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

JUNE 26, 2013 | VOL. 48 NO. 43



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Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

Tyler Witlin, 9 months old, crawls to his mom Steff and father Brian, winning the second round and qualifying for the finals in a diaper derby held during the Menlo Park downtown block party on June 19.

Diaper Derby steals show

By Sam Borsos

Special to the Almanac

A race of infant crawlers was a highlight of the Menlo Park downtown block party, held June 19 on Santa Cruz Avenue and sponsored by the Menlo Park Chamber of Commerce.

The diaper derby took place on a rainbow gymnastic mat amid a sea of balloons, bubbles, bike taxis, bouncy slides and live music that painted the streets of Santa Cruz Avenue, which was closed to traffic from 5 to 9 p.m.

"When I was a kid, I went to a county fair that had a diaper derby," said Councilman Ray Mueller, the master of ceremonies for the block party and diaper-derby race announcer. "It brings back wonderful memories with my family."

Three crawlers competed in the finals: 1-year-old Alexander "Zander" Reece of Menlo Park, who won the third round to qualify for the finals; 8-and-a-half-month-old Tyler Whitlin from Mountain View, who took the second round; and 10-month-old Desmond Cardoin from Menlo Park, who came out on top in the first round.



Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

Zander Reece, a 1-year-old, finishes first in the final round of the diaper derby.

In the final event, after a dramatic crawl near the finish line followed by a turnaround to nearly back where he started, Baby Zander finally crossed the finish line first and into the arms of his mother, Mara Giattina. "It was pretty great considering we were a last-minute entry," she said. Zander was entered in the competition right

before his crawling debut, rather than online beforehand. "I wish he would've clapped for himself at the end," she said.

The West Bay Sanitary District sponsored the diaper derby.


Among other block activities, five bands lined the street: the Buffalo Chips, Acoustic Son, Blue, the Raytones and The Member. On the Fremont Park stage, Livewire Band performed rock and pop music in the first in a series of summer concerts in the park.

Children's activities such as basketball hoops, balloon animal-making and jumping houses centered around the second annual Facebook community stage, which hosted much of the entertainment at the block party, including the diaper derby.

"The block party keeps getting better and better every year," Brian Flegel, board member of the Chamber of Commerce and block party chairman, said. "It's only as good as what people bring."

Mr. Flegel, manager at Flegel's Home Furnishings on Santa Cruz Avenue, has helped put on the event since its start in 2007.


See **DIAPER DERBY**, page 6




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Local News

MENLO PARK | AHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

Council wants to appoint Carlson's replacement

■ Application deadline July 8 for residents seeking appointment to serve out council term.

By Renee Batti
Almanac News Editor

■ AHERTON

Aherton residents who want to serve their community at a high level of involvement — and who have a solid store of tolerance for meeting attendance — might consider applying for a short term on the City Council to see if the job suits them. Applications are being taken for residents interested in serving out the term of Councilman Jerry Carlson, who is resigning his position on July 1.

The four remaining council members are hoping to appoint a person to the seat rather than wait until the November election to have a full council. Mr. Carlson's term ends in December 2014.

The application deadline is July 8 at 5 p.m.

The council decided at its

June 19 meeting to interview candidates on Thursday, July 11, beginning at 5:30 p.m. The council could appoint a person that night, or, if the four members can't agree on a candidate, could call for an election on Nov. 5.

If an election is held, the candidate filing period would open on July 15 and end on Aug. 9.

New vice mayor

The council on June 19 also appointed Cary Wiest vice mayor. Mr. Carlson was elected to that position in December, but resigned the post effective 6 p.m. June 19, just before the council meeting.

Mr. Wiest was elected to the council last November, support-

See **COUNCIL APPOINT**, page 8

School bond measure officially approved for November ballot

By Renee Batti
Almanac News Editor

There was much agonizing over language but no surprises when the Menlo Park City School District board met on June 17 and unanimously approved placing a \$23 million bond measure on the November ballot.

The board also unanimously approved the extension of the German-American International School's lease of the district-owned O'Connor campus by one year, allowing the private school to stay at the Menlo Park campus until May 15, 2015.

With enrollment surging and the district's four schools feeling the pressures of overcrowding and increasing class size, the board voted earlier this year to reopen the former O'Connor school in the Willows neighborhood in 2016. It will serve third- to fifth-graders coming from the K-2 program at nearby Laurel School.

If the bond measure is approved by 55 percent of vot-

ers, the bonds will pay for new buildings and equipment on the approximately six-acre campus. The district will decide whether to renovate or tear down and rebuild the only existing building on the site after an investigation by engineering and geotechnical experts.

According to the district, the "best estimate" of the maximum tax rate levied to meet the debt service of a \$23 million bond measure would be \$8.70 per year per \$100,000 of assessed valuation of taxable property.

The resolution authorizing the ballot measure includes the board's intent "to issue such bonds, if approved by voters, only as current interest bonds unless future assessed property valuation or interest rates vary substantially" from current projections.

That language was added at a June 11 meeting at the request of board member Jeff Child, who wanted the board to signal to voters their preference for

See **SCHOOL BOND**, page 8

Storm drains, bridges are key features of Woodside budget

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

Public works is a major focus in a proposed budget for the town of Woodside over the next two fiscal years, starting July 1.

