

**INSIDER** James Lianides takes over  
high school district. | Page 9



# The Almanac

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

MARCH 24, 2010 | VOL. 45 NO. 30



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# Councilman asked for \$500,000 loan, says Atherton resident who is suing town

By **Andrea Gemmet**  
Almanac Staff Writer

**A**therton Councilman Charles Marsala is accused of asking for a large personal loan from a man who is suing Atherton in federal court.

His accuser is Jon Buckheit, an Atherton resident who is advocating the creation of a police oversight board. When the oversight board idea was tabled at the March 17 City Council meeting, he protested the vote during a public comment. "Charles, when you came to me asking to borrow money, you had a very different view than you do today," Mr. Buckheit said.

Mr. Marsala told The Almanac after the meeting that he could not comment. "I spoke with the city attorney and I've been advised not to talk about it because we're in litigation with (Mr. Buckheit)," he said. "I'm comfortable with my vote on Wednesday night. I voted with the majority of the council and I explained my reasons."

Mr. Buckheit told The Almanac that in late September 2009, Mr. Marsala asked him for a \$500,000 "hard money" loan against his

Atherton house. Mr. Buckheit said the size of the loan request gave him pause, but that he considered an arrangement that would make him one of several investors in the loan to Mr. Marsala.

"It didn't pan out," Mr. Buckheit said.

Mr. Buckheit forwarded three e-mails regarding the loan to The Almanac, dated Sept. 25-30. Two, which appear to be from Mr. Marsala's personal e-mail address, inquire about the loan's status. "Jon, I do not need all the money at once. \$200,000 to start and knowing a remainder (sic) is available works," said one dated Sept. 25. The second e-mail, dated Sept. 28, said, "Any updates?"

In the third e-mail, dated Sept. 30, Mr. Buckheit responds, saying: "I spoke with the remaining hard money broker. She won't touch it because it's not fully documentable."

Mr. Buckheit's e-mail finishes by saying: "Sorry I couldn't be more helpful. I would need to do these loans through a broker since I don't have a license."

In October, Mr. Buckheit filed a lawsuit against the town and two of its police officers over the handling of a domestic dispute at

his house in 2008. Mr. Buckheit was arrested on domestic violence charges, but never charged. He was later exonerated by a San Mateo County Superior Court judge and granted a declaration of factual innocence. Shortly thereafter, he filed a civil rights lawsuit against the town of Atherton in federal court in San Francisco.

Mr. Buckheit said before he was asked for the loan, he contacted Mr. Marsala, whom he knew casually, about his situation with the police department. Mr. Marsala was sympathetic, and said he would try to help, Mr. Buckheit said.

The vote to table any further discussion of creating a police oversight committee was 4-1, with Mayor Kathy McKeithen opposed. At the meeting, Mr. Marsala said he was concerned that a small town like Atherton would have trouble finding enough citizens willing to serve on an oversight committee, and that leaks of confidential information regarding police officers could be a problem.

"I can't prove he changed his vote, but I don't think you go to a resident with a big problem and ask for a half-million dollars," Mr. Buckheit told The Almanac. ■

## Atherton council shelves police oversight idea

By **Andrea Gemmet**  
Almanac Staff Writer

**A** push to create a citizen oversight committee for the Atherton Police Department ran out of steam, as four of five Atherton council members voted to table the idea at the March 17 meeting.

Mayor Kathy McKeithen was the only champion of the idea, as the rest of the council said that new police Chief Mike Guerra should have a chance to put his stamp on the department.

"We have a new sheriff in town," said Councilwoman Elizabeth Lewis. "I hope our residents understand that we've got to give this new administration a chance to do the right thing."

The town and two of its police officers are currently being sued by Atherton resident Jon Buckheit over the handling of a domestic dispute at his house in 2008. Mr. Buckheit was arrested on suspicion of domestic violence but never charged. His arrest record was later expunged by a San Mateo County Superior

Court judge who granted a declaration of factual innocence. In October, Mr. Buckheit filed a civil rights lawsuit against the town of Atherton in federal court in San Francisco.

Mr. Buckheit's high-profile case, along with other residents' complaints about the police department, has led some to call for the creation of a police oversight committee.

"A crisis is not a prerequisite for a citizen review board,"

See **POLICE**, page 7

## Also Inside

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## On the cover

Keith Gutierrez demonstrates a traditional Native American method of starting a fire as Oak Knoll student Jason Sonsini looks on. The hands-on program, which ties into third-grade lessons on early California, is funded by grants that aim to spark innovations in education. Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac. See **Section 2**.

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**THE ALMANAC** (ISSN 1097-3095 and USPS 459370) is published every Wednesday by Embarcadero Media, 3525 Alameda de las Pulgas, Menlo Park, CA 94025-6558. Periodicals Postage Paid at Menlo Park, CA and at additional mailing offices. Adjudicated a newspaper of general circulation for San Mateo County, The Almanac is delivered free to homes in Menlo Park, Atherton, Portola Valley and Woodside. Subscriptions for \$60 per year or \$100 per 2 years are welcome. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the Almanac, 3525 Alameda de las Pulgas, Menlo Park, CA 94025-6558. Copyright ©2010 by Embarcadero Media, All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission is strictly prohibited.

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# Local News

MENLO PARK | AHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

## Parading mountain lion is both beautiful and scary

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

That Woodside is mountain lion country is not news. Sightings in Woodside are a regular feature of the county-wide e-mail alert system. Observers, when interviewed, tend to feel blessed by the experience.

Thirty-year resident Sabrina Pospisil, for example, saw one at 7:10 a.m. on Friday, March 12, from her home office window on Roan Place. "He was beautiful, Oh, he was so beautiful," she said in an interview. "He looked so healthy. The eyes looked bigger and rounder (than I was used to). He was full of life."

What scared Ms. Pospisil was the lion's return after an apparent earlier visit, and its confidence in parading up her front steps and through her yard. "He's just walking along, broadcasting 'king of beasts,'" Ms. Pospisil said as she ascended her stairs and tried to emulate its stride.

"They seem to like stairs! They like the entrance to my house!" she added. "I never dreamed they'd be walking up here in the open. ... To me, this is dangerous."

Four young children live nearby and this is the second lion

Reported mountain lion sightings way up this year. Page 6.

sighting at her home and the third in the area in 10 days, she said.

"I would be terrified if my kids lived here," she said. "This is kind of a warning and we all need to think about what we're doing here. What is the sensible thing to do?"

A San Mateo County Sheriff's Office advisory distributed in response to the incidents warns residents to supervise children outside, to be cautious at dawn, dusk and at night, and, if the lion seems confrontational, to stand your ground, appear as large as possible and fight back if attacked.

Ms. Pospisil, a psychotherapist, has this warning posted on a cabinet in her waiting room. In the March 12 sighting, a client in session with her and facing a large window had pointed out the lion approaching her house.

Therapists are in the business of comforting people. "All my patients, I have to advise them" about the lions, she said. "That's not too comforting."

Ms. Pospisil is no novice to lion encounters, having joined the Peace Corps in 1968 and



Photo by Dave Boyce/The Almanac

Sabrina Pospisil, a Woodside psychotherapist, points to a notice from the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office that she has posted in her waiting room to warn her clients of possible mountain lion encounters outside her home.

gone to Africa. "I've been around a lot of lions," she said.

