eyeglasses that slip down the nose are not providing the eyes with the full benefit of the lenses' prescriptions.

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

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OBITUARY

Brian Howard

Early employee of Apple Computer

A memorial concert honoring Brian Howard of Portola Valley will be given at 11 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 20, at Stanford Memorial Church on the university campus. Mr. Howard, one of the four original members of the Apple McIntosh team, died Feb. 1 of cancer. He was 65.

In 1978 Mr. Howard became the 32nd employee of Apple Computer Inc. As editor of its computer manuals, he combined language skills with computer knowledge to create user-friendly instruction books that helped revolutionize the personal computer, according to his wife, Lynne Toribara. His signature was molded into the case of the original Macs. He eventually moved from computer documentation to architectural

hardware, in line with his engineering background.

He was considered to be employed by Apple at the time of his death, which made him the longest continuous employee of the company, according to Ms. Toribara. At Apple, he was promoted to the level of DEST (distinguished engineer, scientist, and technologist).

Mr. Howard was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but grew up in Norman, Oklahoma, where his father was a physics professor at the University of Oklahoma and his mother was a concert pianist. He attended Stanford



Brian Howard

University on a National Merit scholarship, graduating in 1967 with a bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering.

An accomplished musician, Mr. Howard played cornetto, flute and recorder with the Stanford Renaissance Wind Band and sang with the St. Ann Choir, California Bach Society, Stanford Early Music Singers, and Albany Consort. He also performed at the Renaissance Pleasure Faire in Marin County, and, in 1986, became a founding member of the early brass and winds ensemble, The Whole Noyse.

He is survived by his wife, Lynne Toribara; stepdaughter Mariko Toribara; sisters Kathleen Howard and Eileen Howard; nieces Keira Manes and Terri Torres; and nephew Devin Manes.

In memory of Mr. Howard, the family prefers donations to Doctors Without Borders, or for the donor to join TerraPass.

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

Residential burglary report: Laptop computer and tools stolen from construction site, Atherton Ave., Feb. 11.

Grand theft reports:

■ Apple iPhone stolen during party, Polhemus Ave., Feb. 9.

■ Boxes containing family jewelry stolen, Catalpa Drive, Feb. 9.

Auto burglary reports:

■ Back window smashed, Palmer Lane, Feb. 5.

■ Back window smashed and purse found lying on ground, Holbrook Lane, Feb. 5.

MENLO PARK

Fraud reports:

■ Employee suspected in \$13,800 loss, 300 block of Middlefield Road, Feb. 6.

■ Resident defrauded of \$2,000, 21000 block of Santa Cruz Ave., Feb. 6.

■ Use of falsified driver's license in attempt to withdraw funds from bank account, Chase Bank at 650 Santa Cruz Ave., Feb. 8.

■ Bad check received, 300 block of Middlefield Road, Feb. 11.

■ Identity theft, 100 block of Seminary Drive, Feb. 11.

Residential burglary reports:

■ Jewelry stolen with estimated loss of \$575, 1300 block of San Mateo Ave., Feb. 5.

■ Resident came home and unidentified male ran out front door, 1000 block of Wallea Drive, Feb. 8.

■ Attempted burglary, 200 block of Market Place, Feb. 8.

Auto-burglary reports:

■ Stereo equipment stolen, 700 block of Coleman Ave., Feb. 8.

■ Window smashed and GPS device stolen, 1400 block of Woodland Ave., Feb. 11.

■ Window smashed and purse stolen, 1600 block of Marsh Road, Feb. 11.

Grand theft report: Haron Chavez, 28, arrested on charges of attempted grand theft, 100 block of Middlefield Road, Feb. 5.

WOODSIDE

Attempted fraud report: Resident called several times by purported grandson who repeatedly asked for money to be bailed out of jail, 100 block of Greer Road, Feb. 3.

WEST MENLO PARK

Theft reports:

■ Payment requested on two credit cards not owned by resident, 2000 block of Camino a los Cerros, Feb. 4.

■ Laptop computer stolen from storage area in rear of store, Starbucks Coffee Company at 3590 Alameda de las Pulgas, Feb. 8.

HELEN HANDTE MORSE

Helen Handte Morse, a seventeen year resident of Menlo Park, California, passed away peacefully on January 24 at her home in Napa. She was 94.