Under the plan, proposed by Town Manager Kevin Bryant, the town would begin long-term projects to recondition and make safe the town's storm drains and three of its bridges. The crosswalk at the elementary school would be upgraded, the Town Hall would be repainted and

some new windows installed, and the staff would receive a pay raise.

The Town Council discussed the two-year budget in detail on June 11. At its meeting on Tuesday, June 25, the council will either approve it or send it back for more work. That meeting starts at 7:30 p.m.

(Check AlmanacNews.com for updates. The paper went to press before the June 25 meeting.)

With revenues over the coming 12 months projected at \$5.84 million and expenses at \$5.57 million, the budget would show

a surplus of \$271,146. A surplus of \$177,341 is expected in the 2014-15 fiscal year.

After spending more than \$3 million on road rehabilitation since 2008, the storm-drain system needs attention, Mr. Bryant said. "Now the real threat to (the surface roads) is the sub-surface infrastructure," he said. "If they fail, then we're losing some of the money we spent." The budget allocates \$50,000 over the next year to map a repair and replacement strategy, and \$100,000 to start

See **STORM DRAINS**, page 8



Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

The new view of 1825 Santa Cruz Ave. from Louise Street. Neighbors complain that work crews stripped away a screen of greenery that used to keep them from seeing Santa Cruz Avenue.

Louise Street conflict escalates

By Sandy Brundage
Almanac Staff Writer

If a tree branch falls on Louise Street, someone will be there to hear it, watch it and photograph it, as the conflict between neighborhood residents and a Menlo Park developer heats up.

To recap: Developer Sam Sinnott and investment partner Mircea Voskerician want to build a driveway exiting on Louise Street from a property at 1825 Santa Cruz Ave. that they purchased for redevelopment. The exit would partially pave over a bit of greenery in

the public right-of-way, and possibly bolster the developer's case for switching the address from Santa Cruz Avenue to Louise Street, which city staff has declined to support.

But staff did initially issue the permit for the driveway. Shortly thereafter, a group of neighbors asked the council to revoke it, partly on grounds that the driveway never existed, saying that 35 current and former Louise Street residents don't remember any vehicle ever accessing the lot from the back. The man who sold the property to Mr. Sinnott contests that, saying work trucks had. City

staff noted that yet another previous owner also had a permit, but never followed through.

The council voted 4-1 to nix Mr. Sinnott's permit after hearing from both sides.

The neighbors then asked the city to turn over the public right-of-way to adjoining homeowners — a process called abandonment — with plans to preserve it as green space in perpetuity with easements for pedestrian access. The council is scheduled to vote on the abandonment July 16; planning commissioners voted 4-2

See **LOUISE STREET**, page 8

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Embezzlement case: District sues former official over 'gift' of Menlo Park home

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

The San Mateo County Mosquito and Vector Control District has sued the district's former finance director alleging that, after she pleaded no contest to embezzlement charges involving more than \$450,000 but before a judge determined what she owes as restitution, she improperly divested herself of the ownership of a house at 1311 Henderson Ave. in Menlo Park.

Former finance director Jo Ann Dearman (aka Jo Ann Seoney) pleaded no contest on April 17 to five counts each of felony embezzlement and felony embezzlement of public funds, prosecutors said. She is free on a \$250,000 bail, but faces a maximum of seven years in state prison. Sentencing is set for July 19. The length of her prison term depends in part on how much restitution she makes to the mosquito control district ahead of her sentencing hearing, District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe said.

In a June 11 court filing, the mosquito control district's attorneys, Paul E. Gaspari and John P. Christian, alleged fraud and conspiracy to defraud by

Ms. Dearman, 62, and by a woman who county attorneys believe to be her sister, co-defendant Billie Jean Dearman. On April 30, two weeks after her plea agreement, Jo Ann Dearman transferred ownership of the house to Billie Jean Dearman by means of a quit-claim deed, essentially a gift.

The San Mateo County Treasurer-Tax Collector set the assessed value of the house at \$271,000 in 2012, according to the agency's online database.

When Ms. Dearman was hired by the district in 2008, she had a criminal record that included an embezzlement conviction in connection with a previous employer, prosecutors said. She reportedly took medical leave from the district to serve time in prison.

Over a two-year period at the mosquito control district, Ms. Dearman and her bookkeeping assistant Vika Sinipata embezzled over \$450,000 by giving themselves extra pay, raising their rate of pay, taking "fraudulent" time off, channeling excessive contributions to deferred compensation funds, and using district credit cards for personal purchases and electronic transfers into their own accounts, prosecutors said. ■

Bill Workman service on July 7

A memorial service will be held from 2 to 6 p.m. Sunday, July 7, at the Kings Mountain Fire Brigade Community Center for William "Bill" Spears Workman Jr., an award-winning journalist and longtime Woodside resident. The

community center is at 13899 Skyline Blvd. in Woodside.

Mr. Workman died June 11 after a battle with prostate cancer. He was 77.

An earlier story had the wrong date for the service.

DIAPER DERBY

continued from page 3

time bringing the community together downtown.

His favorite part of the block party, he said, is interacting and connecting with people. "I like that it has no rules. You can bring your dog, your family — I've seen people dress up in costumes. It takes on a life of its own." ■

He and Dexter Chow, the owner of the Cheeky Monkey toy store just down the street, help organize the party. The goal, Mr. Flegel said, is to support local businesses and nonprofit organizations, while at the same

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Recipe by Rose Scott, 12, wins invitation to the White House

Menlo Park girl is a winner in Michelle Obama's 'healthy lunch' contest

By Sam Borsos

Special to the Almanac

Rose Scott, a 12-year-old Menlo Park girl, isn't your average kid baking cookies in an Easy Bake oven. She'll be dining at the White House in July, thanks to her award-winning recipe for pork and tofu lettuce cups.

