



INSIDE THIS ISSUE
Spring Home & Garden Design

The Almanac

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

APRIL 7, 2010 | VOL. 45 NO. 32



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Menlo Park unveils plan for downtown, El Camino

(See Section 2)



A plaza on a section of Santa Cruz Avenue is part of a long-term plan for Menlo Park's city center. *Sketch courtesy city of Menlo Park.*

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Man killed by train was investigated for involvement in Atherton elder abuse case

By Andrea Gemmet
Almanac Staff Writer

Jon Armstrong, the pedestrian who died after being hit by a train on Friday, April 2, in San Bruno was a 52-year-old Menlo Park resident who was being investigated by the Atherton Police Department on suspicion of abusing an elderly Atherton woman.

He was hit at about 6:30 a.m. in the pedestrian crossing area at the north end of the San Bruno Caltrain station, Caltrain spokeswoman Christine Dunn said.

An autopsy was being performed, and a ruling on whether his death was a suicide is still pending, said a spokeswoman for the San Mateo County coroner's office on Monday, April 5.

Mr. Armstrong's death brings a sudden climax to a messy saga that has been talked about in Atherton for months. The story, involving a wealthy Atherton widow in failing health, allegations of undue influence, withheld

medical care and elder abuse, and a dramatic intervention by concerned friends, is being revealed through court documents in the civil conservatorship case.

In January, Mr. Armstrong was served with a temporary restraining order to keep him away from the 81-year-old alleged victim. A petition filed in San Mateo County Superior Court on Feb. 3 accuses Mr. Armstrong of financial and physical abuse. The victim is described in the documents as having a long history of alcoholism and bipolar disorder.

The petition to place the elderly woman's affairs under the supervision of a conservator alleges that Mr. Armstrong was "causing (the victim's) health to deteriorate toward death so that he could inherit her estate under documents he influenced her to prepare."

Mr. Armstrong's attorney, Daniel Barton, did not return The Almanac's telephone request for comment by the Monday press deadline.

Walter Shjeflo, the attorney

representing the victim's only child, said he's meeting with Mr. Armstrong's attorneys this week to assess the situation in light of Mr. Armstrong's death. "We're going to try to handle it in a fair and humane manner," he told The Almanac.

"It's a very sad situation. My condolences to Mr. Armstrong's family," said Atherton resident Jon Buckheit, who was appointed the elderly woman's temporary conservator by the court. "Whether this will have an impact on the future proceedings, it seems to me that Mr. Armstrong cannot, by nature of his death, continue to object. I will continue to cooperate and do what I can."

Sgt. Sherman Hall of the Atherton police department confirmed that he was in the midst of investigating a complaint of elder abuse involving fraud through theft and deceit, as well as abuse through deprivation of medical care. With Mr.

See **ARMSTRONG**, page 16

CALLING ON THE ALMANAC

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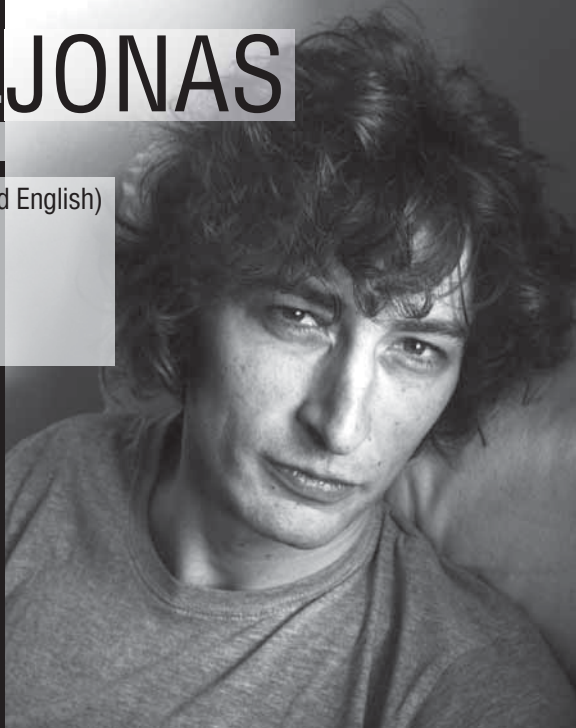
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DANIEL JONAS

DLCL WRITER IN RESIDENCE

Poetry Reading (Bilingual in Portuguese and English)
 Tuesday, April 13, 5:00-7:00 p.m.
 Pigott Hall (Bldg. 260), Room 216
 Stanford University's Main Quad
 Refreshments at 5:00; Reading at 5:30

Daniel Jonas, of Portugal, has published four collections of poems including *Os Fantasmas Inquilinos* (The Phantom Tenants) and *Sonótono* (Dreamtone), which was awarded the P.E.N. prize in 2008. He has translated into Portuguese Shakespeare, Waugh, Huysmans, Pirandello, Milton and Auden and is now working on a translation of selected poems by William Wordsworth. In 2008, he debuted as a playwright with the play *Nenhures* (Nowhere) for Teatro Bruto. He has been working with the S. João National Theatre in Porto, and he has co-directed the dramaturgy of the plays *The Merchant of Venice* and the stage reading of *Paradise Lost*.



Presented by the Division of Literatures, Cultures, and Languages (DLCL) at Stanford University.
 Contact info: dianejak@stanford.edu or 650-725-8620
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CITY OF MENLO PARK MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT PROPOSING WATER RATE INCREASES

COMMUNITY MEETING

APRIL 21, 2010

6:30-8:00 P.M.

**BURGESS RECREATION CENTER, ROOM 118
700 ALMA STREET, MENLO PARK**

The City of Menlo Park Municipal Water District purchases all of the water it provides to its customers from the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC). The SFPUC is planning, designing, and constructing multiple improvement projects to increase the safety and reliability of their Hetch Hetchy water supply system. In order to finance these improvements, the SFPUC has increased the wholesale water prices by more than 60% over the last four years and projects that their prices will double over the next five years. The City of Menlo Park Municipal Water District is proposing to phase in a series of water rate increases over the next five years as a result of these SFPUC wholesale rate increases.

The City's water rates currently consist of three components: (1) a fixed monthly charge based on meter size; (2) a capital surcharge per hundred cubic feet, ccf; and (3) a water usage charge based on metered water consumption. Rate increases are being considered for each component. The City will also be considering different rate structures for metered water consumption.

The City will hold a Community Meeting to present information and answer any questions relating to the proposed rate increases. Information will also be available at the meeting to assist customers who would like to reduce their water bills through water conservation.

Information is also available on the City's website at www.MenloPark.org or by phone at (650) 330-6740.

Sale Dates: April 7, 8, 9, 10

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Local News

MENLO PARK | AHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

Atherton poised to settle John Johns lawsuit

■ Former finance director to receive \$225,000 payment and good reference, and forfeit the right to sue Charles Marsala.

By Renee Batti

Almanac News Editor

The town of Atherton and former finance director John Johns are poised to sign an agreement awarding him about \$225,000 to settle a lawsuit he filed over his firing by the town in October 2007.

Mr. Johns confirmed rumors that have been buzzing through the town's rumor mill that the settlement agreement includes a provision that the town would rehire Mr. Johns, who would then resign. The town would also write him a letter of recommendation, he confirmed.

The settlement also stipulates that Mr. Johns would forfeit the right to sue the

town or Councilman Charles Marsala, who made public statements alleging misconduct by Mr. Johns. "Frankly, I had no interest in doing so," he told *The Almanac*.

But, he added, "one thing I insisted on was that I'd be allowed to speak publicly on my experiences," he said—a matter on the table during settlement negotiations.

Mr. Johns was fired after being put on administrative leave for two months while a private attorney hired by the town conducted an investigation into complaints against him. The hostile workplace charges were not substantiated, but the investigator's report painted Mr. Johns as a bully who may have improperly done outside work while on

the town's time.

Mr. Johns maintains that he was targeted for blowing the whistle on fiscal improprieties in Atherton's building and other departments. He has called the report from the investigation flawed and inaccurate.

In July 2008, following an investigation, the San Mateo County District Attorney's office declined to prosecute Mr. Johns on allegations that he used town computers or time that should have been spent working for the town to pursue outside jobs, actions that could constitute a theft or misuse of public funds.

The settlement with Mr. Johns would be the second large pay-out to a former employee the town has made in the last four and a half months. In November, the town signed a \$230,000 settlement agreement with former police officer Pilar

Ortiz-Buckley, who sued Atherton for sexual harassment by a town employee and for alleged retaliation for her complaining about the employee's alleged behavior.

Mr. Johns had filed an earlier "wrongful termination" lawsuit, and offered to settle the matter for a \$10,000 pay-out, he said. When the town refused, he abandoned the lawsuit, but filed another after a criminal investigation by the San Mateo County District Attorney's Office was dropped.