Born in Poplar Bluff, Missouri, Helen soon moved to Sumter, South Carolina with her family. A strong willed, athletic girl, she and her mother convinced her father to let Helen attend college instead of secretarial school. In 1936, after graduating from Agnes Scott College in Atlanta, Georgia, Helen coached a girls basketball team. She married John H. Morse (US Naval Academy, 1932) the following year, and moved to Coronado Ca. where Lt. Morse completed Navy pilot training. Helen embarked on her life as a Navy wife with great enthusiasm, raising three children while moving and resettling their household every few years. The family moves took them to many places including: Monterey, Ca., Washington, D.C., Newport, R.I., Hawaii and France.

Helen's love of athletics and the outdoors continued throughout her life. An avid tennis player, she water skied at 60 and loved to snorkel in Hawaii with her grandchildren. She was a skilled gardener, winning blue ribbons in local garden clubs. Camellias and azaleas were her favorites.

Helen was a devoted wife, mother and grandmother. She is survived by her children, Joan Sather of Pacific Palisades, Ca., John H. Morse of Louisville, Kentucky, and Dr. Peter Morse of Napa; six grandchildren and two step-grandchildren; and seventeen great grandchildren.

Private services will be held at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. Donations in Helen's name may be sent to Hospice of Napa Valley, 414 South Jefferson Street, Napa, Ca., 94559

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JOHN SEBASTIAN LA BARBERA

AUGUST 3, 1906 – FEBRUARY 4, 2010

In the year 1906, two major events occurred. The first was on April 18th, the day the Big Earthquake Struck San Francisco, and the second event took place on August 3rd, when John La Barbera was born to Maria Turturici La Barbera and Salvatore Sebastian La Barbera.

The earthquake destroyed the family home in North Beach. The family consisted of three younger sisters, Antoinetta, Mary, and Josephine. The United States Army provided temporary shelter in a hastily constructed "Tent City" in Golden Gate Park, where Maria gave birth to her first son, John. San Francisco was in total shambles, with the most damage caused by fires. The water mains had been destroyed leaving the City without the means to put out the fires. The family escaped with only a trunk of clothing.

Salvatore was a friend of A.P. Gianinni, then head of the Bank of Italy, later to become the Bank of America. Mr. Gianinni made building loans to those whose homes were destroyed on the shaking of hands—no lengthy forms were necessary. Salvatore was able to rebuild his home, along with income units, and begin life anew. Son John was always very ambitious and industrious, had an ability to create and maintain things well.

When John met his first and only love, Caroline Zisa, the two immediately fell in love. They were very young, and knew the families would not be in favor of a marriage, so they decided to elope. They were initially married at St. Rose Church in Portland, Oregon, and then later renewed their vows at St. Peter and Paul Church in San Francisco.

John and Caroline had one daughter, Marie, who was the light of their lives. John worked diligently, saved prudently, invested wisely, and was able to take early retirement at the age of 56. The couple loved to travel, and now were able to fulfill that dream. They embarked on many cruises, and enjoyed seventy-seven (77) years of marriage. The couple had many anniversary celebrations, beginning with their 50th. On the occasion of their 75th Anniversary, Marie and her late husband, Dene Zahn, arranged a celebration including the renewal of their vows with Father Donald De Angelo, then pastor of the Church of the Nativity, presiding at Sharon Heights Golf and Country in 1998.

John was an active member in the Native Sons of the Golden West, Druids, and Sons of Italy. He was a member of the Church of the Nativity. The love of his life, Caroline, preceded him in going to the arms of Divine Love in 2001. He is survived by his loving daughter, Marie La Barbera Zahn, Granddaughter, Lynne Meyer (Robert), Grandson, Timothy Cookston, Great-granddaughter Lisa Meyer Finnigan (Shane), and little Great grandson, Sebastian Robert Finnigan, who kept him filled with joy. The family was privileged to have John with them for over 103 years, and he will be sorely missed, by those who loved him so much. He was truly the patriarch of the family.

A Celebration of Mass will take place on Thursday, February 11th, 2010 at 10:00 a.m. at the Church of the Nativity, 210 Oak Grove Avenue, Menlo Park. He will be escorted to the Mausoleum at the Italian Cemetery, 540 "F" Street, Colma. The family prefers donations to the Church of the Nativity, Sequoia Hospital Foundation, 170 Alameda de las Pulgas, Redwood City or Pathways Hospice Foundation, 585 N. Mary Ave. Sunnyvale.

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WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

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

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CALL the Viewpoint desk at 854-2690, ext. 222.

Clearing the air in Atherton

The Atherton Police Department has had its problems of late, so it is welcome news that City Manager Jerry Gruber and Police Chief Mike Guerra have scheduled a meeting next Monday to meet the public and begin a new policy of public outreach for the department. The meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. at the Holbrook-Palmer Park pavilion, 150 Watkins Ave. in Atherton.