Rose is one of 54 children throughout the United States to win the second nationwide "Healthy Lunchtime Challenge," sponsored by First Lady Michelle Obama to help fight childhood obesity.

Her recipe was selected among three finalists in California. More than 1,300 entries were submitted for the contest, restricted to kids ages 8 to 12. The winners were announced on June 20.

"My mom used to make this pork recipe and she'd serve it over rice," Rose said. "I thought it was really yummy so I decided to make a variation for the competition — I added tofu and vegetables and served it in lettuce."

The winners, each accompanied by one adult, will attend dinner at the White House on July 9 and taste some of the winning dishes. Afterward, they'll visit the White House kitchen garden.

"We're absolutely thrilled and honored," said Jean Lum Hoy, Rose's mother, who will accompany her daughter to the dinner.

"When I go to the White House, I'm looking forward to meeting Michelle Obama," Rose said. "I think she's a great person."

Ms. Lum Hoy said that her family is health-conscious about what they cook because of their 10-year-old son Galen's allergies to wheat and dairy.

"My mom spent a lot of time trying to find nutritious foods that he could eat," Rose said. "That meant no pizza or macaroni and cheese in our house."

A student at Girls' Middle School in Palo Alto, Rose has been cooking for a few years. Among her favorite recipes: black bean chili and



Photo by Greg McShea

Rose Scott, 12, of Menlo Park, makes her pork and tofu lettuce cups at her friend's house.

pancakes for dinner. Other than cooking, she studies computer science, runs cross country, and participates in synchronized swimming with the Santa Clara Aquamaids.

"My husband and I have encouraged both of our kids to help out in the kitchen," Ms. Lum Hoy said. "We want them to be self-sufficient and make something nutritious. Recently we've asked both of the kids to make dinner once a week. It's an important life skill."

Other recipes entered in the White House competition include "Slam Dunk Veggie Burger," "Yummy Eggplant Lasagna Rolls" and "Zucchini Pancakes & Passion Fruit Banana Smoothie." The recipes were designed using the USDA's MyPlate guide to including the five food groups in each meal.

Go to recipechallenge.epicurious.com to see a complete list of winners and recipes. A free e-cookbook of winning recipes will be available in July. ■



Photo by Greg McShea

Recipe below for this award-winning dish created by a Menlo Park student.

RECIPE

Rose's Recipe for Pork and Tofu Lettuce Cups:

Ingredients:

1 lb lean ground pork
1 block firm tofu, drained well and diced into 1/2 inch cubes
2 tsp vegetable oil

Sauce:

3 tbsp soy sauce (or wheat free/low salt soy sauce)
1 tbsp sesame oil
1 tbsp cornstarch
2 tsp grated ginger
2 tsp white or rice vinegar
2 tsp sugar
2 minced garlic cloves

2 heads of butter or romaine lettuce, cleaned and separated

Toppings:

1 bag broccoli coleslaw (undressed) or
bean sprouts
cilantro
mint
lime slices

Stir sauce ingredients in a bowl and set aside. Brown ground pork in oil over medium-high heat, breaking meat into small pieces as it cooks. Drain excess oil from pan. Add sauce to pan and cook until thickened, about five minutes. Stir frequently. Add tofu and cook until heated through, about 2 minutes. Spoon meat mixture into lettuce cups (about a quarter cup). Top with fresh veggies.



REAL ESTATE TRENDS

by Samia Cullen

Home Repairs You Should Not Neglect

Home maintenance is one of those things that is easy to forget or put off. Taking care of the following repairs annually can save you a lot of money over the long haul. If you're not careful, you can end up having that house in the neighborhood with the overgrown yard, peeling paint, and a list of expensive repairs that could have possibly been prevented.

- 1) Annual HVAC inspection:** Have the heating system serviced. Change filters. Make repairs as needed; it prolongs the useful life and efficiency of the furnace.
- 2) Chimney inspection:** A simple chimney cleaning can prevent chimney fires and damage to your entire house. Inspect the chimney for loose or missing mortar; check the cap and repair as needed.
- 3) Termite Inspection:** Termites are more active in spring and early summer. An inspection might find subterranean termites that come from the ground or flying termites. Termite

- repairs could be costly if neglected.
- 4) Power washing and sealing wood deck:** Power wash and seal every one to three years, depending on the amount of moss and mold. If you let it go, your deck will warp, nails will pop out and the deck won't last as long.
 - 5) Dryer vent cleaning:** The purpose is to get rid of lint buildup. If you ignore it, the result could be a disastrous fire. Once the vent gets clogged, the dryer starts overheating and it can catch on fire.
 - 6) Carpet cleaning:** Have the carpets cleaned every 12 months or more often for high-traffic areas and homes with small children, pets or smokers. If the carpet looks dirty, you've waited too long because some soil can't be removed with vacuuming.
 - 7) Siding and Paint:** Look for cracks and holes in house siding or paint. Replace caulk and paint as necessary.

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Storm drains, bridges are key features of Woodside budget

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rehabilitation the following year.