Regarding the as-yet unsigned settlement agreement, Mr. Johns said in an e-mail that he is "grateful for the official recognition by the town for the good work that I did. I am in private practice now. The skill I acquired and the lessons

See **JOHNS**, page 8

Mediation fails to restart talks

By Renee Batti

Almanac News Editor

The March 25 mediation session between the Menlo Park Fire Protection District and its firefighters ended in fizzled hopes that the two parties would resolve enough differences to return to the bargaining table, according to Chief Harold Schapelhouman of the fire district.

"Unfortunately, disappointingly, mediation was not successful," Mr. Schapelhouman said. "There is no plan at this point to have another mediation session."

The firefighters have been working without a contract since July 2008. Negotiations ceased in May or June 2009, and on June 15, the firefighters' association filed a grievance with the state's Public Employee Relations Board (PERB) alleging bad faith and "regressive" bargaining on the part of the district.

Last week's mediation session was an attempt "to go back to the negotiations table," said John Wurdinger, a district fire captain who represents the firefighters. "But we don't plan on meeting with them again at this point in time."

Chief Schapelhouman said the decision not to continue with mediation was "their decision, not ours. I personally didn't feel we were through with mediation."

See **MP FIRE**, page 8



Business was slow in Menlo Park in 2009, but storefronts stayed occupied in the downtown area. **Linda Gullotta**, visiting from Connecticut, peers into a boutique on Santa Cruz Avenue.

Photo by Michelle Le/
The Almanac

Data shows how local business slowed

By Sean Howell

Almanac Staff Writer

Employment was down in Menlo Park in 2009. So were sales-tax revenues, the amount of venture capital funds invested in local businesses, and office space occupancy rates.

Just about any way you measure it, in fact, business activity fell off from the previous year. That's according to the

city's business development department, which recently put together a presentation on the issue for the City Council.

"Each person has their own charts or indicators that they think are telling, everyone is trying to read the tea leaves," David Johnson, the city's business development manager, said in an interview. "This is our local version of that."

The data in the city's Power-

Point presentation was drawn from numerous sources, including federal agencies, such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics; PricewaterhouseCoopers Money Tree Report for venture capital investing; and a survey by the city's business development department and information from Cornish & Carey for office vacancy rates.

According to the presentation, businesses citywide shed

864 jobs from the end of 2008 to October 2009, and the city's unemployment rate rose from 3.8 percent to 6.9 percent. Its office vacancy rate was the highest it had been since 2005, but wasn't as high as it had been in the years following the dot-com bust.

Venture capital investments in city businesses fell from

See **BUSINESS**, page 8



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Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

Easter parade

A little girl looks into the Easter window display at Walgreens on Santa Cruz Avenue in Menlo Park.

Second meeting on councilman's 'improper' conduct set for April 7

By Renee Batti

Almanac News Editor

A second special Atherton City Council meeting to discuss “alleged improper official conduct and allegations that council member (Charles) Marsala is not a resident of the town” is set for Wednesday, April 7, at 6 p.m. in the council chambers, 94 Ashfield Road in Atherton.

A meeting on the topic was convened Friday afternoon, March 26, but was canceled for lack of a quorum. Only Mayor Kathy McKeithen and Councilman Jim Dobbie showed up, and those two council members held an informal meeting to hear from residents who showed up.

Mr. Marsala has been harshly criticized for asking resident Jon Buckheit, who is suing the town, for a \$500,000 loan in August of last year. He also has been accused of no longer living in Atherton, although council members are legally required to live in the towns they serve.

Mr. Marsala is renting out his Emilie Avenue home to a Stanford Hospital patient and her family, and said the family needs to remain in the house at least through part of April. He said he has been living with friends in town.

Mr. Marsala said he didn't know Mr. Buckheit was planning to sue the town when he asked him to help him secure a loan, although Mr. Buckheit had filed a legal claim against the town on April 9 2009. Filing a claim against a public agency is the legally required first

ATHERTON

step before filing a lawsuit.

In an interview with The Almanac, Mr. Marsala said the claim didn't come before the council until mid-July, and the council voted unanimously to reject it. Because it was on the consent calendar, there was no discussion of it, and “I considered it closed,” he said.

According to City Council agendas from 2009, the council met in closed sessions to discuss legal actions filed by Mr. Buckheit against the town on April 15, May 20, June 17, and July 15.

Mr. Buckheit filed a lawsuit against the town in federal court on Oct. 20, alleging police misconduct during a domestic dispute at his house in 2008 that resulted in his arrest. He was never charged with a crime, and recently won a court declaration of factual innocence in the matter.

Town attorney Wynne Furth, in an analysis of questions surrounding Mr. Marsala's loan request and residency prepared for the April 7 special meeting, said that Mr. Marsala asked Mr. Buckheit for financial assistance in August 2009. “The recession had led banks to change their lending practices and Mr. Marsala's usual sources of commercial lending were unavailable,” she wrote. “The proposed loan was a four-year loan secured by Mr. Marsala's house at an interest rate of 8 percent.”

In a Sept. 23 e-mail, “Mr. Buckheit informed Mr. Marsala that he could not assist him with

a loan or arranging a loan,” Ms. Furth wrote.

In her analysis, Ms. Furth detailed two laws that govern conflict of interest on the part of public officials: the Political Reform Act and Government Code Section 1090. The laws deal primarily with whether the official has a financial interest.

“Based on the information that Council Member Marsala has provided, he did not violate any conflict of interest rules because he had no financial interest in any of the decisions in which he participated,” she wrote.

Mr. Marsala has stated “that he will recuse himself from future discussions concerning Mr. Buckheit's lawsuits,” she wrote. “We believe this is a sound position. Because council members are elected to make decisions, recusal is not something to be done lightly. However, the principle of avoiding both actual and apparent conflicts of interest takes precedence.”

The analysis is an expanded version of a summary Ms. Furth presented at the special March 26 meeting that was canceled for lack of a quorum. It is a summary of a thicker document provided to council members, marked “confidential.”

Mayor Kathy McKeithen said she'd like to see the more detailed review made available to the public. “It's very important to the town,” she said. “I think the public has a right to know what is in that document. It was prepared at taxpayer expense, and I don't see any reason why it should

remain confidential.”

Ms. McKeithen has been a regular critic of Mr. Marsala for years, and led the charge to schedule the special meetings to meet what she characterized as the public's demand for the council to address the questions surrounding Mr. Marsala.

Another critic, former Atherton finance director John Johns, said he intends to call for Mr. Marsala's

resignation at the April 7 meeting.

Mr. Johns, fired from his job in October 2007, sued the town for wrongful termination and is on the verge of signing a settlement agreement that would award him \$225,000 and other concessions.

During the town's investigation of Mr. Johns, Councilman Marsala made a number of public statements alleging wrongdoing on the part of Mr. Johns. ■

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Mediation fails to restart talks

MP FIRE

continued from page 5

The district board will meet in closed session on April 20 to discuss the status of the impasse, and give staff direction on how to proceed, Mr. Schapelhouman said.

The grievance

The PERB grievance was composed of three general areas, one of which was recently dismissed by the regional attorney reviewing the complaint, and two of which were allowed to go forward to a hearing by PERB, according to Rick Bolanos, the district's attorney for labor negotiations.

He said the green-lighting of the two elements of the grievance wasn't a ruling on their merits; rather, it means that the allegations deserve a hearing by PERB to determine if they are true.

Mr. Wurdinger said firefighters wanted to try mediation rather than wait for a PERB hearing because of the length of time required for the process, which can be well over a year. "Our goal is not to win the PERB case; our goal is to get a contract," he said.

He noted that firefighters haven't had a salary increase for nearly three years, and have had no increase in medical benefits for nearly five years.

The district has said the firefighters were asking for substantial raises in each year of a multi-year contract, including an 11 percent raise in the first year. Before talks broke off last year, the district was proposing to postpone pay raises until this year.

Mr. Wurdinger said last week that the firefighters "are looking for contract language, not necessarily a dollar amount."

He pointed to a recent Wall Street Journal article on the district's strong financial position. "If the fire district was under financial hardship, they could legally (freeze salaries)," he said. "If the fire district was under financial hardship, we'd let them do that."

But the article said the district is "in good financial shape. You can't have it both ways," he said.

The district has curtailed spending since the economic downturn in late 2008, postponing capital purchases and construction. It has also guarded its \$2.5 million reserve, considering it "a fund of last resort," Chief Schapelhouman told the Almanac last year.

Property tax revenue has been flat as a result of the recession and falling housing prices, and the district's employee costs are rising in proportion to the overall budget. ■



Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

View of the Rosewood Sand Hill campus from the balcony of Madera restaurant.

Rosewood hotel celebrates one year in business

By Sean Howell

Almanac Staff Writer

A year since the Rosewood Sand Hill resort opened in Menlo Park, things couldn't be better, according to Managing Director Mike Casey.