This reporter asked her if she might be overreacting in that this lion does not appear to have threatened anyone. "Wait until a lion walks around your yard twice in a week and you'll feel differently," she replied, then

added, "Maybe I'm not as brave anymore."

### A housecat, but larger

Jeannine DeWald, a wildlife biologist at the Monterey office of the Department of Fish and Game, said in an interview that such incidents are not usually

cause for alarm.

A lion sauntering through a yard is "a little unusual," Ms. DeWald said, but this animal was unaware that humans were watching. "What we go on is its behavior when it spots a per-

See LION, page 6

## Atherton forecast: severe budget problems ahead

By Andrea Gemmet

Almanac Staff Writer

Atherton's five-year budget forecast is in, and the future looks grim for the town. The town's finance director is projecting dwindling revenues and growing expenses that will drain the town's reserves in four years.

The conservative projections reflect "the worst scenario the town could face," said finance director Louise Ho at the March 17 Atherton City Council meeting. While it might be a worst-case scenario, it was one that council members seemed inclined to believe.

"Certainly, this is not an acceptable plan, and it's not one we will even try to pretend to make," said Councilman Jerry Carlson. "The rate of growth of expenses every year exceeds the rate of growth of revenue. That's a problem."

Ms. Ho's forecast shows property tax revenue, the town's single largest source of revenue, will not be sufficient to support the town's police and public works departments.

"It's shocking to have it spread out like this, because clearly things are going to have to change," said Councilwoman Elizabeth Lewis. "We have to make some severe cuts."

The council called for a study session meeting to delve into the problem more deeply.

"This is a 'When did we go bankrupt?' five-year plan," said Councilman Jim Dobbie.

City Manager Jerry Gruber said his goal is to create a balanced budget this year that doesn't dip into the town's reserves.

"We keep saying this is the worst case, but frankly, it's not," said

See BUDGET, page 10

## Menlo extinguishes smoking law, for now

By Sean Howell

Almanac Staff Writer

Smokers don't have to rush to find an ashtray when they spot a Menlo Park cop. At least, not yet.

That's because the city is starting over in revising an ordinance that would greatly restrict smoking within Menlo Park's borders, after city management realized it could have an even broader impact than intended.

After the City Council gave preliminary approval to the ordinance at its March 2 meeting, City Attorney Bill McClure said the city realized that the ordinance might have several "unintended consequences." For instance, people could interpret it as restricting smoking on sidewalks and in parking lots outside businesses, raising questions about whether smokers would have anywhere to go for a cigarette break.

And some restaurateurs, includ-

ing the proprietors of the British Bankers Club and the Oasis, complained that the ordinance wouldn't allow customers to smoke on their patios — or, for that matter, on sidewalks or parking lots outside the establishments. Businesspeople feared that might have smokers bypassing Menlo Park for Redwood City or Palo Alto, Mr. McClure said.

"Are we basically saying that smokers are not welcome to frequent dining establishments in Menlo Park?" he asked. "There was no real discussion of some of these topics by the council."

"Our sense was, we need to take a step back and look at some of these provisions, to make sure we come forward with an ordinance that is carefully worded to say what we intend it to say, and that some of these other implications are considered carefully by the council before it adopts something."

Councilman John Boyle was the lone dissenter in the original vote,

saying he didn't think the city had thought the ordinance through. He said in an interview that he was glad the city has decided to take a step back.

The approval process will now start over. The council will introduce and discuss the revised ordinance at one public hearing (tentatively scheduled for May), and could adopt the law at a subsequent meeting. The council was originally scheduled to adopt the ordinance at its March 23 meeting.

### Clarification

An article in the March 10 Almanac about the smoking ordinance cited confusion about whether the council had voted to allow people to smoke on the patio outside Knickerbockers Cigars, an activity the ordinance would have otherwise prohibited. The council did indeed grant Knickerbockers an exemption, according to Mr. McClure. ■



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## Reported mountain lion sightings way up this year

By Dave Boyce  
Almanac Staff Writer

Reported mountain lion sightings in San Mateo County seem on track to exceed 30 this year, up from six in 2008 and 14 in 2009.

In response to an Almanac request, the county Sheriff's Office listed eight sighting reports in 2010, and the first quarter is not yet over. The list did not include sightings on March 18 and 21 in Emerald Hills in unincorporated Woodside.

The list also did not note two Woodside sightings reported to The Almanac: Tuesday, March 2, on Roan Place at 7:45 a.m.; and Wednesday, March 3, on Patrol Road at 9:45 p.m.

The Santa Cruz Mountains range "has always been known to have a large number of lions," said Tim

Dunbar, the executive director of the Sacramento-based Mountain Lion Foundation.

As to the increased number of sightings, Mr. Dunbar noted that it's migration time, and that bobcats and coyotes are also mistaken for lions.

Lions are "very much self-limiting" in population control, he said. Resident males will not only expel other males but are so territorial that, other than in breeding season, they have killed females and even their own offspring, he said.

Asked to comment on a lion that cleared a 5-foot-high fence to attack a pygmy goat in a Portola Valley backyard, Mr. Dunbar was nonplused. A mountain lion has a vertical leap of 12 feet to 15 feet, he said. "These guys are strong," he added. "Their leap is phenomenal." ■

### LION

continued from page 5

son," she said.

Ms. Pospisil said that when she appeared outside on an elevated deck, the cat moved a little faster but did not appear frightened.

The behavior of a housecat is apparently instructive in reading a mountain lion's intentions.

Go to [is.gd/aMxZR](http://is.gd/aMxZR) for more. (This URL is case-sensitive.)

Mountain lions have evolved to kill deer, Ms. Dewald said.

The likelihood of an attack is proportional to one's deer-like appearance. "They will take other things, but they are way down the list," she added.

As to how to fight back, Ms. DeWald recommends carrying a tall wooden walking stick that you can wave to look larger. "If push comes to shove, it (also) gives you something you can fight back with," she said.

Any predator, in considering prey, will always weigh the possibility of serious injury to itself, she added. ■

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## 'Pancakes for Haiti' raised \$7,000

"Pancakes for Haiti," a fundraising breakfast for Haitian emergency relief, held March 14 at Cedro Ristorante Italiano in Menlo Park, raised more than \$7,000, say event coordinators Carolyn Digovich and Pam Salvatierra.

Checks for \$3,500 each will be sent to Partners in Health Haiti and Whirlwind Wheelchairs, they say.

Josef Navigato was on hand to thank patrons for coming to his family's restaurant, located 1010 El Camino Real, near Kepler's bookstore and Cafe Borrone. Josef, a Hillview eighth-grader, inspired the fundraiser after coming home from school upset about the news from Haiti and

wanting to do something for the Haitians suffering from the earthquake.

### Kindergarten registration at Woodside School

Woodside School is now registering children for its fall 2010 kindergarten classes.

Students entering kindergarten must be 5 years old by Dec. 2, 2010, and must live within the Woodside School District boundaries.

Families may pick up a registration packet in the school office, 3195 Woodside Road in Woodside. For more information, call Taffy in the district office at 851-1571, ext. 271.

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## John Bentley sells Woodside restaurant

By Jane Knoerle

Almanac Lifestyles Editor

It's a new era for Woodside's first firehouse. For the past 16 years, the little red building at 2992 Woodside Road has been home to John Bentley's popular restaurant. Wednesday, March 31, will be the restaurant's last day of business.

Taking over April 1 will be new proprietors Zu Tarazi and his wife, Kristy Borrone. The restaurant, to be known as Station One, will be closed for about a month for renovations.