Meanwhile, three bridges that span three creeks — on Kings Mountain, Portola and Mountain Home roads — are seen as threats to fail. The California Department of Transportation in 2009 designated the bridges across Union Creek, Alambique Creek and Bear Gulch Creek as “structurally deficient” and “functionally obsolete.” Untouched, it may be 20 years before Caltrans would forbid heavy traffic, possibly even fire and garbage trucks, a professional engineer told the council in November 2012.

To replace all three bridges would run \$6.5 million, 90 percent of which the federal government would pay, but with a catch: federal standards would double bridge widths and undercut their charm and rural nature. There are options to extend the bridges’ lives, but the council wanted a study. The budget allocates \$20,000 for that and \$100,000 for 2014-15 in anticipation of rehabilitation work.

Some \$215,600 would upgrade the crosswalk at Woodside Elementary School, including new in-pavement lights, better drainage, and more effective road signs. Grants would pay for it all: \$194,000 from the Highway Safety Improvement Program, and \$21,600 from Measure A, a countywide half-cent sales tax.

COUNCIL APPOINT

continued from page 5

ed along with Mayor Elizabeth Lewis by the Atherton Police Officers’ Association during a campaign marked by warnings from the police union that police services would be in jeopardy should residents support the wrong candidates. Mr. Wiest had run unsuccessfully for a council seat in 2010, soon after moving to Atherton.

Council members Jim Dobbie and Bill Widmer objected to the appointment of a vice mayor that night, and urged the council to postpone the decision. “It is not appropriate for council member Carlson to be voting on the future mayor when (Mr. Carlson) is leaving,” Mr. Dobbie said.

Mr. Widmer said he felt so strongly that the appointment, with Mr. Carlson voting, would be inappropriate that he would refuse to vote if the council acted that night.

Disagreeing with his colleagues, Mr. Carlson said the council needed to have a vice mayor in place in case the mayor

Smaller staff

Town Hall staff is smaller. Gone since 2011-12 are the town’s building official, building inspector, three project managers and a community preservation officer, according to the budget message. The proposed budget would retain one full-time deputy building official and one full-time project manager, but go to outside firms for the other services.

In July, all staff members would get a 3 percent raise, the first in five years, but with fewer staff members, spending on compensation will drop by about \$350,000, Mr. Bryant said in an email. The town will save \$185,000 even though contractual services costs will rise by about \$165,000.

Another top priority: the Town Center Area Plan, an effort by staff and volunteers to ponder the future of the downtown commercial district. The budget allocates \$100,000 for professional facilitators to engage the community and consultants to prepare designs and conduct studies.

The budget includes about \$60,000 for Town Hall upkeep, including painting the building, repairing or replacing the deck, and repairing selected windows and window frames.

A structural analysis of the public library would assess whether longstanding plans to rehabilitate the building meet seismic-integrity standards. ■

is unable for any reason to perform her duties after Mr. Carlson has stepped down. Such a situation would leave the council with three members only, and with none designated to preside over a council session.

Mr. Carlson, Mr. Wiest and Mayor Lewis pushed ahead; all three cast votes for Mr. Wiest. Mr. Dobbie voted no, and Mr. Widmer abstained.

There is no rule requiring the council to appoint a vice mayor to the mayoral post the following year, but that has been the traditional progression into the office. The tradition is likely to be tested in December, however, given the unusual circumstances for Mr. Wiest’s appointment and the dissension of two council members.

To apply for council

Residents interested in applying for the council seat should contact City Clerk Theresa DellaSanta at 752-0529 or tdellasanta@ci.atherton.ca.us. Application forms are available online at www.ci.atherton.ca.us under the “Announcement” heading on the home page. ■



Photo by Sofia Biroš/The Almanac

Carrying the torch

Making their way through downtown Menlo Park on El Camino Real, Menlo Park police and Special Olympics athletes carry the torch June 21 in support of the Special Olympics of Northern California. Officers ran along El Camino between Palo Alto and Atherton. The Special Olympics is a nonprofit that organizes free sports training and competitions across the world for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. The local games will take place at the end of June.

Louise Street conflict escalates

continued from page 5

last month that the request follows the city’s general plan, but noted that they were not voting on whether abandonment should proceed or not.

Tempers have not cooled while everyone waits for the council’s decision. Police responded to a complaint of possible heritage tree damage on Louise Street on June 13. Officers, after consulting the city’s arborist, determined construction needed to stop until protection was put up around a heritage tree trunk, according to spokeswoman Nicole Acker. Police also told residents who had blocked the work crew’s trucks with their own cars to move, and they complied, Ms. Acker said. No one was cited.

Both sides called the other out

for behaving rudely during the confrontation.

To hear the residents tell it, Mr. Sinnott’s work crew showed up and tore down foliage, in the process damaging a heritage redwood tree growing on the right-of-way. The crew stripped away a screen of greenery that used to keep the neighbors from seeing Santa Cruz Avenue, they said, visibly changing the character of the street and leaving the residents terribly upset.

To hear developer Sam Sinnott and his attorney, Bill Garrett, tell it, the yard work thinned the backyard as a fire precaution and to save a heritage oak tree choked by overgrowth, after being authorized by the city’s arborist. Protective fencing was installed as soon as the yard work cleared enough space, they said,

and three to four redwood tree branches that crossed the property line were trimmed to avoid breakage as the crew’s truck pulled into the yard.