Mr. Casey's interview with The Almanac was brief, but it was long on superlatives. "This has been the fastest year of my hotel life," he said. "It's been such a sensational success that every month is busier than the one before."

He declined to provide many specific details, but did say that hotel occupancy rates have improved each month since it opened. The resort began with 250 employees, and now boasts 350, he said.

While the city of Menlo Park does not disclose tax revenues generated by specific businesses, its hotel tax receipts increased by \$140,000 in the first quarter after Rosewood opened, and by \$256,000 in the third quarter.

As a point of reference, the latter number is more than the

downtown area generated in sales tax in the same quarter.

A consultant hired by the city had estimated the hotel would produce \$1.1 million in tax revenue in its first year of operation.

"It's met all of our expectations, and then some," Mr. Casey said, acknowledging that those expectations were informed by the regional and global economic picture.

The biggest surprise has been the hotel's ability to tap the "leisure" market, according to Mr. Casey. He quoted from a

thank-you letter from an Atherton family that had just come across his desk. The family spent a weekend at the resort, saying they felt as if they had visited a faraway land.

"We have a product that is very accessible, people can get away without investing the time required to go elsewhere," he said. "You literally feel like you've gone somewhere, with very little time and effort required."

"We're delighted to be here, and we're looking forward to year two." ■

BUSINESS

continued from page 5

\$166 million in the third quarter of 2008 to a low of \$49.5 million in the second quarter of 2009.

There were, however, a few bright spots in the PowerPoint presentation. Vacancies along Santa Cruz Avenue were only about 7 percent as of early this year, and only about 11 percent of El Camino Real properties were unoccupied, including "chronically vacant" buildings such as the abandoned car lots.

A DNA sequencing company with headquarters in Menlo Park, Pacific Biosciences, drew a \$68 million investment from a venture capital fund in 2009. The firm plans to move into a 30,000-square-foot headquarters currently under construction in east Menlo Park.

Revenue from the city's hotel tax grew steadily quarter-by-quarter, as business improved at the recently opened Rosewood

Sand Hill hotel.

Office vacancies were highest in the "light industrial" area east of U.S. 101, which is in the midst of a slow transition to support more "life sciences" and medical device companies. The city hopes to begin work soon on a master plan to enable several major property owners to redevelop their land.

The city is also in talks with several electric car manufacturers looking to open an assembly plant,

JOHNS

continued from page 5

I learned as Atherton's finance director have proven invaluable to me in this new life."

He also praised friends, supporters — even his wife — for standing by him throughout a painful ordeal. Among those he named is Mayor Kathy McKeithen, who, he said, "exercised moral courage, who risked her own political career by issuing a

sworn declaration in support of my challenge to the validity of the investigative report" on him.

Mr. Johns served as the town's top financial officer from November 2001 until he was fired in October 2007 by Atherton's interim city manager, Wende Protzman. His public profile rose during the 2006 audits of the Atherton Building Department and the concurrent investigation of the department by the San Mateo

County Civil Grand Jury.

The town has yet to determine the costs of fighting Mr. Johns' lawsuit, according to Assistant City Manager Eileen Wilkerson, who explained that City Manager Jerry Gruber has been working on tallying the payments from various attorneys involved in the case, but has not finished the project. ■

Staff writer Andrea Gemmet contributed to this report.

Police report string of property crimes

Criminals got away with goods and cash valued at around \$18,000 in a string of Menlo Park property crimes between March 26 and April 1, according to the Menlo Park Police Department.

Among the incidents:

■ At Applewood Pizza at the corner of Menlo Avenue and El Camino Real, thieves broke into the office and stole a \$300 safe

containing \$5,400 and tampered with cash register and a TV.

■ At the Rosewood Sand Hill Hotel, a guest reported missing a pair of gold diamond earrings, a gold pendant, and a platinum necklace on March 31, for a total loss of \$2,350.

■ At BoardVantage, a corporate-security firm on Marsh Road, burglars broke in and

stole two laptop computer valued at \$2,600.

■ At Bayfront Park, someone broke into a vehicle and stole a purse with a wallet, cell phone and cash for a total loss of \$5,350.

Though not a property crime, per se, a victim in the 300 block of Terminal Avenue lost \$7,600 to identity theft, police said.

High school district refines initial offer to Everest

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

The new and “final” offer of high school district facilities to Everest (charter) Public High School for the 2010-11 school year is a refinement and upgrade to the Sequoia Union High School District’s first offer and includes an openness to discuss alternatives.

The new proposal, delivered by Assistant Superintendent James Lianides to the governing board on March 31, would still have Everest’s 200 freshmen and sophomores on the campus of Woodside High School rather than Everest’s preference for the campus of Sequoia High School in Redwood City, and the tenancy would still be for one year only.

But Everest would have more room — the equivalent of nine and a half classrooms instead of the first offer’s eight — would not need to set up its own library and media center, and would not have to provide its own physical education equipment.

Everest rejected the board’s first offer on March 1 and has until May 1 to respond to this one, with a two-week window to propose an alternative.

Everest, in its first year of a two-year lease in an office building in Redwood City, is entitled to facilities because the Sequoia district, in its recent construction bond campaigns, employed a provision allowing passage with less than the

two-thirds majority normally required for tax increases.

The Summit Institute, Everest’s parent corporation, is suing the Sequoia district over an allegedly illegal offer of facilities in East Palo Alto last year.

The Woodside campus offer includes three classrooms plus offices in the B wing, three classrooms in the E wing, and labs in the C and H wings.

As for the library, gyms and other non-classroom spaces, a formula would allow Everest use of each of these facilities for about 30 minutes a day. In aligning schedules, Everest may end up with the first 30 minutes of the day or an hour every other day, Mr. Lianides said.

“This particular offer reflects the work of staff to provide a (legally) compliant offer,” Mr. Lianides said. “It meets the letter and spirit of the law (and) is really attempting to provide reasonably equivalent facilities.”

Alternatives

The Sequoia board debated then unanimously agreed to a proposal by member Chris Thomsen to discuss with Everest alternatives to moving to Woodside — such as staying put — if the discussion occurs within two weeks.

These legally required first-of-the-month offers and counter-offers is a “back-and-forth that is very limited,” Mr. Thomsen noted. “The law allows two parties to reach an alternative agreement if both parties are agreeable.”

Mr. Lianides told The Almanac that he sent this proposal to Everest via U.S. mail as a cover letter with a package made up of another letter and the offer itself. They were expected to arrive on April 2 or 5.

This package, without the alternatives-discussion language but with other board-proposed edits, was e-mailed to Everest chief negotiator Diane Tavenner on March 31. The “alternatives” language was unavailable in electronic form, Mr. Lianides said.

Sequoia attorney David Levy said in an interview that the first letter was more of a formal document, and that a second letter was “a cleaner way of doing it.”

Ms. Tavenner would likely hear about it anyway because Everest Executive Director Jon Deane attended the board meeting, Mr. Lianides and board President Olivia Martinez told The Almanac.

Discussing alternatives lets the camel’s nose under the tent, board member Lorraine Rumley warned. “As soon as (Everest officials) read that, they’re not going to go past the first paragraph,” she said.

But as it stands, Ms. Martinez said, the offer has “a very high impact” on Woodside High.

Everest knew what it was getting into when it asked for campus space, board member Don Gibson said.

Asked to comment, Mr. Deane noted that the offer is “unclear” on several details but that the “chance to continue the dialog is a good sign.” ■



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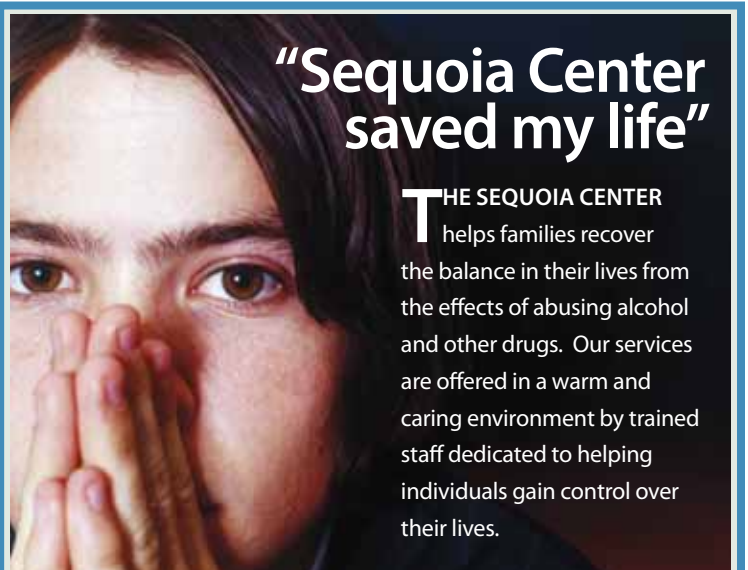
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and Saturday, Apr. 24, 10:30 a.m. –
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6:30 – 8 p.m.