In recent weeks the department has come under fire from resident Jonathan Buckheit, who says he was treated badly after calling 911 and reporting that he was the victim of a domestic dispute with a

woman. The responding Atherton officers arrested him instead of the alleged assailant, but no charges were ever filed in the 2008 case.

Since then, Mr. Buckheit has fought to clear his name and recently won a declaration of factual innocence from a San Mateo County Superior Court judge. He is now suing the department over the incident, saying his civil rights were violated. He has also publicly charged that there were numerous police mistakes — including an allegation that an officer's report of the incident was altered — in the way the case was handled.

In his ruling, Judge Mark Forcum ordered that the arrest records be expunged and the case sealed, making it impossible for The Almanac and other parties to review the testimony and court records.

The Buckheit case follows a recent pay-out of \$230,000 to former Atherton police officer Pilar Ortiz-Buckley. The city agreed to settle her sexual harassment and disability discrimination complaint out of court before depositions were even taken. The City Council did not release details of the settlement for nearly a month, which angered some residents and spurred the council to apologize and promise to do a better job at keeping residents informed.

Mr. Gruber did not help matters when in November he announced

that Mr. Guerra was taking over as chief of the department without the town's conducting a search or public hearing, after former Chief Glenn Nielsen retired. The sudden and surprise move was accepted by the council, but others in the community thought Mr. Gruber acted too quickly. Some said they were upset that members of the public were not invited to comment on the appointment and that outside candidates were not considered for the high-profile position.

Perhaps to make up for failing to include the public in his decision to hire Mr. Guerra, City Manager Gruber may be trying to make amends by offering a public meeting with the chief. Certainly this is a good decision, although much more could be done, including giving his strong support to establishing a citizen oversight committee as proposed by resident Peter Carpenter, the president of the Atherton Civic Interest League. Mr. Carpenter said he does not feel that there are serious problems in the police department, but believes an oversight committee could address "...a growing level of concern and distrust regarding the police department."

Such a committee would conduct its business in public under Brown Act regulations, advise the department on policies and procedures and act as a review board for citizen complaints, under Mr. Carpenter's proposal.

So far, there has been no official reaction from City Council members, but we urge them to seriously consider forming a police review committee. In many jurisdictions, police misconduct is almost impossible to smoke out. Only in rare cases will one officer testify against another, and internal discipline often is hamstrung by union rules or arcane procedures that can block hearings about a complaint for years.

A citizen review committee could cut through such red tape and quickly and thoroughly investigate any complaint raised about the department. Many Atherton residents have a close relationship with the department and trust it to provide a safe environment. A citizen review committee would improve that relationship in the years to come.

EDITORIAL

The opinion of The Almanac

LETTERS

Our readers write

Fight to preserve our quality of life

Editor:

The quality of life in Redwood City, and its surrounding areas, is being challenged like never before.

The Cargill/DMB project, if permitted to proceed as planned, will further destroy and degrade San Francisco Bay's natural and historic environment and our quality of life.

At stake is our water quality. If the Bay is further filled, the wetlands will no longer cleanse chemical and other pollutants and capture sediments at the same level. Our water supply will be further stressed. There simply is not enough water to meet the demands of this proposed development.

At stake is our quality of air. Air pollution from an influx of automobiles will adversely affect the flora and fauna of the surround-

See **LETTERS**, next page



Menlo Circus Club/Menlo Park Historical Association

Our Regional Heritage

Twins Berenice and Lurline Roth were elected queens of the Menlo Circus in 1925. When founded in 1923, the Circus was said to be "...the only country club in America designed exclusively for children." It survives today in the same Atherton location, and is known as the Menlo Circus Club. The twins were the daughters of William R. and Lurline Roth, who spent summers at their Why Worry estate in Woodside. In the 1930s the family, who operated the Matson Steamship Lines, purchased the Filoli Estate in Woodside, off Canada Road.

LETTERS

Continued from previous page

ing areas as well as humans.

Just recently, the New York Times reported a new study on urban green space from Geophysical Research letters. The study argues, "Native gases and wetlands remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it as organic carbon in soil, making them important carbon sinks." However, when there is such urban sprawl as proposed by Cargill and DMB, these gases cannot be absorbed, adding to air pollution and global warming.

Now, more than ever before, we need to raise our collective voices to show our strength and commitment to stand at the forefront of fighting to preserve the environment and our quality of life.

Restoring the salt ponds to wetlands will give us greater recreational enjoyment, cleaner air, cleaner water, and a measurably better quality of life for this and future generations to come. We need to be heard to preserve this treasure.