Mr. Sinnott had informed the city about the work in advance. City Attorney Bill McClure told the Almanac that he suggested the developer wait until after the council votes on the abandonment “to avoid creating or escalating a conflict with the Louise Street neighbors.”

The city attorney also said that no permit is required for the developer to access his property from Louise Street and that no laws would be violated by doing so “provided he does not remove any vegetation or trees from the public right of way, perform any work in the public right of way, or cause damage to the public right of way” without city approval. ■

SCHOOL BOND

continued from page 5

that type of bond instead of the increasingly controversial capital appreciation bond (CAB). With a CAB, a school district or other public agency pays no interest until the bond term ends, but the interest rate is higher, as is the ultimate cost to the public.

Board members spent most of their time during the June 17 discussion on 75 words — or 74, depending on who was counting correctly. Those words will be

the bond measure’s ballot summary, which is legally limited to 75 words.

The difficulty was in conveying the district’s intent to use the bond revenue to reopen a new school, but to include the possibility that, if all the revenue is not needed for the new school, the remaining money would be applied toward critical capital projects on other campuses.

If there’s leftover money, the ballot measure authorizes work at the district’s other campuses including roof repair, replace-

ment or modification; seismic and structural upgrades; replacement or repair of energy efficiency systems; installation, renovation and improvement of campus security systems; renovation, repair and upgrade of classroom and multipurpose room interiors; and construction, renovation, repair and upgrade of classroom and storage spaces.

Go to tinyurl.com/MPbond26 and click on the link under 4.a to read the ballot language and the resolution authorizing the bond election. ■



'Fresh Impressions'

"Poppies with a View" by Alice Weil of Menlo Park is one of the oil landscapes featured in "Fresh Impressions," the artist's June show at the Portola Art Gallery at the Allied Arts Guild, 75 Arbor Road in Menlo Park. The paintings span all seasons, capturing mostly local scenes. Through Aug. 15, Portola Art Gallery artists will also participate in the group theme, "Sunflowers," in a tribute to one of van Gogh's most famous subjects.

7 burglaries, 4 thefts in 3 days

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

■ MENLO PARK

Someone got past a fence in the 300 block of Constitution Avenue and cut the lock of a storage container, stealing \$15,000 in welding equipment from the container, according to a June 18 report from the Menlo Park Police Department.

That burglary was one of three reported in Menlo Park on Monday, June 17 — two commercial burglaries and one residential. The next day saw three more burglaries plus four cases of theft, with another burglary on Wednesday. Over the three days, the estimated losses add up to nearly \$25,000.

Thieves smashed windows and made off with valuables in two vehicle burglaries on Tuesday, June 18: a MacBook Pro, no value given, stolen from a vehicle parked in the 1800 block of El Camino

Real; and a computer, cell phone, \$40 in cash and personal items (a loss totaling \$1,800) taken from a vehicle parked in the 1600 block of Marsh Road.

Two bicycles were reported stolen — one with a value of \$300, taken from an unlocked storage container on Coleman Avenue, and another worth \$6,000, taken from a garage on Lemon Street. Another bike was stolen from an open garage on Middlefield Road, but police had no information on its value.

Someone broke into a laundry room in the 400 block of Oak Grove Avenue and stole the coin-collection containers from coin-operated washing machines, and broke into a maintenance room and stole two saws. The losses amounted to \$665, including \$20 in coins, police said.

About \$20 in coins were also reported stolen from a home on Hollyburne Avenue on June 19, along with a Playstation video game console with a value of \$300 after someone entered the house through an unlocked bedroom window.

A backpack containing work papers, laptop computers and knee pads went missing from the trunk of a vehicle parked in the 300 block of Hedge Road, police said. The losses add up to \$690.

In two burglaries, one commercial and one residential, the victims reported signs of break-ins but that was all. At Honeycombers, a lice-treatment facility at 441 El Camino Real, there were pry marks on a door and the door's handle was missing, police said. And at a residence on Glenwood Avenue, thieves broke into four storage containers but took nothing, police said. ■

Menlo Park drive-by shooting injures two

By Sue Dremman
Palo Alto Weekly

Two men sitting in the driveway of Hamilton Avenue residence were shot Saturday night, Menlo Park police said.

Officers responded on June 22 at 10:15 p.m. to several calls about gunshots and possible victims on the 400 block of Hamilton Avenue, the block where Belle Haven Elementary School is located. They found evidence of a shoot-

ing and that at least one person had been injured, but failed to find any victims or cooperative witnesses, police said.

Officers contacted local hospitals and discovered two shooting victims had just walked into a hospital with injuries that were not life-threatening. The victims, a 22-year-old Fremont man and a 27-year-old Menlo Park resident, told police they were sitting in the home's driveway when an SUV pulled up in

front of the house. An unknown person in the vehicle shot at them multiple times, they said. The car then drove off northbound on Hamilton Avenue.

The suspect car is described as a light-colored — possibly silver — SUV occupied by an unknown number of people.