Mr. Tarazi is a former manager of John Bentley's, Redwood City. "They will be a dynamite front of the house," said owner John

Bentley of the young couple. Paul Shields, sous chef at John Bentley's, Redwood City, will become the new chef in Woodside.

And in another case of trading places, Santos de la Concha, who has been the chef in Woodside, is coming over to serve as Mr. Bentley's sous chef in Redwood City.

Mr. Bentley said it was never his intention to operate two restaurants within three miles of each other. At the time he opened John Bentley's in Redwood City in 2004, he planned to close the Woodside restaurant.

However, after listening to pleas of longtime Woodside customers to stay open, he decided he could

keep both businesses running. Now, six years later, he admitted, "I can't be in two places at once."

In speaking with The Almanac, Mr. Bentley said he wanted to thank all his longtime patrons in Woodside for their loyalty and support in making his first venture as a restaurateur such a success. "I absolutely adore everybody in Woodside," he said.

Of the new owners, he said: "They have great plans. They are very passionate about working with local farmers and providing the best sustainable food."

The Almanac was unable to contact Mr. Tarazi and Ms. Borrone before press time. ■

## Filing period over for June 8 ballot

There will be no race for several key San Mateo County elective offices due to a dearth of candidates. With the closing of the filing period on March 17 for the June 8 election, it's almost a certainty that incumbent Sheriff Greg Munks will keep his job because no one is running against him. And Anne Campbell, superintendent of Portola Valley schools, has no competition in her bid to become the county's next superintendent of schools.

No one filed to run against Assistant District Attorney Stephen Wagstaffe in the district attorney race, who now will take the reins from longtime District Attorney Jim Fox. In the assessor-county clerk-recorder office, Mark Church is poised to take over Warren Slocum's job.

There will be a race to succeed treasurer-tax collector Lee Buffington, who is not seeking re-election. Running for that position are

deputy treasurer Sandie Arnott; Joe Galligan, a certified public accountant; Dave Mandelkern, a trustee of the San Mateo County Community College District; and Richard Guilbault, a registered investment advisor.

Five people are running to replace Rich Gordon as supervisor of District 3: retired county sheriff Don Horsley; former San Carlos councilman Matt Grotto; small business owner April Vargas of Montara; Jack Hickey, a member of the Sequoia Healthcare District Board; and Michael Stogner of San Carlos.

In Supervisorial District 2, incumbent Carole Groom is facing a challenge from Belmont business owner Daniel Kaul to retain her seat.

In the race for state Assembly, 21st District, three Democrats are running to replace term-out Assemblyman Ira Ruskin: Rich Gordon, a county supervi-

## POLICE

continued from page 3

Mr. Buckheit told the council. "Oversight is good."

The creation of an oversight body should not be seen as a rebuke, but as a healthy process, he said.

Mayor McKeithen said that nearly every significant piece of litigation that Atherton has been involved in recently was tied to the police department. "I don't think these issues can wait," she said.

Ms. McKeithen also said that, in the past, she knew of complaints about the police chief himself that were ignored by the city manager at the time.

"What happens when our chief of police is responsible?" she asked.

Councilman Jerry Carlson said that there is already another level of accountability for the police department. "The buck stops with the council," he said.

The creation of a police oversight body was scheduled for discussion at the meeting, not action, so the council's decision to table the idea caught some by surprise.

Mr. Buckheit said he was promised a chance to give the council a PowerPoint presentation on police oversight issues, and was told by City Manager Jerry Gruber that the council wouldn't vote on the issue at the meeting. "I've been robbed of my opportunity," Mr. Buckheit protested.

Of the nine citizen complaints lodged against the Atherton police since 2005, none were sustained, which was used as an argument both for and against the oversight commission.

Mr. Buckheit said that Atherton had an illegal warning on citizen complaint forms that said anyone making a false complaint against an officer could be criminally prosecuted. That warning wasn't removed until

the very day of the council meeting, Mr. Buckheit said.

After the meeting, Chief Guerra said that the law regarding the admonishment against false claims changed following a 2006 court decision, but that the California Penal Code still hasn't been updated to reflect it. Even the latest edition of the penal code says that law enforcement agencies "shall have" that admonishment on their complaint forms, even though the courts say that no one can be asked to sign it.

"Mr. Buckheit is right, it's cleaner not to have it on there," Chief Guerra said. "We talked about it four weeks ago when he questioned it, so we changed it in our printed forms, but we didn't realize our online complaint screen still had it."

It's now been removed, on the advice of the city attorney, he said. ■

### ■ MORE ONLINE

Check AlmanacNews.com for more news, including these stories:

■ **Portola Valley:** A discussion and possible revision of Portola Valley's solicitation ordinance is set for Town Council consideration at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 24, at the Historic Schoolhouse at 765 Portola Road.

■ **Menlo Park:** In addition to garbage rates and fees for city services, Menlo Park's City Council will take up water pricing and infrastructure projects at its meeting on Tuesday, March 23. The council will hold a study session at 6 p.m., prior to its regular meeting, to discuss the city's five-year water rate plan.

## REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Gloria Darke



### Real Estate as an Investment

Dear Gloria,

I have grown up thinking that the only way to build your net worth was by owning real estate. We would like to start buying property now but are a little timid because of what we have seen in the past year or two. Is this still the way achieve financial security?

Brenda K.

Dear Brenda,

That is a good question given what we see happening all around us. No doubt about it - housing prices have fallen and foreclosure rates have risen to numbers not seen before. While it is all but impossible to time the market, there does seem to be anecdotal evidence that we may be at or near the bottom. To address your question

about real estate and financial security;

I do believe that in your approach to purchasing a property in which to live and raise a family it should be viewed differently than it has in the past decade. In all probability, its value is not going to increase by 10% or more annually and rather than considering it a short term investment, look at it as a home which over time will increase in value. However, it may worth looking at investing in multiple units as rental income property. I met recently with a long time friend and client who is nearing retirement age and is supplementing his income very nicely with the cash flow from his two well located Menlo Park buildings. The value of the property has risen over the years as has the income that it produces.

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



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## Night lights will go on trial at M-A football field

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

Night football games are likely to come to Menlo-Atherton High School in September, but at least for the 2011-12 season, the lights would be temporary, and that has everyone involved feeling pretty good, a school district official said.

Two of the communities affected — M-A students and Atherton neighbors of the school — spoke approvingly of the plan to try temporary lights for a year before considering a permanent installation, said Olivia Martinez, president of the governing board of the Sequoia Union High School District.

The discussion and public comment “went very well,” Ms. Martinez said in an interview. “I think everybody went away satisfied.”

A staff report is due in about 30 days, she added. The board gave staff direction to proceed, but has not yet voted on the question of whether to install the lights.

The lights would be plugged in rather than run on diesel-powered generators and would

cost the district about \$20,000 to install and \$2,500 a month to rent, Ms. Martinez said. The money would be drawn from the district’s bond funding for capital projects.

The district has little choice but to go with temporary lights. The Division of State Architect, the state agency overseeing construction at public schools, has a backlog that would push any consideration of permanent lights to November or December at the earliest, the district said.

In January, Atherton neighbors had asked for temporary lights as part of a go-slow approach out of concern for unwanted noise, light and possibly crime intruding into their community during night games. For their part, athletic team boosters pushed to begin a Friday night football tradition at M-A after 58 years without it.