Elkie Muller
Eleanor Drive, Woodside

Join First Lady's fight against obesity

Editor:

Two weeks ago, First Lady Michelle Obama called on the U.S. Conference of Mayors to help her fight the national scourge of childhood obesity. She noted that one-third of all children are overweight or obese. She

Proposed initiative is real pension reform

By Roy Thiele-Sardina

Sometimes the first step is the hardest. The public employee retirement system is a state-wide problem — in fact the CalPERS system presents a menu of benefit options that cities can bestow on their employees, the most expensive of which are inevitable time bombs for any city. Several years ago, our city upgraded to the bomb.

If Menlo Park is to return to sustainable budgets, and dodge an upcoming crisis, we must start the process now. We cant honestly expect the state Legislature to save us.

The Menlo Park Pension Reform initiative will:

- Reduce the long-term liabilities the city has for underfunded pensions.
- Make any future increase to the pension system require voter approval, giving the City Council the footing to negotiate as real representatives of the citizens of Menlo Park.
- Allow the City Council to further reduce new commitments should it so decide.
- Assure the citizens of Menlo Park that there will never be another retroactive increase to pension benefits for current employees.
- Reduce Menlo Parks pension contribution costs per new



employee by about 50 percent.

In effect, we will no longer make things worse no matter whose arm is twisted.

The Menlo Park Pension Reform initiative will: not step outside California law; not hamper the city's ability to hire good people — there are too many good, people who would truly appreciate job stability and benefits at this level; not abrogate promises to existing employees.

This ballot measure will make Menlo Park a stronger, more vibrant city that can use its valuable resources to improve our city—valuable resources that should go to our citizens and not to a pension system that significantly exceeds what average citizens receive.

The proposed Pension Reform Initiative is significant. Let's make it happen together, now, this year.

Roy Thiele-Sardina and Henry Riggs
are co-chairmen of Citizens for Pension Reform.

proposed healthier school lunch fares, increased physical activity, and nutrition education.

Traditionally, the National School Lunch Program has served as a dumping ground for U.S. Department of Agriculture's surplus meat and dairy commodities. Not surprisingly, USDA's own surveys indicate that 90 percent of American children consume excessive amounts of fat, and only 15 percent eat the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables. Their early dietary flaws become lifelong addictions, raising their risk of diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

In the past few years, several state legislatures have asked their schools to offer daily vegetarian options. According to the School Nutrition Association, 52 percent of U.S. school districts now do. Last fall, the Baltimore City Public School system became the first in the United States to offer its 80,000 students a complete weekly break from meat.

Parents and others who care about our children's health should demand healthful plant-based school meals, snacks, and vending machine items.

Miles Barne
Sharon Park Drive, Menlo Park

City should wake up and accept Gateway project

By Dan O'Brien

I never write letters of complaint but in the case of the Menlo Park Planning Commission vs. David Bohannon and Menlo Gateway I'm willing to make an exception.

I've lived in Menlo Park for 20 years. I drive up and down the Bayshore Freeway many times a week. The current Bohannon Office park is dated, tired and a prime area to be revitalized. It is east of 101 and the Menlo Park Belle Haven residents are in full support and can't wait to have this project approved.

Enter the Menlo Park Planning Commission. Having sat through a few sessions of the Planning Commission's review of this project, I'm disgusted with their lack of professionalism and willingness to be open to the information presented. In the business world this group would be out of business in a month.

Not one person is willing to be



positive or take a position. They prefer to just muddle along with more hurdles. With this commission at the helm we're going nowhere

fast. And if that isn't bad enough, Vince Bressler of the Planning Commission manages to find the time to write a guest opinion for The Almanac panning this project? Ever hear of conflict of interest?

Did they ever consider that Menlo Park is lucky to have a community-minded citizen like David Bohannon who is willing to put up with all this baloney to revitalize HIS parcel of land? These folks even have the nerve to suggest what they would like to see him do with

this land. It's his land, hello!

Yes I know he is requesting a change of zoning but let's not immediately try to turn this into a jackpot for all of Menlo Park. It's a damn good project and if you would like to see an example of the type of positive change a project like this can have you should look no further than University Circle in Palo Alto or Rosewood Hotel at Sand Hill Road.

Considering the current economy and the process they have put this guy through, I suggest they quit pandering to the preferences of a few grumpy old folks who want Menlo Park to be like it was in 1950 and get this done before Mr. Bohannon loses interest and takes this project down the road. Palo Alto or Mountain View would welcome him with open arms.

Dan O'Brien lives on Santa Cruz Avenue in Menlo Park.

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