Police ask anyone who might have information or who witnessed the incident to call detectives at 330-6300 or the anonymous tip line at 330-6395. ■



June 24

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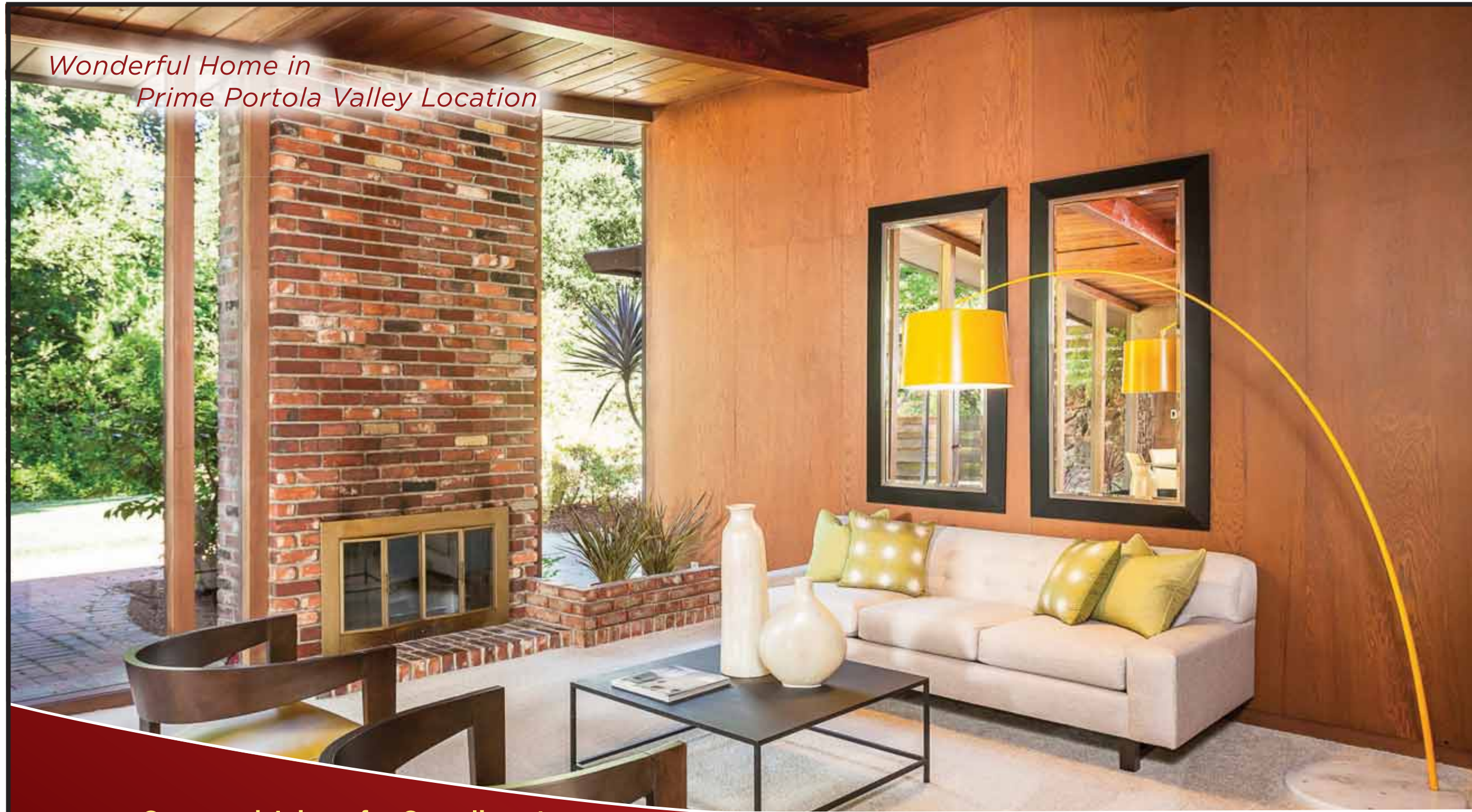
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Belle Haven vision process steps into action phase

By Tara Golshan

Special to the Almanac

Menlo Park residents and city officials came together on June 20 in a communal effort to address and prioritize key issues affecting the city's Belle Haven neighborhood.

For two hours, approximately 70 people participated in a Belle Haven community action workshop, held at the senior center on Terminal Avenue, to help envision an improved and safer neighborhood.

The Menlo Park City Council voted 4-1 last September to spend an estimated \$90,000 to hire consultants to develop a community-engagement process and vision for Belle Haven. The June 20 discussion, facilitated in both English and Spanish, continued the process. However, according to Menlo Park Community School Director and Belle Haven resident Alejandro Vilchez, the workshop marked the beginning of the next phase in this community-planning endeavor.

"What you can expect tonight is the prioritization of issues and concerns that have been voiced

and expressed by neighborhood stakeholders," Mr. Vilchez said in his introduction to the event. "Something we want to accomplish tonight is to take those 'whats' and turn them into 'hows' and then 'whens.'"

The meeting highlighted work by consultant group MIG Inc. on the visioning process. Emphasizing the importance of community input, MIG Public Outreach Consultant Vanessa Silva presented the key action ideas offered by Belle Haven residents over the past months.

Public safety, crime prevention and education consistently received the most interest from community members, Ms. Silva said, who then separated the group to discuss specific improvement strategies in each category.

Belle Haven, a historically less affluent and more ethnically diverse neighborhood in Menlo Park, has the reputation of having a high crime rate, Menlo Park Police Chief Robert Jonsen said.