The idea for night games gained momentum in October when M-A hosted Sacred Heart Preparatory High School in an experimental night football game that proved both popular and profitable. ■

## City may hike fees for services

By Sean Howell

Almanac Staff Writer

One of the dozens and dozens of city services offered by the city of Menlo Park allows people to drive over to the police department and have an officer install a car seat.

With the city eyeing a budget deficit, however, it finds itself unable to justify offering the service for free. It would start charging \$40 for the service to Menlo Park residents, under a recommendation by city management that the City Council will review at its meeting on Tuesday, March 23.

That’s one of a number of services the city is either starting to charge for, or increasing the price of, as it tries to wring money out of a parched budget in the midst of an economic recession. All told, tweaks to the fee schedule and fees for new services would bring in \$200,500 per year, according to city management.

“We don’t want to be unintentionally subsidizing things we don’t want to subsidize,” Finance Director Carol Augustine said, explaining the city’s policy and acknowledging that department heads took a closer look at the schedule this year than it has in years past.

One set of fee increases almost certain to spur complaints from residents: double-digit percentage

hikes to some part-time patrons of the child care center in the Civic Center. Under the new schedule, it will cost more per day to send a child to the program part-time than it would to enroll a child full-time, because it’s more difficult to fill part-time slots, according to Ms. Augustine.

Parents of children enrolled in the after-school child care program could see rate increases of up to 39 percent. The city said it was recovering all its costs on the program last year, but that’s no longer the case, according to Ms. Augustine.

At the childcare center in the Belle Haven neighborhood, the city will no longer provide a subsidy to families that earn more than \$6,000 per month. It will increase the fee for children who take gymnastics classes by \$1, a change that will bring in an astounding \$60,000 because there are so many kids enrolled in the program.

The city will charge a fee to use a new patio area outside the Burgess recreation center, hoping people might want to use it for weddings or parties. Fees for sports teams to use city fields will also increase, to put them more in line with those of surrounding communities, according to Ms. Augustine.

Another change: Someone who appeals a decision by the planning department, to both the Planning

## John O’Connor returns to Menlo Park

By Jane Knoerle

Almanac Lifestyles Editor

John O’Connor says he’s been recycled. After taking a “mental health decade” spending 3,000 nights in a thousand different cities” aboard his sailboat, the longtime funeral director is returning to Menlo Park to reopen his old business.

John O’Connor’s Menlo Park Funeral Services opens in April at 1182 Chestnut St. in Menlo Park.

The recent news that Spangler Mortuary was closing in Menlo Park, leaving the city without a local funeral home, prompted him to return, he says. Mr. O’Connor has always kept in touch with Menlo Park, where he was in business for 20 years, first on Live Oak Avenue (the late Spangler site), then as John J. O’Connor’s Colonial Mortuary at 657 Oak Grove Ave.

“All these years I have still been scattering ashes for friends,” he says.

The new location is an office only. There is no chapel or embalming facility.

Menlo Park residents usually have their funeral services at a local church, such as Menlo Park Presbyterian or the Church of the Nativity, says Mr. O’Connor. Non-denominational services will be held at the Masonic Lodge on Roble Avenue or at Crippen & Flynn Mortuary in Redwood City.

Embalming services will be done at Cusimano’s Mortuary in Mountain View. The trend today is away from embalming, with 60 percent of Cali-



Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

John O’Connor says the recent news about Spangler Mortuary’s closing in Menlo Park, leaving the city without a local funeral home, prompted him to return.

fornians choosing cremation, says Mr. O’Connor, a licensed embalmer.

He notes the “green” movement has even reached the funeral business, with the option of having a body refrigerated, instead of embalmed.

Mr. O’Connor grew up in the funeral business in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His grandfather founded the O’Connor Funeral Home there, and it’s still in business after 100 years. After serving in the Marine Corps, Mr. O’Connor came to California in 1968.

While in business in Menlo Park, Mr. O’Connor was an active member of the community, belonging to the Chamber

of Commerce, Kiwanis, and the old Town Club. During those years, he says, he raised a half million dollars for worthy causes by offering “A Day on the Bay” excursions at charity auctions. He estimates 5,000 visitors sailed over to Angel Island with him on the 50-foot vessel “Windsong.”

Although he might be sailing from New York to Lisbon, or visiting the Greek Islands, Mr. O’Connor has always kept in touch with Menlo Park. About 20 of his local friends have sailed with him to exotic locales. He has returned home every Christmas to be with his two children, Robyn and Sean O’Connor, who live in the Bay Area.

He also has three granddaughters. “For years they called me Papa Santa because I had a beard and came at Christmas,” he says with a laugh.

He puts down the idea that sailing the seas was living dangerously. “It wasn’t like climbing Mt. Everest,” he says. “It’s more like going to Safeway.”

Mr. O’Connor was living on the sailboat “Sonrisa” in Sausalito before deciding to go back in business. He’s now making do with a motor home and will probably move “Sonrisa” to Pete’s Harbor in Redwood City.

“Everything I own moves,” says the 68-year-old, who also flies airplanes and rides a motorcycle.

The telephone number for Menlo Park Funeral Services is 380-0747; the e-mail address is MenloParkFunerals@hotmail.com. ■

## Garbage: Menlo Park residents in line for big rate hike

By Sean Howell

Almanac Staff Writer

If you live in Menlo Park, taking out the trash is about to get a lot more expensive.

Under a proposal by city management, garbage rates would increase 28 percent this year for multi-family and commercial property owners. They would jump by \$5 per can, per month for owners of single-family homes, regardless of the can’s size.

Those rate hikes follow an 18 percent increase last year, as the city works to pay off its debt with a waste provider whose contract is

about to expire.

Some homeowners would be in line for nearly a 70 percent rate increase since 2008, if the City Council adopts the recommendation by city management at its meeting Tuesday, March 23. The meeting begins at 7 p.m. in the council chambers, located in the Civic Center complex.

Rates for homeowners with one 32-gallon can would increase to \$19.80 per month, and rates for homeowners with two or three 32-gallon cans would increase to \$48 or \$72, respectively. Those rates are close to the average in the South

Bay Waste Management Agency.

While several factors play into the decision on setting garbage rates, the primary one is the cost to the city’s provider, Allied Waste. The city’s rate increases have not kept pace with those costs, putting Menlo Park into nearly \$1 million of debt with Allied.

An independent contractor reviewed Allied’s cost numbers, according to city staff.

Recology will take over the city’s waste-collection contract in early 2011. The company changed its name from Norcal Waste after two major bribery scandals in the past decade.

The cost increase to commercial and multi-tenant property owners will be retroactive to the beginning of this year, while rate increases for single-family homes won’t go into effect until July 1. ■

Commission and the City Council, will foot the bill for the full cost of the second appeal. It’s designed to discourage appeals when only one resident disagrees with a decision, as appeared to be the case in a

recent issue involving a permit for Safeway.

Go to [is.gd/aPlmw](http://is.gd/aPlmw) to see the fee schedule. (This URL is case-sensitive.) The regular council meeting starts at 7 p.m. ■

## Insider to take over high school district

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

The transition coming to the top of the Sequoia Union High School District has the earmarks of being seamless when a new superintendent takes over in July.

The governing board, in a unanimous decision, announced at its March 17 meeting that it had appointed current assistant superintendent and business officer James Lianides, 56, to take over from Superintendent Patrick Gemma when Mr. Gemma retires on June 30 after seven years on the job.