Preparing for Baby
Tuesday, Apr. 13, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Introduction to Solids
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Menlo Park council may vote on terms for proposed Bohannon development

One of the largest land development proposals in Menlo Park history will be the sole item of regular business on the agenda for Menlo Park's City Council at its meeting Tuesday, April 6.

The council is expected to weigh in on a "term sheet" negotiated between the city and the Bohannon Development Co., outlining the conditions under which a development proposal for three eight-story office buildings and a 230-room hotel near Bayfront Expressway and Marsh Road would be allowed to proceed.

In exchange for major zoning concessions, the Bohannon company has agreed to completely offset the greenhouse gas emissions of the buildings, to reduce vehicle trips to and

from the site by 17 percent, to guarantee a certain amount of tax revenue for the city, and to provide a flat payment of \$1 million, among other things.

The council may decide whether to proceed with the approval process, or to renegotiate terms with the Bohannon company.

The city has also released a final environmental impact report, revising sections of the report and responding to comments from residents and regional agencies.

Go to is.gd/bfZ9C to view the list of terms.

The council meeting will begin at 5:30 p.m. in the council chambers in the Civic Center complex, with a 90-minute presentation on the project. The regular meeting will start at 7 p.m.

Solar seller forced to repay victims

By Jocelyn Dong
Palo Alto Weekly

Richard and Esther Sirinsky wanted to do a good turn for the environment. So in 2008, they decided to install solar panels on the roof of their Menlo Park home. They called a few companies and settled on Beohana Solar Corporation of San Jose.

Esther Sirinsky was particularly impressed with CEO Peter Be, who seemed knowledgeable about the panels he was selling.

"He had the product we wanted. He was very personable. His price was in the proper range," she said.

But unfortunately for the Sirinskys, Mr. Be's price turned out to be all too high. After taking their deposit, he failed to deliver the system, first stalling, then telling the Sirinskys the product was no longer available, according to Ms. Sirinsky.

When the Sirinskys demanded their deposit back, he sent only a fraction, Ms. Sirinsky recalled Tuesday.

The Sirinskys were not alone, as the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office later discovered.

Mr. Be, 42, was recently sentenced to eight months in county jail and ordered to pay restitution of \$178,146 to 62 victims of his operation.

Most had paid Beohana Solar a \$1,000 deposit, but a few paid between \$2,000 and \$8,000, according to Lisa Schon, deputy district attorney with the county's Consumer Protection Unit.

One customer, a hotel owner,

had given Beohana \$105,000, Ms. Schon said.

Mr. Be was convicted of four felony counts of diversion of construction funds and a misdemeanor count of contracting without a license. He represented himself as a licensed contractor, which he was not, according to a press release from the District Attorney's Office.

The case was investigated by the Contractors State Licensing Board, which licenses and regulates California's construction industry. The probe was "crucial in bringing justice to consumers who became victims of Mr. Be's crimes," District Attorney Dolores Carr stated in the press release.

Like other victims, the Sirinskys had called Beohana after seeing a newspaper advertisement. The ad claimed that after a 12-year lease, the solar system would be "FREE." However, Beohana's written contract stated in fine print that the systems would not be free but that homeowners would be required to pay for the equipment at fair market value, according to the District Attorney's Office.

Mr. Be's sentencing brings little comfort to Esther Sirinsky, whose faith in her ability to read people's character has been shaken.

"It's been a lot of aggravation. Plus the fact that he destroyed my self-confidence in judging people," she said. "It's very upsetting."

"I think that somebody like him deserves to get punishment and not get away with it."



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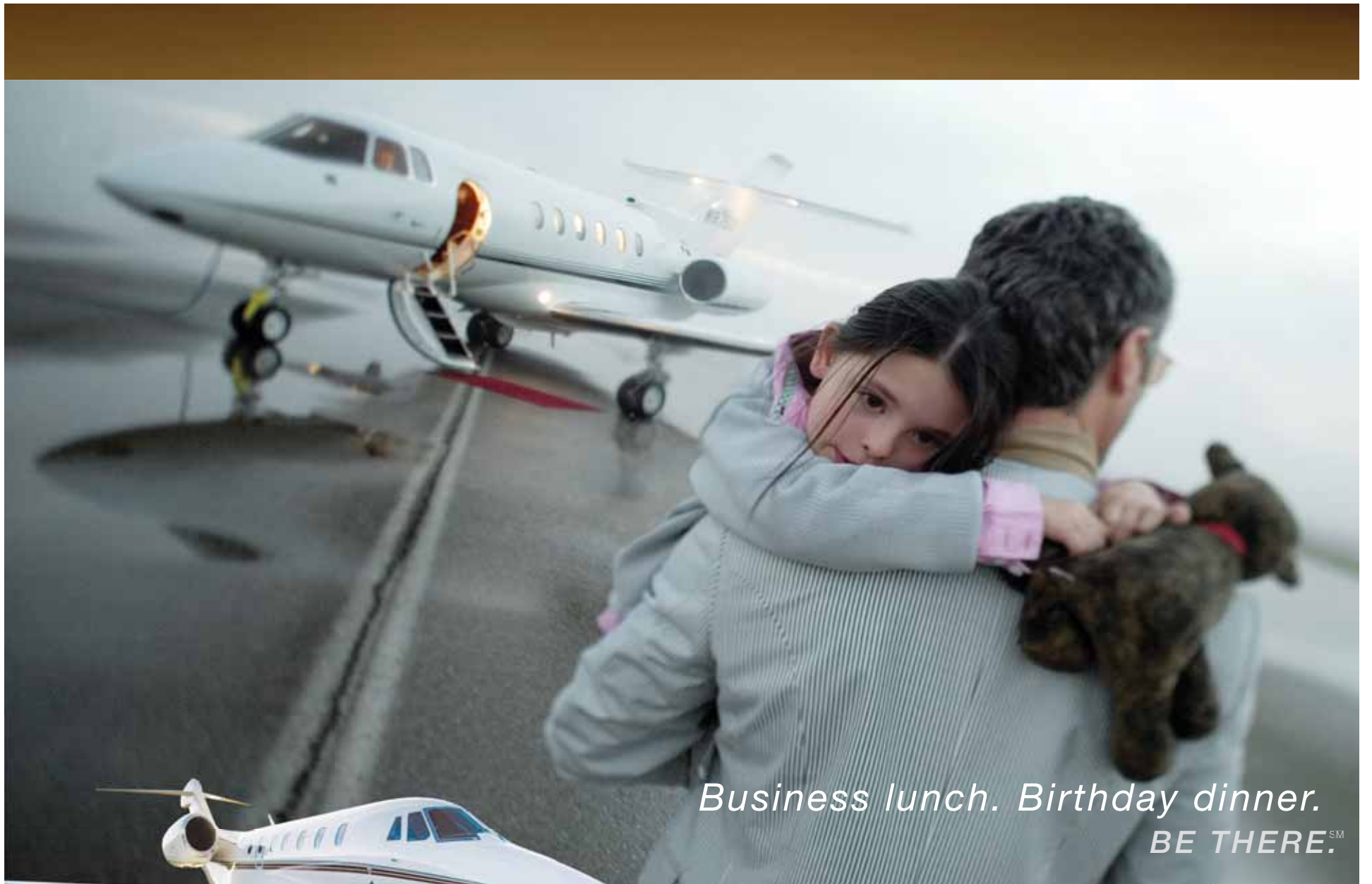
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Caltrain deficit could force service cuts

Faced with a staggering deficit, Caltrain will consider cutting its service significantly in the next 15 months, spokeswoman Tasha Bartholomew said March 31.

She said the agency is losing money due to a combination of factors, including the loss of \$10 million in state funding for each of the past three years and declining ridership, which accounts for 40 percent of the agency's revenue.

"Caltrain never had a dedicated funding source," Ms. Bartholomew said. "We've been running on a deficit for quite some time, and now everything is coming to a head."

She said changes, which could

include cutting midday, late night and weekend service, would take effect by June 2011. The service cuts could be handled in a number of ways and could be implemented in one sweep or gradually.

At a Caltrain board meeting March 31, members said they wanted to discuss the issue further before making any decisions. One member recommended creating a three-member subcommittee to explore options.

Caltrain has a \$97 million annual budget and faces a \$2.7 million deficit for the current fiscal year. The deficit could balloon to about \$30 million, Ms. Bartholomew said.

She said Caltrain receives \$40 million in annual funding from the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, and the San Mateo County Transit District, or SamTrans, which serves as the managing agency for Caltrain.

Funding from all three entities may be drastically reduced in the near future, she said.

"We all have the same problem," she said. "We're all losing money, and we're all just trying to figure out how to function."