"I know a lot of people think there is a lot of crime," Chief Jonsen said. "The crime here, statistically, is no different than any other part of the city. It is



Community heroines

Keiko Franklin sent us this photo of three "community heroines" picking up trash on Sharon Road in front of La Entrada Middle School in Menlo Park a little before 7 a.m. Friday, June 21. "They mentioned that they live nearby in Menlo Park and they take a walk together every Friday morning with their garbage bags in their hands. I believe that their deeds are commendable." From left, they are Elizabeth Schwartz, Diane Brandt and Margot Rowllins.

almost number for number."

However, many residents were quick to disagree, noting that the severity of the crime is the distinguishing factor in Belle Haven.

Amanda Pecoraro, who moved to Belle Haven in October, described a drive-by shooting that happened on her street and hit her front window in April.

"I have seen people walk by our house and rip a wallet off somebody, and then the shooting," Ms. Pecoraro said. "We were very scared."

However, with the action of the community, Ms. Pecoraro

said she is confident the neighborhood can make bigger strides toward crime prevention.

Chief Jonsen agreed, noting that public safety "is a very collaborative effort," and takes a close-knit community.

In an effort to combat the fear factor, community members began work on forming a neighborhood watch group by signing up block captains and committing to increasing friendly interactions with their neighbors.

With such widespread ethnic diversity in the Belle Haven community, Mr. Vilchez emphasized

the need for authentic conversation between neighbors in order to create a successful watch group.

Participants also noted the importance of involving youth in planning, highlighting the need for summer employment and educational support to get kids off of the streets.

MIG representatives said they hope to see increased involvement and commitment from community members to ensure follow-through with the discussed action items, and may present the updated vision of the Belle Haven community to the council in July. ■



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Homeowner claims he was falsely accused of arson after house fire

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

James Irizarry, the owner of the Woodside home at 1200 Bear Gulch Road destroyed by fire a year ago, has filed a defamation lawsuit against a Redwood City real estate agent.

A complaint filed with the San Mateo County Superior Court accuses Larry Aikins and the real estate agency that he owns, Terrace Associates, of falsely claiming that Mr. Irizarry intentionally set the house on fire in hopes of a windfall in insurance money to alleviate Mr. Irizarry's financial distress.

Mr. Aikins did not respond to a request for comment. Don Dowling, Mr. Aikins' attorney, said he had no comment except to say that the allegations are of slander, an oral statement, and not libel, which would be written.

Mr. Aikins is a commissioner for the port of Redwood City, a former planning commissioner for the city, and a former chair of the Redwood City Chamber of Commerce, according to an online biography. He has been chief financial officer of the Chamber since 1991.

The June 6 complaint says that "false and malicious statements made to various parties"

WOODSIDE

are untrue, were known by Mr. Aikins to be untrue, and were defamatory and intended to injure Mr. Irizarry's reputation. The cause of the fire was and remains unknown, the complaint says.

That assertion was confirmed by Fire Chief Dan Ghiorso of the Woodside Fire Protection District. "The cause is still undetermined and will remain that way, unless something comes to light in this lawsuit," Chief Ghiorso said in an email: "We have no reason to believe it is arson and of course no evidence to that assertion."

Mr. Irizarry's attorney, J. Philip Martin of Mountain View, said that Mr. Irizarry has an office in Half Moon Bay, lives in the "Woodside area," and once worked as a real estate agent for Terrace Associates. Mr. Irizarry owned the Bear Gulch Road house, but did not live in it, Mr. Martin added.

The complaint goes on to say that the allegations of arson have created additional insurance-related and legal expenses for Mr. Irizarry, and that he is seeking compensation for loss of reputation and emotional distress as well as punitive damages.

Water from above

The three-alarm fire on June 2, 2012, drew a massive response from area firefighting agencies. All told, there were 71 firefighting personnel and 27 vehicles at the scene from seven firefighting agencies, including Woodside Fire, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, San Mateo County, Redwood City, San Carlos, Menlo Park and Belmont.

Firefighters needed almost two hours to bring the blaze under control. A crew of 15 prison inmates from a camp in Ben Lomond was called in to cut brush and create a dirt perimeter around the fire. A helicopter dropped three 500-gallon buckets of water, which prevented the fire from becoming a conflagration in the surrounding forest, Chief Ghiorso said at the time.

The residents, who were renting the house, were not at home at the time of the fire. The only injury was to one firefighter who was evacuated and treated for heat exhaustion but later returned to duty.

Water pressure at hydrants in this remote neighborhood fell off at one point and the California Water Service Company shut down other areas of service to divert an adequate supply to the hydrants, the chief said. ■

Council passes 'healthy outlook' budget

By Renee Batti

Almanac News Editor

Higher-than-expected property tax revenue and the effects of whittling down spending over the last few years have led to a "healthy outlook" on Atherton's finances, according to City Manager George Roderick's report to the City Council, which on June 19 unanimously approved a \$10.4 million operating budget for the next fiscal year.

The 2013-14 budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1 also shows revenues totaling \$10.8 million — a 5 percent increase over last year's revenue — and a single-year revenue surplus of nearly \$364,000.

The spending figure represents a slight increase over the \$10.28 million budget for the current fiscal year.

Well over half of the town's spending will be for police services, which has been allocated \$5.58 million. The town's parcel tax revenues account for 20 percent of that budget, accord-

ATHERTON

ing to the report.

Because the town has no sales tax revenue, which largely supports services in many other cities, it is dependent on parcel tax and property tax revenues. "Significant negative changes in either of these two revenue sources would have a significant effect on the town's ability to provide services to the community and would create an ongoing structural deficit," Mr. Rodericks wrote in the report.