A Feb. 24 decision to limit the candidate search to employees of the district was not unanimous. Board member Chris Thomsen, preferring a nationwide search, dissented in the 4-1 vote made behind closed doors.

Atherton resident and open-government advocate Peter Carpenter said that the board's Feb. 24 action violates the state's open-meeting law, the Brown Act, and should have been discussed and voted upon in public. He has requested that the district rescind its decision or face a lawsuit.

The Sequoia district's lawyer and a lawyer from the District Attorney's Office have both said the board acted appropriately.

### No down time

Mr. Gemma hired Mr. Lianides in 2008, and he has since had a high profile on many district issues.

"We are extremely fortunate to have (Mr.) Lianides ready to succeed superintendent Gemma," board president Olivia Martinez said in a statement. "... he

will contribute new ideas and leadership to the upward trajectory achieved during Dr. Gemma's tenure."

"There'll be no 'down time' during this pivotal transition, which is particularly important now, with the significant challenges we currently face," Ms. Martinez continued.

"Transition to (Mr.) Lianides promises to be smooth, without interruption to the ongoing work and achievements of our outstanding staff and excellent schools."

Since his arrival, Mr. Lianides activities have included:

- Preparing the annual budget, now at \$100 million, amid widespread budget cutting by public agencies.

- Overseeing capital projects such as the completion of the new theater at Menlo-Atherton High School in 2009.

- Participating in the district's career technical education initiative.

- Participating in the effort to make the district greener environmentally, including recycling and composting initiatives.

- Managing the district's \$6.5 million loss when Lehman Brothers investment bank went bankrupt in 2008. (The Lehman investment was overseen by the county treasurer.)

- Being at Mr. Gemma's right hand in dealing with charter schools, including the controversial effort to place Everest Public High School in East Palo



**James Lianides** has had a high profile on many district issues.

Alto rather than Redwood City, where Everest officials wanted to be and now are.

### Thirty-year career

Mr. Lianides came to the Sequoia district from the Pacifica School District, where he was the superintendent.

He lives in and grew up in Redwood City, and graduated from Woodside High School, which is the alma mater of his two sons, district spokeswoman Bettylu Smith said. He is fluent in Spanish.

Mr. Lianides has a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of California at Berkeley, a master's degree in educational administration from San Jose State University, and a doctorate in education from a program run by UC Berkeley and California State University, Ms. Smith said.

He has headed schools in Mountain View and Half Moon Bay, and taught bilingual classes in Los Angeles and Redwood City, she said. As the business officer for the Pacifica School District, he was recognized by the state's association of school administrators. ■

## Charter schools get significant support in online survey

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

Charter school advocates turned out in force to respond to a recent online survey asking the Sequoia Union High School District community for criteria in hiring a replacement for Superintendent Patrick Gemma, who has announced plans to retire in June.

In the 17-item survey, of the 80 responses to item 16, "Additional criteria important to you," 37 argued for support of charter schools. Mr. Gemma had been relentless in speaking out against Everest Public High School, a sister school to Summit Prep that opened in August in Redwood City.

The results may or may not be meaningful. Web surveys can be skewed by groups making a con-

certed effort on one issue. Just one respondent to the "additional criteria" item expressed opposition to charters.

The Sequoia district ran the survey on its Web site for 12 days, from Feb. 22 to March 5, and gathered 95 respondents, 59 percent of whom identified themselves as parents of current, former or future students, according to a compilation provided to The Almanac by the district. Another 29 percent claimed to be district employees.

The district employs about 1,000 people, enrolls about 9,000 students, serves some 96,000 households and receives about 20,000 unique visits to its Web site every month, spokeswoman Bettylu Smith said in a letter.

Of the survey participants, 26 percent said they live in Menlo Park, another 26 percent said they

live in Redwood City, with "other" and San Carlos next in line.

The bulk of the survey was 13 multiple-choice criteria. Respondents were asked to rate a candidate's view of priorities as either very important, somewhat important, or not too important.

The results showed 12 of the 13 items as "very important," including:

- "Sustain and improve the performance of ALL students while closing the gap between higher and poorer achieving students." Very-important rating: 83 percent.

- "Value and capitalize upon diversity in the schools and community as s/he addresses the unique needs of an ethnically, culturally and socio-economi-

See SURVEY, page 12

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# Severe budget problems ahead for Atherton

**BUDGET**  
continued from page 5

Mayor Kathy McKeithen, who pointed out that the town is still facing significant legal expenses that aren't reflected in the five-year projections.

Compounding the budget problems is the recent loss of a significant source of infrastructure funding — road-impact fees. In December, the council rescinded the fee upon advice

that it left the town vulnerable to lawsuits over its legality. The fee, which was charged to builders for wear and tear on roads, was used to fund road-repair projects.

A plan to refund \$1.6 million in road impact fees is entangled in a procedural vote.

Mayor Kathy McKeithen used the five-year forecast as her reason for opposing a transfer of \$1.1 million in general fund reserves into a road-impact fee fund for refunds.

Staff characterized the transfer

as correcting an accounting error that improperly put road-impact fees into the general fund.

"It's one thing to say that we are legally obligated to replenish those funds, but I do not believe that it should come from reserves when we don't have a balanced budget," Ms. McKeithen said.

By council policy, transfers from the general fund require a four-fifths super-majority vote, but both Ms. McKeithen and Mr. Dobbie voted against the transfer, which failed on a 3-2

vote. Mr. Dobbie said he doesn't believe the council should have rescinded the road-impact fee at all.

"It's a simple issue. We're taking ill-gotten gains that ended up in our general reserves," countered Mr. Carlson. "I don't see why we need to keep bickering about it."

Next month's Atherton council meeting will likely see the same item back on the agenda, along with a new item: changing the policy requiring a fourth-fifths vote to a simple majority. Ironically, changing the policy requires only a simple majority vote. ■

**BIRTHS**

**Atherton**

■ Megan and David Lampert, a daughter, Feb. 27, Sequoia Hospital.

**Menlo Park**

■ Rose and Ramon Jimenez, a son, March 5, Sequoia Hospital.

■ Nicole McGovern and Junryo Watanabe, a son, March 5, Sequoia Hospital.

■ Erin and Anthony Paruszewski, a daughter, March 7, Sequoia Hospital.

■ Jennifer and Brian Roberts, a daughter, March 9, Sequoia Hospital.

**Portola Valley**

■ Jordana Lauren and Benjamin Weiss, a son, Feb. 25, Sequoia Hospital.