Bay City News Service.

Community 'Rebuilding Day' set for April 24

Rebuilding Together Peninsula, the organization that mobilizes thousands of volunteers to repair community facilities and the homes of low-income people, will hold its annual Rebuilding Day on Saturday, April 24.

Some 3,500 volunteers from companies and community organizations will work on 80 projects in 14 cities on the Peninsula, including four projects in Menlo Park, said Kate Comfort Harr, development director for Rebuilding Together Peninsula.

About 100 volunteers are expected to participate in a

major repainting project at Belle Haven School, a K-8 elementary school in Menlo Park, where most of the students are from low-income families.

Last year, Rebuilding Together volunteers started repainting the exterior of the school. This year's goal is to complete that effort, painting about 11,000 square feet of surface area, Ms. Harr said.

The volunteers are from the Kiwanis Club of Palo Alto and BioCentury Publications, as well as Kiwanis-sponsored youth groups from Palo Alto and Gunn high schools and Stanford University. The workers will be

augmented by volunteers from the National Charity League and parents of Belle Haven students.

One of the Menlo Park homes set to be repaired is on Carlton Avenue. The volunteers are sponsored by the Menlo Park Fire Protection District and the Kiwanis Club of Menlo Park, Ms. Harr said.

Volunteers will use green practices, such as reducing waste, and help homeowners reduce energy by insulating water heaters and weatherstripping windows and doors.

Go to rebuildingtogether-peninsula.org for more information.

Program on removing Searsville Dam

This story was submitted by Matt Stoecker,

The Beyond the Searsville Dam Coalition will present a slideshow Tuesday, April 13, on the benefits of removing Stanford's Searsville Dam. The program will start at 7 p.m. at Patagonia's Palo Alto store, 525 Alma St.

Stanford University's Searsville Dam, built in 1891 to supplement drinking water from Crystal Springs Lake, never served that purpose, and no longer serves a critical need. Its reservoir is now largely filled with silt.

Moreover, the aging dam poses a liability in the event of a major earthquake, blocks annual runs of steelhead trout from access to their spawning grounds, and compromises the ecology of the San Francisquito watershed.

Removing this obsolete concrete wall provides an opportunity to revive submerged wetlands, help

restore threatened steelhead to their ancestral habitat, and provide natural flood protection benefits.

Go to beyondsearsvilledam.org for more information.

Community meetings on higher education

The public is invited to community coffee meetings with Assemblyman Ira Ruskin on Saturday, April 10, in Palo Alto and Los Altos. The topic is the work of the Joint Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education, which Mr. Ruskin co-chairs.

The meetings will be held from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday, April 10, at the Palo Alto City Council Chambers, 250 Hamilton Ave., and from 3 to 4:30 p.m. the same day at Brian's restaurant at the Rancho Shopping Center, 680 Fremont Ave. in Los Altos. For more information, call 691-2121.

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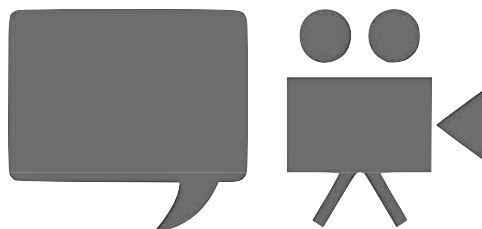
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M-A senior cast in A.C.T. play

Forrest Fraser Tiffany II of Menlo Park plays Jimmy in the American Conservatory Theater's world premiere "Riot," which runs April 1-17 in the Zeum Theater in San Francisco's Yerba Buena Gardens.

Forrest, a senior at Menlo-Atherton High School, is one of several high school students in the production set in a clinic for emotionally disturbed teens.

Last summer he was cast in the workshop for the new play, which took place at the Royal Bath Theatre in Bath, England.

"Riot" by Irish playwright Ursula Rani Sarma is the newest commission from A.C.T.'s partnership with

the Royal Bath Theatre.

Forrest, the son of Terri and Joseph Tiffany, has been performing with A.C.T. since he was 9, appearing for several seasons in "A Christmas Carol."

He attended Phillips Brooks School and Hillview Middle School before entering Menlo-Atherton. He has been accepted in the fine arts acting program at Emerson College in Boston this fall.



Forrest Fraser Tiffany II

Draeger's program on organic foods

Draeger's Market in San Mateo will hold two free panel discussions Sunday, April 11, on the benefits of organic fruits and vegetables, according to Draeger's spokesperson Mary Claire DeSoto.

One panel will be made up of local organic farmers, who will discuss their methods of farming and the nutritional value of organic produce. On the other panel, nutritionists will discuss the scientific bases for the claims that organic foods are more healthful.

The discussions will be held at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. at Draeger's cooking school at the store, located at 222 E. 4th Ave. in San Mateo.

Two presentations, including one on the Jelich Ranch by farmer Terence Welch, will be given at noon in the private dining room at the store.

Go to is.gd/b19uL (case-sensitive) for more information and to sign up. Reservations are required for the panel discussions.

Continued from previous page

children's books, bird watching, and daily walks with his wife through their suburban neighborhood, say family members.

He is survived by his wife, Lauren; children Cindy Salavantis, John Regan, James Regan and Elizabeth Regan; sisters Muffy Bui of Menlo Park and Jan Difur of Angels Camp; brother Bill Regan of San Mateo; and two grandchildren.

Ethel Toby

Woodside resident

Ethel Medhurst Toby died March 19 at her home in Woodside.

Born in San Mateo in 1917, Ms. Toby spent her childhood in the

town of Caspar, north of Mendocino, until returning to San Mateo to attend high school.

She married Daniel Toby in 1941. While living in San Mateo, she spent many years working in the family manufacturing business.

For the past 11 years, she lived in a small house next door to her daughter, Diane Toby, and her husband, Jeff Lea, in Woodside. Her green thumb was legendary and she was most at home in her garden, say family members. She was a soft-spoken woman with a quick mind and strong opinions, they say.

She is survived by her daughters, Diane Toby of Woodside and Louise Toby of Baltimore; and four grandchildren.

Redwood team wins national All Net basketball title

This story was submitted by Mark Daschbach, assistant coach, Redwood 6th grade All Net Boys team.

The Redwood 6th Grade All Net Boys team, coached by John Paye, won the National Junior Basketball All Net Tournament, held in Los Angeles March 27-28.

The roster is made up of nine players from Atherton, Menlo Park, Portola Valley, and San Carlos. The team competed in the top division of the national tournament and claimed the championship with a win over Newport Mesa in the title game March 28.

Andrew Daschbach, Mason Randall, Curtis Witt and Jared Lucian provided pinpoint outside shooting throughout the tournament, including 27 three-point field goals in Redwood's



Championship team members and coaches: back row, from left, Assistant Coach Mark Daschbach, Jared Lucian, Andrew Daschbach, Mason Randall, Justin Harmon, Kevin Kahrman, Scotty Harris, Curtis Witt and Head Coach John Paye; front row, from left, Nicolas Simbeck and Nick O'Donnell.

three victories on Championship Sunday.

Scotty Harris, Nicolas Simbeck and Nick O'Donnell were instrumental with their strong forward play and inside/outside scoring.

Centers Kevin Kahrman and Justin Harmon contributed inside scoring and powerful rebounding.

John Paye is an Atherton resident and Menlo School coach.

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Report to examine high-speed rail options

A report will be released April 8 analyzing alternative alignments for the San Jose-to-San Francisco segment of the proposed high-speed rail system.

Prepared by the staff of the California High-Speed Rail Authority, the report will include the Menlo Park and Atherton parts of the route.

“This information should include much more detailed analyses of the pros and cons of the potential alignment alterna-

BRIEFS

tive designs (‘at grade,’ elevated, and tunnel/trench) for the HSR tracks,” said Menlo Park Councilman John Boyle in a Sunday e-mail.

The report will be presented at the authority’s board meeting, starting at 9 a.m. Thursday, April 8, at the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors’ Chambers at 70 West Hedding St. in San Jose.

“We’ll no doubt have follow-up forums and events held locally, but the first look at this information will be available to the public at this board meeting,” Mr. Boyle said.

Board asked to rescind appointment

Atherton resident and open-government advocate Peter Carpenter has made good on his threat to try to force the govern-

ing board of the Sequoia Union High School District to rescind its appointment of Assistant Superintendent James Lianides to succeed Superintendent Patrick Gemma, who announced plans to retire in June.

In an April 5 letter to the board, attorney James M. Chadwick of the Menlo Park firm Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton requests that the board rescind its actions of Feb. 24, when it voted 4-1 in closed session to limit the candidate search to district employees, and the subsequent appointment of Mr. Lianides on March 17.

Mr. Chadwick cites cases from the 1980s to support a claim that the state’s open-government law, the Brown Act, allows legislative bodies to discuss individuals in closed session but not matters of process.

Attorneys for the Sequoia district have said that the district’s actions were legal.

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

Theft report: Suspect in London, England, used e-mail and Craigslist to steal \$2,200 from victim, 200 block of Atherton Ave., March 26.

Residential burglary reports:

- Attempted break-in, Stockbridge Ave., March 30.
- Window pried open and flat-screen TV stolen, first block of Watkins Ave., April 1.

Elder abuse report: First block of Parker Ave., March 28.

MENLO PARK

Auto burglary reports:

- Briefcase valued at \$900 stolen. It contained personal information, credit cards, stamps and gold necklace, 4000 block of Campbell Ave., March 26.
- Window smashed and Apple iPod music player valued at \$350 stolen, O’Connor and Euclid avenues, March 29.

Grand theft report: Cash in amount of \$640 stolen from office, 2800 block of Sand Hill Road, March 26.

Fraud reports:

- ID theft, reported at main police station on Laurel St., March 29.
- Forged check received, 100 block of O’Connor St., March 29.
- Collection notice received from unauthorized account in victim’s name, 2100 block of Monterey Ave., March 30.
- Unauthorized use of victim’s Social Security number, 1100 block of Madera Ave., March 30.

ARMSTRONG

continued from page 3

Armstrong’s death, the criminal case no longer has a suspect, he told The Almanac.

It’s not the first time Atherton police were called to investigate the situation. In 2007, a complaint of elder abuse made by the victim’s daughter was determined to be unfounded by the Atherton police.

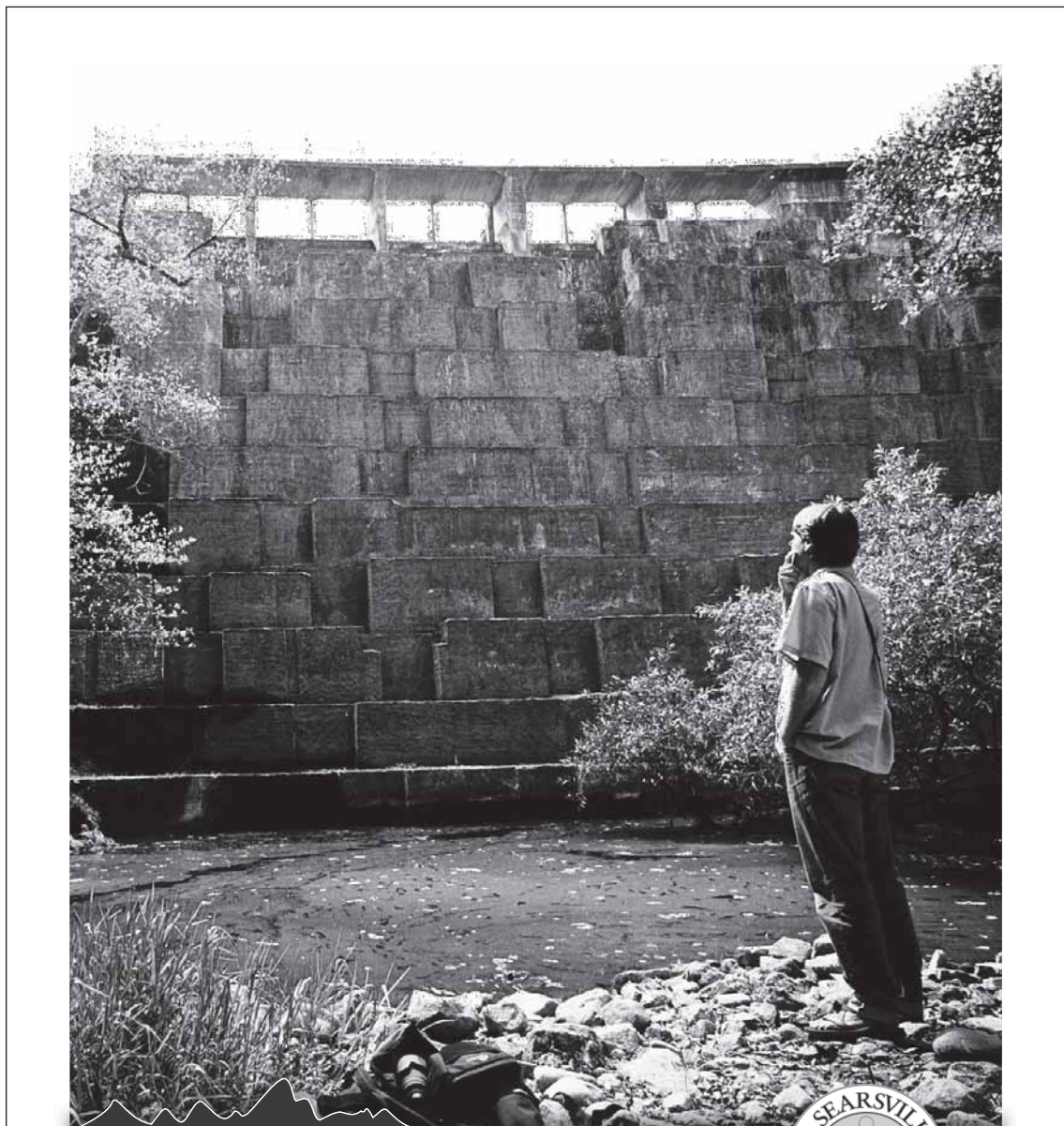
Another complaint, this time by the victim’s doctor, Thomas Tayeri, was made in June 2009. Dr. Tayeri told police that he believed Mr. Armstrong was responsible for the elderly woman’s poor physical condition. “It appeared that Armstrong controlled (the victim), and was trying to speed up (the victim’s) death,” according to the report.

The investigation by the Atherton Police Department was reviewed by a prosecutor in the

San Mateo County District Attorney’s Office, according to Steve Wagstaffe, chief deputy district attorney. “The evidence did not warrant a prosecution” because under the law, a person would have to be ruled incompetent in order to be a victim of the kind of abuse Mr. Armstrong was suspected of, and the woman had been determined to be competent at the time, Mr. Wagstaffe said.

Mr. Armstrong first met the elderly widow while he was working for Wells Fargo Bank four years ago, according to court documents. He was assigned to handle her accounts, and the two developed a relationship that Mr. Armstrong, in court documents, said was platonic, but that troubled the victim’s family and friends. Mr. Armstrong was fired by Wells Fargo in September 2007 for

Continued on next page

dammed if we don't

Join your neighbors at Patagonia’s Palo Alto store for a slide show presentation from Beyond Searsville Dam Coalition and special guests, plus refreshments, product giveaways and music from local bluegrass band Windy Hill.

Built 120 years ago, Stanford’s Searsville Dam no longer serves a critical need – and blocks annual runs of steelhead trout from reaching their spawning grounds. Removing it will revive submerged wetlands and provide natural flood protection benefits – as well as help restore steelhead.

For more information and to sign on in support of the coalition: visit beyondsearsvilleDam.org

JOIN US FOR THIS SPECIAL EVENT
APRIL 13, 7-9 PM, PATAGONIA PALO ALTO
525 Alma Street, Palo Alto, 650-329-8556

patagonia

Continued from previous page

wrongful conduct, the documents state.

In 2007, Mr. Armstrong left his wife and moved into the elderly woman's home. In 2009, he moved out but maintained an office at her house. According to the petition, Mr. Armstrong allegedly began taking control of the woman's assets, estimated at \$15 million, and positioning himself or his young daughter as the beneficiaries of her estate.

Chris Cotton, a neighbor who has known the victim for years, said he grew increasingly concerned about her health in January. After finding her bed-ridden and unable to eat solid foods, he began contacting the woman's daughter, who had been prevented from seeing her mother, he told The Almanac.

On Jan. 27, the victim told Mr. Cotton that she wanted to see her daughter, and Mr. Cotton set the wheels in motion for an intervention later that afternoon.

A handful of the woman's friends and neighbors, including Atherton Mayor Kathy McKeithen and Dr. David White, met Mr. Cotton outside of the woman's home. They found the woman in such poor condition that they called an ambulance. According to the petition, she agreed to go with paramedics, but then Mr. Armstrong arrived and allegedly attempted to prevent the victim from going to the hospital.

"In front of all present, Armstrong yelled, '(The victim's nickname), you don't want to go to the hospital!'" the petition states.

Witnesses said that Mr. Armstrong protested that the elderly woman had a "do not resuscitate" order that he had prepared for her.

"I explained to Mr. Armstrong that 'do not resuscitate' does not equal 'do not treat,' Mr. Armstrong strongly disagreed," Dr. White said in his court declaration.

The paramedics, with the woman's permission, took her to Sequoia Hospital in Redwood City. Mr. Armstrong was served with a restraining order and prevented from contacting her.