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Good Friday Service – 3:00 PM

Holy Saturday Easter Vigil – 8:00 PM

Easter Sunday Eucharist – 9:30 AM

Good Friday Ecumenical Taize Service – 8:00 PM

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9:30 a.m. Palm Cross Making

10:00 a.m. Liturgy of the Palms,  
Procession, and Sung Eucharist, Rite II

**MAUNDY THURSDAY: APRIL 1**

6:30 p.m. Agape Meal and Sung Eucharist, Rite II  
followed by the stripping of the altar and vigil

**GOOD FRIDAY: APRIL 2**

12 noon Sung Liturgy of the Day

**HOLY SATURDAY: APRIL 3**

4:00 p.m. Easter Vigil (with Eucharist) for  
kids under 6 followed by Easter egg hunt

**EASTER SUNDAY: APRIL 4**

8:00 a.m. Sung Eucharist, Rite I

10:00 a.m. Festival Eucharist, Rite II followed by Easter egg hunt



# Peninsula Easter Services



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7:30 pm Holy Eucharist


April 2 ❖ GOOD FRIDAY  
12 noon Service of music, reflection, and prayer  
7:30 pm Meditation on the Passion of Christ

April 3 ❖ HOLY SATURDAY  
9 pm Great Vigil of Easter, Holy Baptism & Eucharist

April 4 ❖ EASTER DAY  
8 am Eucharist with Hymns  
10:15 am Sung Eucharist  
11:30 am Easter Egg Hunt in the Courtyard  
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April 5 ❖ EASTER MONDAY  
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**Maundy Thursday (The Last Supper)**  
April 1, 6:00\* PM (with simple meal)

**Good Friday, April 2**  
7:00 AM & Noon

**The Great Vigil of Easter**  
Saturday, April 3, 7:00\* PM

**Easter Sunday, April 4**  
6:30 AM, 8:30\* AM, 10:30\* AM

*\*Indicates child care available*

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**Maundy Thursday** (4/1 | 7:30 pm)  
**Good Friday** (4/2 | 12 pm & 7:30 pm)  
**Easter Vigil** (4/3 | 7:30 pm)  
**Easter Sunday** (4/4 | 8:30 am, 10:45 am)



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# Alleluia!

**Holy Week Services**

April 1	6:00 pm	Seder Dinner
April 2	Noon & 7:00 pm	Good Friday Services
April 4	9:30 am	Easter Festival Service



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Sunday Services at 9:30 a.m.



**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST** God is still speaking.

**SURVEY**

continued from page 9

cally diverse student body.” Very-important rating: 53 percent.

■ “Address the multi-faceted

issues associated with charter schools in an objective manner.” Very-important rating: 68 percent.

Some respondents found this tedious, with one person writing: “All the questions are lead-

ing — ‘How important is it for the (superintendent) to do a good job on everything within their job description?’”

Said another: “I don’t get it. How will this line of question-

ing be useful?”

That line of questioning is balanced by items asking for open-ended responses, Sequoia board President Olivia Martinez said in an interview. One part is quantitative and the other qualitative and, lacking a better method, the board uses the results as it may, she said.

The multiple choice items “reaffirm that there a consensus in the community as to the

importance of what these things are,” she said. “In a democracy, nothing is perfect.”

Ms. Martinez recently announced that the board decided, in a 4-1 vote in closed session, to limit the search for a new superintendent to district employees only.

Atherton resident Peter Carpenter said he plans to challenge that decision in court because it should have been made in open session. ■

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**■ 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.*

**MENLO PARK**

**Auto burglary reports:**

■ Purse stolen with eyeglasses inside for estimated loss of \$1,100, 700 block of University Drive, March 12.

■ Navigation unit stolen for loss valued at \$200, 1200 block of Windermere Ave., March 16.

**Grand theft report:** Parking decal for Menlo Park Plaza stolen from rear windshield for loss of \$569, 700 block of Menlo Ave., March 16.

**Residential burglary report:** Rear sliding door possibly pried open but no loss, 900 block of Siskiyou Drive, March 18.

**Fraud reports:**

■ Unauthorized use of credit card but no loss, 500 block of Fanita Way, March 12.

■ Identity theft but no loss, 500 block of Hamilton Ave., March 12.

■ Identity theft but no loss, 1300 block of Hollyburne Ave., March 12.

**Stolen vehicle report:** Green 2004 Volkswagen Passat stolen, 700 block of Fremont St., and later found in Trader Joe's parking lot, March 15.

**WOODSIDE**

**Theft report:** Relative running a convenience store owned by uncle is alleged to have stolen \$71,000 by opening various credit card accounts, 17000 block of Skyline Blvd., March 12.

**Fraud report:** Resident received letter allegedly from Internal Revenue Service stating that he owed \$3,400 in back taxes and IRS advised beginning an investigation, 100 block of Barrett Drive, March 11.

**CARMEN MORTON CHRISTENSEN**



Carmen Morton Christensen, 96, a resident of Atherton for more than 60 years, died in her home on Feb. 26. A native of Salt Lake City, UT., she received a BA from University of Utah and a Masters degree from UC Berkeley prior to WWII. A noted Bay Area philanthropist, with her husband she co-founded Palo Alto-based Christensen Fund, an international grantmaking foundation, and as an individual significantly sup-

ported a number of diverse Bay Area non-profits over the years. A founding donor to the Cantor Center of the Arts at Stanford (where her name is inscribed over the main entrance), she also made endowment gifts to the Peninsula Volunteers, the Department of Art at Stanford, the Palo Alto Junior Museum and Zoo, the Opportunity Center, the Silicon Valley Humane Society, local schools and other institutions. A member of the Atherton Garden Guild and the PVs, she enjoyed classical music and was an accomplished pianist and artist. She is survived by three children and five grandchildren. Donations may be made to the Cantor Center or the Peninsula Volunteers.

PAID OBITUARY

**SamTrans seeks citizen advisers**

The San Mateo County Transportation Authority is seeking applicants for vacancies on its citizens advisory committee. The 15-member committee acts as a liaison between the public and the board of directors.

Monday, April 12, is the deadline for submitting applications for the committee, which meets once a month on the Tuesday pre-

ceding the first Thursday of the month at 4:30 p.m. in San Carlos. Committee members must be residents of San Mateo County.

The Transportation Authority is an independent agency formed to administer proceeds of a countywide half-cent sales tax, originally approved by voters in 1988. For more information, call 508-6223.

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- Saturday, April 10: two classes offered: 9:00 - 11:30 am & 12:00 - 2:30 pm

**▶ COMFORT TECHNIQUES FOR LABOR**

For couples who have already completed Childbirth Prep, this class provides additional tools and practice for relaxation, breathing and comfort measures for labor.

- Saturday, April 17: 1:30 - 3:00 pm

**▶ DADS OF DAUGHTERS: THE JOYS & CHALLENGES OF RAISING TEENAGE GIRLS**

Julie Metzger, RN, creator of our "Heart to Heart" program, hosts an evening for fathers who want to foster better understanding and open communication with their teenage daughters.

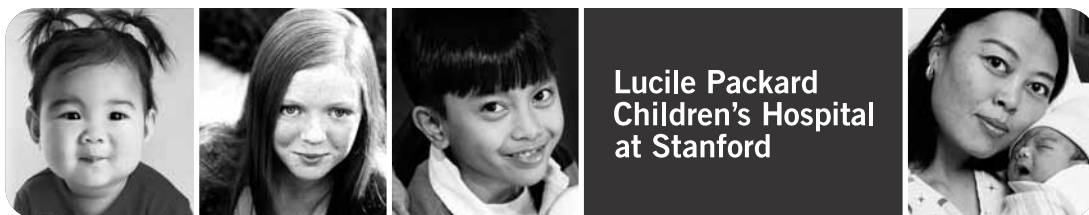
- Tuesday, April 27: 7:00 - 8:30 pm

**▶ MOTHER-BABY MORNINGS**

LPCH offers a group forum for new mothers with infants 0-6 months of age. Our group provides support and camaraderie for new parents while promoting confidence and well-being.

- Tuesday mornings, 10:00 - 11:30 am

Call (650) 723-4600 or visit [www.lpch.org](http://www.lpch.org) to register or obtain more information on the times, locations and fees for these and other courses.



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Published every Wednesday at  
3525 Alameda De Las Pulgas,  
Menlo Park, Ca 94025

**Newsroom: (650) 854-2690**

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

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



**WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?**

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

**TOWN SQUARE FORUM**

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**EMAIL** your views to:

[letters@almanacnews.com](mailto:letters@almanacnews.com) and note this it is a letter to the editor in the subject line.

**MAIL** or deliver to:

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

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

## It is time to adjust Proposition 13

Research by a Menlo Park woman with a school-aged child described in last week's Almanac shows in dramatic detail how the state's fabled and untouchable Proposition 13 that restricts property tax increases to 2 percent a year has over time become a huge windfall for commercial property owners.

Instead of an equitable 50-50 split, residential property owners now shoulder about two-thirds of the tax load, twice as much as commercial property owners. The imbalance in the tax burden has grown steadily since a few years after Proposition 13's passage in 1978. This is in part due to Proposition 58, a law passed in 1986 that allows property to be passed from parent to child with no reassessment of the property.

**EDITORIAL**

*The opinion of The Almanac*

Due to the slow turnover rate of commercial property, and perhaps good tax advice, many owners have been able to lock in 1978 tax rates through trusts and other provisions, while far fewer residential owners pass their homes on to heirs.

As reported in The Almanac's cover story, written by News Editor Renee Batti, former high-tech executive and Stanford MBA Jennifer Bestor, whose son attends Oak Knoll School, examined one commercial strip on Santa Cruz Avenue and a street in her own Menlo Park neighborhood. (Ms. Bestor embarked on the project to find out why local property taxes are falling short of paying for her school district's needs.)

On Santa Cruz Avenue, Ms. Bestor found that of the 56 commercial parcels, 23 are assessed at the 1978 rate (plus 2 percent per year). Of those 23 parcels, only four are held by the 1978 owners; 11 have been passed to a son or daughter and in some cases are held in family trusts. The last eight are owned by corporations (six) and partnerships of unknown composition (two), according to Ms. Bestor.

This contrasts significantly with the 53 residential parcels in Ms. Bestor's neighborhood, where 13 are held by 1978 owners and two are held by children of 1978 owners, so are taxed at the 1978 level. Assessments of two other parcels were affected by other factors.

The other 36 parcels, including Ms. Bestor's, have been reassessed after changing hands, she said.

These findings have led Ms. Bestor to say that her residential street is "...paying its way. I think that Prop. 13 did what people hoped it would

do (for homeowners). It allowed people to stay in their homes and families to plan their financial futures."

But commercial property owners are not paying their way, she says. "Does it really make sense to subsidize family trusts, major real estate corporations and developers, who make smaller and smaller contributions (proportionally) to public services each year?"

Ms. Bestor also shared details on an inequity in commercial taxes that is repeated in many areas of Menlo Park.

She said, "The Trader Joe's property — now the new market in town — contributes just \$7,471 of general tax towards our local services (for two-thirds of an acre of prime commercial property) compared with Draeger's up the street at \$66,585."

"It isn't Trader Joe's, of course, that's paying the tax — if they'd bought the property when they moved in, that parcel would be contributing 500 percent-plus more (in taxes).

"Trader Joe's leases it from a family trust, descendants of the 1978 owner ...with an address on a leafy street in Cape Cod. Since landlords charge what the market will bear, it's fair to guess that the property tax savings are accruing to those folks in Massachusetts — while the costs are borne by school kids and residents in Menlo Park."

We agree with Ms. Bestor, who suggests that one way to help reduce the inequality of the never-ending 1978 assessments is to revise Proposition 13 to require that all commercial property be reassessed every 20 years. Such a rule would give commercial property owners a 20-year cap on substantial tax increases, but also provide local government agencies with the assurance that valuable local real estate would not be granted a never-ending tax break.

Ending the practice would also level the playing field for businesses that are now paying the maximum property taxes while their competitors enjoy the benefit of the 1978 assessments.

We hope Ms. Bestor's work will help to convince government officials that the commercial side of the Proposition 13 and Proposition 58 legacies needs a serious overhaul. Since the economic downturn brought huge budget deficits to California, the governor and legislators have been looking for more revenue but have focused on slashing expenditures, including devastating cuts to all levels of education. One answer is right under their nose — simply readjust the rules on reassessment of commercial property as stated in Propositions 13 and 58.

**LETTERS**

*Our readers write*

**Time for Steve Jobs, Jackling House, to move on**

*Editor:*

Good news at last for Mr. (Steve) Jobs. His private property rights have recently been restored.

He will be "allowed" to dismantle or tear down an aging moldy Woodside house in which he has had no interest or desire to repair. After 27 years of owning the property he may finally be able to own it for a while.

The small society which has prevented him from carrying out his own plans on this land might have, instead, tried saving the historic water towers that were once part of the landscape of Woodside. Is there one left someplace

See **LETTERS**, next page



Portola Valley Archives

**Our Regional Heritage**

These Portola Valley children posed for a photo on Dec. 12, 1936, at an unknown location. Although most of the youngsters have been identified, a few have not. Those who have are, from left, front row: Martin Ramies, Vivian Silva and Albert Ramies; second row: Ollie Ross, unknown, Bobby Silva, Hiram Slocam, Marshall Slocam and unknown. Anyone who can provide the missing names should leave a message for the historian with Janet McDougall, town of Portola Valley, 851-1700, ext. 218.

## LETTERS

Continued from previous page

behind the oak trees?

The Jackling property was once large and beautiful, with a big swimming pool, stables and other living quarters. That was then. This is now, and a different world it is! The Jackling pool was emptied and torn out, and new property lines drawn through it. The stables have long been separated from the main house. When the era of that heady time ended, so did the life in the big house and all of its once-fine buildings.

Next Mr. Jobs will have to face the Planning Commission and the Town Council, and finally obtain permits for everything he will plan. With blueprints and elevations and storey poles and heights of ceiling, depths of any building below the surface, window designs, lighting fixtures — on and on. We pray that these maneuvers will not take as long as his first endeavor to replace one home for another. Twenty-seven years!

**Trish Hooper**

Portola Road, Portola Valley

### What about total collected under Prop. 13?

Editor:

Nowhere in last week's article on Prop. 13, does it state the total tax revenues collected each year since the passage of Prop. 13.

The total actual dollar figure is very important. I am not sure of the numbers, but I imagine that the total amount collected is very sizeable and should have been mentioned in the article. Yes, there are inequities in the system, but it is so much better than letting politicians set the amount of taxes to support their wish lists of "feel good" projects, rather than learning to live within their budget.

If you can, please provide the total amount collected each year since 1978. You may be surprised.

**Al Kirkland**  
University Avenue, Menlo Park

### Questions were the key to Bohannon survey

Editor:

While the Bohannon poll reported in last week's Almanac may not have been a "push poll," it is well known that poll results are extremely sensitive to the exact wording of the questions.

The fact that the polling organization would not provide The Almanac with a copy of the exact questions and responses suggests that the wording was, in fact, designed to favor certain responses. Indeed, given that the poll was initiated by a party with a large stake in the outcome (David Bohannon), he would have been foolish (which Mr. Bohannon is

## Why Measure C is important to us

By Sean and Heidi Monahan

**W**e just found out a few weeks ago that our son's beloved kindergarten teacher, whom we will call Teacher Smith to protect the teacher's privacy, will be pink-slipped/let go (due to budget cuts and seniority reasons, not performance reasons) this June if Measure C does not pass.