Mr. Cotton, who is a chiropractor, told The Almanac that after the first two days in the hospital, the woman's condition appeared to be significantly improved. Since returning home from the hospital in mid-February, she's been able to get out of bed and walk a couple of steps, he said.

The victim's daughter "has great respect and love for her mother, and doesn't want to see her harmed," said Mr. Shjeflo, the attorney. "Everyone feels they prevented a great tragedy." ■

News Editor Renee Batti and Bay City News Service contributed to this report.



GUIDE TO 2010 SUMMER CAMPS FOR KIDS

Camp Connection

For more information about these camps, see our online directory of camps at PaloAltoOnline.com/biz/summercamps
To advertise in a weekly directory, contact 650-326-8210

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YMCA Peninsula
Palo Alto, Mountain View, Los Altos, Redwood City day and overnight camps for youth Pre-K through 10th grade. Enriching lives through safe, fun activities. Sports, arts, technology, science, and more. Field trips and outdoor fun. Accredited by the American Camp Association.
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Nueva Summer Hillsborough
Nueva Summer offers unique and enriching summer camps for students entering PreK - 8th Grade. June 21 - July 30. We have camps that will inspire every age: from Marine Biology to Tinkering, and Model UN to West African Drumming. Half or full day camps, from one to six weeks. Healthy lunch is provided for full day campers. Extended care available.
www.NuevaSummer.org 650-350-4555

Summer Institute for the Gifted Berkeley/Hillsborough
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www.giftedstudy.org 866-303-4744

The Girls' Middle School Summer Camp Mountain View
New from GMS - Day camp for girls entering grades 4-7. Explorations in Science, Technology, and the Arts in the morning, Moving and Making, includes sports and games, swimming, arts and crafts, in the afternoon.
www.girlsms.org/summercamp 650-968-8338

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www.info@woodland-school.org 650-854-9065

Oshman Family JCC Camps Palo Alto
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Theatreworks Summer Camps Palo Alto
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WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

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

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

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

The Bohannon offer

How much is it worth for the right to develop three tall office buildings, a hotel and three parking garages — all of which far exceed normal zoning restrictions — on the periphery of Menlo Park?

The answer, at least the first answer, made public with the disclosure of terms agreed to between the city of Menlo Park and the Bohannon Development Co., is far less than the \$23.8 million estimated value of the city's zoning concessions over the life of the project. If it is built out, the Menlo Gateway complex on Marsh Road

EDITORIAL
The opinion of The Almanac

and Bayfront Expressway would total nearly 1 million square feet of office and hotel space, in addition to the three multiple-story parking garages.

Nevertheless, the city comes away in this first-pass deal with some significant money and commitments from the developer. For example, the city would receive:

- An estimated \$1.67 million a year from hotel and other taxes.
- A guarantee to pay the city up to \$225,000 a year if the annual tax revenue to the city falls below a certain threshold.
- Nearly \$14 million in various mitigation fees.
- A total of \$1 million to fund projects in nearby Belle Haven, Bedwell Bayfront Park, or other city recreational facilities.

In addition, through an agreement with JobTrain, Belle Haven residents would be chosen first for construction and other jobs at the project.

And Bohannon has made major environmental concessions, including agreeing to:

- Completely offset carbon emissions generated by the operation of the buildings.
- Reduce vehicle trips to and from the buildings by 17 percent.
- Build the offices to meet U.S. Green Building Council LEED Gold standards, and the hotel to meet LEED Silver standards.

In many ways, this first term sheet has revealed the reality of

today's economy and the concern of the developer to make the project as environmentally clean as possible. By some estimates, Mr. Bohannon has spent about \$7 million so far, including about \$1 million on traffic and environmental consultants, to help reduce vehicle trips and carbon emissions.

Certainly of equal concern to the developer and the city is the economic viability of the project due to the anemic 12.7 percent rate of return projected by a city-hired consultant (the industry standard is much higher) on the office buildings. The hotel would just about break even, at best, according to these projections.

In addition, due to the expected slow rollout of construction, much of the expected financial windfall for Menlo Park could be five, 10 or even 15 years off. The hotel room tax (which the Bohannon company would raise by 1 percentage point at the Marriott hotel) would account for most of the city's projected income of \$1.6 million a year. Yet the hotel would not be in operation until 2016 at the earliest, according to an estimate by City Councilwoman Kelly Fergusson. And the first office tower would not have to break ground until up to 15 years after the city awards the zoning permits, according to the agreement.

All of this means that at least in today's down economy, even the land-rich Bohannon family cannot afford to give the city carte blanche in return for a building permit on a project that few other developers would tackle. Just the same, it is clear that due to its longtime ownership of the land, the Bohannon company is strongly committed to building Menlo Gateway and to make it a showcase for the best environmental building practices.

But despite the project's green credentials, the company's monetary offers may look meager to some council members and city residents. They do not come close to matching the value — estimated at \$23.8 million by the city — of the zoning concessions the project needs to go forward, and the city's rewards could be many years away.

In the end what may save the project is its location on the Bayfront

See **BOHANNON OFFER**, page 19

LETTERS

Our readers write

Grateful for Rep. Eshoo's vote on health care reform

Editor:

I am grateful to Rep. Anna Eshoo for standing with her constituents and supporting health insurance reform.

My family members and I have lived without insurance and been turned down because of preexisting conditions in the past. And even though I now have excellent employer-provided insurance, I know that this issue is not just about how I might be affected. It is about all of us.

Access to health care is a right. I hope this reform is just a first step toward changing how we provide health coverage to Americans and that Rep. Eshoo and others will not be intimidated by the fringe elements who fought against this legislation. It is a great victory, but also only a first step.

Erin Wait
Laurel Street, Menlo Park



Menlo Park Historical Association

Our Regional Heritage

When El Camino Real in Menlo Park was widened in 1937, most commercial buildings on the west side of the former two-lane gravel road were cut in half or moved back, sometimes as much as 50 feet. Here, the Menlo Park Hardware Store at the corner of Santa Cruz Avenue and El Camino, is being moved to make way for the new highway.

Yes on Measure C to make up for state cuts

Editor:

As a parent of two students who attended Menlo Park's award-win-

ning schools, I have been involved in the school community for many years and have seen our schools flourish and benefit from the continued community support that has enabled students to benefit

from small class sizes and ongoing program enhancements.

Today, due to recent cuts in

See **LETTERS**, next page

state funding coupled with flat local property tax growth and increased enrollment, our schools are at risk of losing ground. As such we must once again rely on the community to show its support of our schools by voting in support of Measure C.

The budgetary challenges the school district faces are simply too significant to absorb without significant reductions in staff and curriculum. Measure C's seven-year parcel tax of \$178 a year, will raise the vital funds needed to keep our schools strong by enabling the district to retain teachers, maintain class sizes and preserve core educational programs during this period of economic uncertainty.

I can say from my family's experience that our district's outstanding schools have done an excellent job preparing the community's children for the future. In addition, whether you have a student or not, our nationally recognized schools positively impact our community's property values. We cannot afford to compromise this important community resource.

Please join me in supporting Measure C and keeping our schools strong.

Sue Sutherland
Arden Road, Menlo Park

Rail opponents fail to see the positives

Editor:

Your story "Stop that Train" is all about America can't do anything big anymore.

There was no discussion of the energy savings, pollution reduction, or improved productivity of high-speed rail linking population centers in California. Neither was there any discussion of the successes of high-speed rail lines in Japan, France, the U.K. or China. No, the opponents arguments rest on two points:

- Their homes are in the way.
- Americans could never carry it off.

Quoting from the story: "A proj-

Public employees receive fair pay

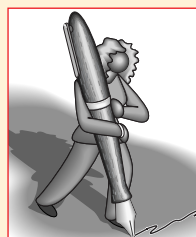
By Galen Rosenberg

I recently received another e-mail from the group describing itself as supporting "fair and responsible pension reform."

In this message, they quote a Wall Street Journal editorial with data from the CATO institute, both representing their right-wing "libertarian" perspective, of course.

What the "Citizens for Fair and Responsible Pension Reform" want me to conclude from their data is that public sector workers are overpaid (\$40/hour in wages and benefits). They want me to conclude that we should lower their pay and benefits to the generally inadequate level of most private sector workers (\$27/hour in wages and benefits).

Many Menlo Park residents need to remember that this data reflects the real "private sector" economy, in which American work-



GUEST
OPINION

ers earn an average of \$40,000 a year, not the six figures and more that many Menlo Park residents earn, and I would venture to guess, many of the petition's supporters.

When I look at the data in the e-mail, I think, "Geez, private sector workers are getting ripped off. They should organize unions like public sector workers so they can have some power in negotiating decent pay and benefits."

As soon as the public can vote on the pay and benefits of the CEOs and higher level executives of the private sector, who are really

overpaid and who really control our economy, then maybe I'll think about voting on lowering the pension benefits of the people who serve me as employees of the city of Menlo Park.