Why would this be a tragedy? Let us count the ways:

■ When you were a kid, do you remember being disappointed that you could not be at school instead of on vacation? Even on our best family vacation this year (where he was having a great time), our son could not wait to get back to Teacher Smith's class.

■ How many of you had a teacher growing up who took a personal interest in the well-being of all his/her students, including their psychological and physical health as well as their scholastic achievement? Teacher Smith is very effectively part-parent, part-big brother, part-teacher, part-disciplinarian and part-empathetic listener, helper and coach.

■ When there are special events — the December holidays, Valentine's Day, Teacher Smith's birthday — the students and parents consistently and voluntarily go above and beyond to thank Teacher Smith for the teacher's compassion and service.

■ Teacher Smith is always innovative and creative — starting with the guitar/banjo that Teacher Smith uses to teach the students about 15 percent of the time. Having seen this firsthand, we can vouch that this is a very effective and unique way of imparting key lessons to our children while also helping our children to enjoy their learning experiences.



■ Like almost every kindergartener parent whom we know, we have had a few incidents this year (most minor, but one major) that required Teacher Smith to call us and work some things out. Teacher Smith's excellent and timely judgment, intellect, compassion, awareness/perceptiveness, confidentiality, fairness and professionalism have exceeded our expectations in every way.

### ■ ABOUT MEASURE C

Measure C is a mail-in vote. Ballots will be mailed out to residents in the Menlo Park City School District between April 5 and 12, and completed ballots must be returned by May 4 to be counted (postmarks do not count) — hence most organizations are recommending getting your completed ballots in the mail no later than April 28.

Measure C is a seven-year parcel tax of \$178 a year on the residents in the Menlo Park City School District. The annual cost will be adjusted for inflation. Very importantly, every dollar raised by Measure C will go directly to our Menlo Park schools and cannot be taken away by the state. A senior citizen exemption is available.

Since 2000 enrollment in the district has grown by over 30 percent (610 students) and is projected to grow an additional 14 percent (more than 300 students) in the next seven years. As a California basic aid school district, the district does not receive additional funding for each new student. These facts, coupled with the state budget cuts and lower property values (which leads to less property taxes being collected to fund education on a state-wide level), have led our district to project a \$2 million deficit for the 2010-11 school year. Hence the need for Measure C. One other key point: As we all know, keeping our vibrant Menlo Park schools strong and in demand also helps many of us keep our property values stronger and in higher demand, too.

For more information, see <http://www.keepourschoolsstrong.org>

■ Finally, our 5-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter don't always see eye-to-eye (imagine that), but on one thing they are both crystal clear: our son loves Teacher Smith and our daughter, who has met Teacher Smith and always hears about Teacher Smith from our son, is adamant that when she gets to kindergarten in 18 months, her teacher is going to be Teacher Smith.

For any of you who have read Robert Fulghum's 1989 classic, "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten," Teacher Smith brings all the best things about kindergarten to life for the students. It would be a catastrophic loss to us at our school to lose the valuable contributions, capabilities, creativity, caring, character and caliber of excellence of Teacher Smith.

If Measure C is not passed, there are a total of 14 Menlo Park teachers and three other staff members (including Teacher Smith) who may lose their jobs due to these budget cuts. In addition several valuable programs at all four schools in the district will be reduced or eliminated, such as hands-on science, music, art, foreign language, library, physical education and struggling-student programs.

So, to put it in comparative terms, there are many things that we and our families value each year: our Starbucks/Peet's beverages; dinners out with our spouses or families; occasional family vacations and outings; our extracurricular/sports activities for our children after school and on weekends; our Scouting memberships and activities; our Wii's, Xbox 360's and PlayStation 3's; our favorite newspapers and magazines; cable TV; and so on. For less money than we spend on each of these valuable items and activities — indeed, for less than 50 cents a day — we can vote yes on Measure C and enable our children to continue to get one of the best educations in this state and nation. We hope that you will join us in doing so.

Sean and Heidi Monahan live on Orange Avenue in Menlo Park.

not) not to attempt to sway the outcome in this way.

I applaud The Almanac for seeking to improve the transparency of the poll. I urge the Menlo Park City Council to disregard the results of this poll, and any poll, unless at a minimum they are provided with a written copy of the exact questions and responses, and can carefully consider how the wording may have affected the results.

**L. Peter Deutsch**  
Santa Margarita Avenue,  
Menlo Park

### A Tea Party pitch to the City Council

Editor:

(The following letter was addressed to the Menlo Park City Council.)

I ask that the council consider changes to your proposed union agreements which are now in negotiations.

First, retirement should not happen until age 65, and we should now consider a 403B type of arrangement instead of the cur-

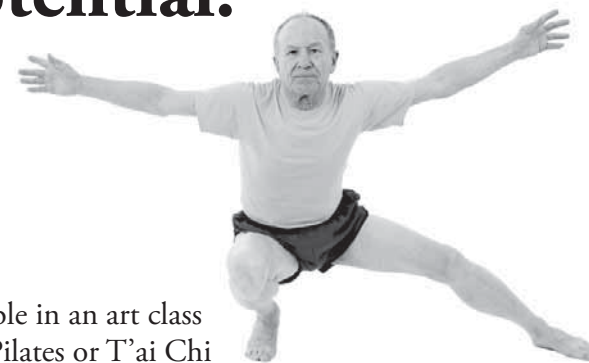
rent plan. People, whether municipal workers or not, need to be more responsible for themselves, as it is evident that the community can't afford to cover retired workers' expenses forever. Also, Menlo Park needs to outsource many of our services, including police and maintenance.

Last, but certainly not least, the council needs to address problems of the city, not the larger geographical agendas which some of you have brought to the council chambers. For example: no more telling Redwood City what to do; no more attempts to invade our homes in order to police water usage and no more trips to Washington, D.C., to meet with the soon to be vacationing Anna Eshoo when one could drive, walk or ride a bike to her Palo Alto office.

Those are starting points. The world is changing. Maybe Menlo Park needs its own Tea Party movement.

**Pat White**  
Santa Cruz Avenue,  
Menlo Park

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**48 Fairview Avenue, Atherton**

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**958 Hermosa Way, Menlo Park**

Gorgeous new 6-bedroom, 5-bath, and 2-half home built by Laurel Homes features hickory floors, fine stone finishes, a recreation/media room, wine cellar, fitness room, and an outdoor covered lanai; Menlo Park schools

OFFERED AT \$6,245,000



**96 Clay Drive, Atherton**

Classic new 5-bedroom home by Persicon Company – complemented by a guest house with kitchen – offers a resort-like setting with pool and spa on a level, one-acre lot in West Atherton; award-winning Las Lomas schools.

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**440 San Mateo Drive, Menlo Park**

Spacious, two-level modern Craftsman-style 5-bedroom, 3.5-bath home beautifully updated with oak floors, skylights, and abundant built-ins; spacious deck and private yard behind a gated entrance; excellent Menlo Park schools.

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**240 Princeton Road, Menlo Park**

Remodeled charming cottage-style 4-bedroom, 2-bath home in desirable Allied Arts; kitchen features superb finishes plus breakfast area; gated front yard is one of three outdoor entertaining areas; top-rated Menlo Park schools.

OFFERED AT \$1,775,000

To view these properties and others, please visit my website at [www.tomlemieux.com](http://www.tomlemieux.com)