Perhaps it is the case that public sector workers earn decent pay and benefits relative to many private sector workers. Maybe there is even some room for renegotiating some of their pension benefits.

However, I think most Menlo Park residents should come to the opposite conclusion from those who want to cut benefits for local workers. We should focus on improving the pay and benefits of private sector workers, not bashing the huge majority of public sector workers who are just making a decent middle-class living. ■

**Galen Rosenberg lives on
Laurel Avenue in Menlo Park.**

ect that will cost billions of dollars but actually will never get done." "A project whose purpose is to make politicians more powerful and their moneyed friends richer."

I guess the three musketeers weren't awake when Americans went to the moon, put a computer on a chip, or built the Internet.

Rob Walker
Walsh Road, Atherton

Librarians may be gone without passage of Measure C

Editor:

There are many reasons to vote yes on Measure C.

As the teacher-librarian at Laurel School, as well as the parent of two grown children who received excellent education in the district, I'd like to stress the importance of school libraries to our district program.

If Measure C is not passed, our libraries could find themselves in the same position they were six short years ago when the libraries at Laurel and Encinal were closed one or two days a week due to lack of staffing.

Imagine, in a district known for

its national award-winning schools, our children were, and may be again, faced with locked library doors once or twice a week. Yes, the plan is to backfill the two lost teacher-librarian positions with clerks, allowing the libraries to remain open as often as possible.

However, without full-time credentialed teacher-librarians, the full potential of our school libraries would be diminished and the impact to our students and teachers would be significant. Not only do teacher-librarians support the teachers by collaborating on planning and supporting the delivery of the curriculum, more importantly, we teach children how to navigate their way through the sea of information that surrounds them.

We help them develop into critical thinkers with the ability to ask the right questions and filter the information available to them, to find answers and use information in a way that promotes confidence and intellectual growth.

What our children learn in today's school libraries will serve them well their entire lives and help them become successful and

confident consumers and seekers of information.

Most people would argue that the value of these lifetime skills far exceeds the 50 cents per day that Measure C will cost each homeowner.

A "yes" vote on Measure C will help retain our very valuable school library program.

Gail Bradley
Laurel School teacher-librarian
Santa Margarita Avenue, Menlo Park

Atherton is 'extremely friendly'

Editor:

I'd like to comment on Portola Valley Councilwoman Maryann Derwin's statement in your last issue, when she said, "We are not a gated community like Atherton. We are friendly." (Ouch.)

I hope she didn't mean to imply that Atherton is not friendly! Actually, Atherton is an extremely friendly and warm community. Atherton maintains a small-town feel (in the middle of a sprawling Peninsula) with town picnics, ice cream socials and Christmas tea parties.

Our little library has family

movie nights, children's story-time, and wonderful cultural events. This is in addition to an abundance of service and social organizations. On Walnut Avenue we have a dinner group, a ladies golf group, and an annual block party.

I'd be happy to have Ms. Derwin over for a cup of coffee and show her some Atherton hospitality.

Cat Westover
Walnut Avenue, Atherton

Measure C for the next generation

Editor:

My children have benefited from excellent local public and private school experiences. I view all of the schools as "ours," because we are part of a community that values education and is rightly focused on the academic engagement of all of our students.

I'm voting yes on Measure C because we all have a responsibility to educate the next generation well and prepare them for a complex future. Great schools are the bedrock of a great community.

Jill Parker
Riordan Place, Menlo Park

BOHANNON OFFER

continued from page 18

Expressway, a long way from downtown Menlo Park, which means many residents will not see any impact on their lives or on local traffic. The only matter left to sort out is how the city might resolve the expected traffic bottlenecks from the project at Marsh and Middlefield roads.

The Bohannons' own polling has shown that a majority of local residents are not strongly opposed to Menlo Gateway, despite it being one of the largest projects ever proposed in Menlo Park. Even so it is certain that a vocal cadre of naysayers will make themselves heard any day now.

Nevertheless, this offer appears to give the city a substantial return for buildings that will not adversely affect the city's core or even areas

closer to the project. Residents of nearby Belle Haven are strongly in favor and have high hopes of gaining jobs from the project.

Although there is more work to be done, this first offer sheet is a good start toward writing an agreement that will benefit the city and permit the Bohannons to move forward on what appears to be a much more environmentally sound project than originally proposed.

During the upcoming hearings, we expect the council will tweak some of the agreement's stipulations, but they should not tear it apart. If these offers are accepted, the city will receive \$14 million in fees and more in hotel occupancy taxes as the project unfolds in the coming years. And while it may be the largest project ever approved in Menlo Park, it will not do great harm to the city and deserves to be approved by the council.

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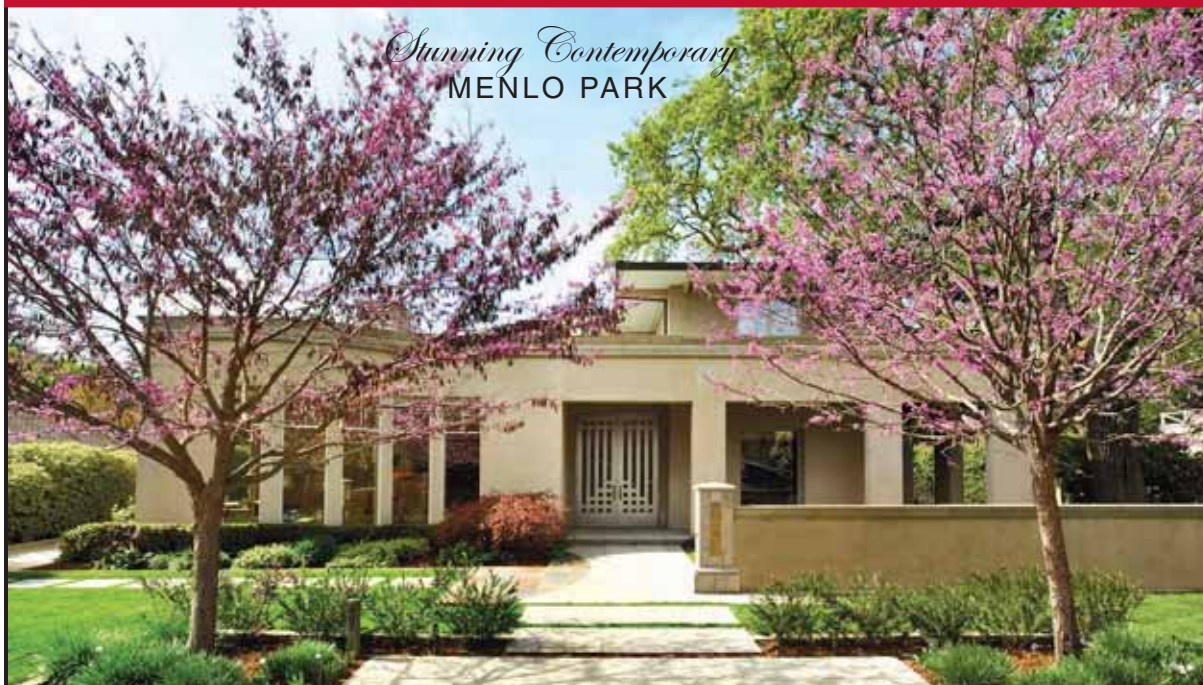
www.2ValleyRoad.com

This magnificently appointed custom home, designed by Dennis O'Connor and completed in 2006, is situated on a corner lot of just over one acre.

OFFERED AT \$7,800,000

- 6 bedrooms, 6 bathrooms, and 1 half-bath
- Main level master suite with fireplace
- Four bedroom suites and a second family room on the upper level
- Additional bedroom/office on the main level
- Library with alder cabinetry and limestone fireplace
- Fully equipped 2 bedroom/2 bath guesthouse
- Resort-like grounds with pool, spa, sport court, center terrace of Connecticut bluestone, and English gardens
- Las Lomitas schools

Stunning Contemporary
MENLO PARK



www.683Hermosa.com

- Custom built in 1998 by Tom Heyenga, designed by architect Maurice Camargo
- 4 bedrooms including the master suite with fireplace and private sun terrace
- Family room features a fireplace surrounded by frameless glass windows
- Kitchen offers sleek maple cabinetry, granite counters and large island with seating
- Studio guest house with full kitchen and bath
- Menlo Park schools: Oak Knoll K - 5, Hillview 6 - 8.

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Information deemed reliable, but not guaranteed. Square footage and/or acreage information contained herein has been received from seller, existing reports, appraisals, public records and/or other sources deemed reliable. However, neither seller nor listing agent has verified this information. If this information is important to buyer in determining whether to buy or to purchase price, buyer should conduct buyer's own investigation. Photography by Bernard André