The parcel tax will expire in June 2014, and the town is preparing to ask voters to renew the tax in November. Sixty percent of the tax revenue is designated for police services, and the remainder goes to public works projects.

In the new budget, three reserve funds total \$4,069,641, including a \$1.6 million contingency to cover emergencies and a \$2.1 million "unassigned reserve."

The council and the town's Finance Committee have also been reviewing a five-year financial forecast, and have discussed strategies to pay down the town's long-term liabilities for employee pensions and post-employment health care costs. The five-year forecast suggests that the town, in addition to paying the budgeted amounts for the annual required contributions, also contribute to a side fund to whittle down the long-term debt.

Although the council approved the budget as presented last week, some tweaking is expected in the coming months. In future meetings, the council and staff will discuss options including increasing the town's code-enforcement budget, adding more funds to emergency-preparedness efforts, and allocating funds for the Town Center master plan.

In the coming months, the council is also expected to look at other revenue sources that would supplement parcel and property tax revenues. ■

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Michael Joseph Conway

Michael Joseph Conway, born July 14, 1952 passed away in the presence of his loving wife, Sue (Ziegler) and their sons, Ross and Mark, in Las Vegas on May 14 after a long battle with Multiple Myeloma.

He was the eighth of twelve children born to John Conway and Virginia Laib of San Francisco, California who predeceased him. He was born and raised in San Francisco and moved to Atherton in 1967. He attended Menlo Atherton High School, Gonzaga University, and USF.

Conway worked in administration for National Semiconductor, Fairchild, Hamilton-Avnet, and Vice President of Centaur Corporation. He loved the 49ers and the San Francisco Giants, following them enthusiastically for many years.

He is survived by his loving wife Sue (Ziegler) and sons, Ross and Mark; as well as his eleven siblings: Virginia Curran, Jan Willbanks (Doug), Diane Caselli, John Conway, Bob Conway (JoAnn), Ron Conway (Gayle), Rick Conway (Lynn), Cookie Cattaneo (Marty), Candy Galea (Andy), Stephen Conway (Julie), and Mary Conway; many nieces and nephews, and numerous grandnieces and grandnephews.

In lieu of flowers, remembrances for Michael may be sent to: St. Baldrick's Childhood Cancer Foundation 1333 South Mayflower Avenue Suite 400 Monrovia, CA 91016

PAID OBITUARY

Portola Valley considers budget, election

Two notable items are in Portola Valley's new budget: Town Hall employees hired in 2013 and later must contribute 6.25 percent of their base pay toward their retirement accounts, and must wait until they're 62 before retiring with the maximum benefit. (For the other staff members, the town pays 100 percent of their pension contribution and they can retire

with maximum benefits at 55.)

A Town Council public hearing to consider the budget for the new fiscal year is set for Wednesday, June 26, at the Historic Schoolhouse. The meeting begins at 7:30 p.m.

Also on the agenda: resolutions calling for an election on Nov. 5 that includes three seats on the five-member Town Council and

renewal of the utility users tax. On the council, four-year terms expire for members Maryann Moise Derwin, Ted Driscoll and Mayor John Richards.

Town Manager Nick Pegueros projects general fund revenues of \$4.21 million and expenses of \$4.06 million for 2013-14, with a projected surplus in the general fund of \$53,225.

■ POLICE CALLS

This information is from the Menlo Park Police Department and the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office. Under the law, people charged with offenses are considered innocent unless convicted.

PORTOLA VALLEY

Scam report: A grandparent residing on Iroquois Trail sent \$7,200 in cash to an address in Canada after a phone call from "a grandchild" who claimed to need the money to avoid going to jail after a car accident in San Francisco involving a Canadian diplomat, June 14.

MENLO PARK

Theft reports:

■ Someone stole a set of Bose headphones, two cell phone chargers and \$30 in coins from an unlocked vehicle parked on Hesketh Drive, June 20.

■ A man reported missing his wallet and \$70 in cash after having gotten off a bus and walking home near the corner of Spruce Avenue and El Camino Real, June 20.

Fraud reports:

■ A Cotton Street resident found an apartment on Craigslist and wire-transferred a \$1,500 security deposit to

a bank account, after which the person associated with the bank account and the apartment suspended all contact, June 18.

■ Someone wrote \$740 in unauthorized checks against the account of a Crane Street resident, June 19.

Hit and run accident report: A witness left a note on a silver Honda Accord parked near Burgess Park that described the driver of a motorhome backing out of a parking space and colliding with the side of the Honda, causing moderate damage, and driving off without leaving a note, June 19.

Facebook adds video via Instagram app

A little more than a year ago, Facebook tumbled onto the public stock exchange and made progress toward opening a second campus in Menlo Park, down the street from its main headquarters at 1 Hacker Way.

The software side of the social media company has not sat idle; in April Facebook launched "Home," a new interface for smartphones. And last week, the company announced the addition of video to its Instagram photo-

sharing application on June 20.

The latest move comes on the heels of Twitter's launch of "Vine" in January, which lets users post up to six seconds of video. Instagram's new feature captures up to 15 seconds and provides a set of 13 filters to customize the footage.

Tracy T. Lefteroff

May 9, 1954-June 9, 2013

Tracy T. Lefteroff, devoted husband and father, passed away peacefully at his home on Sunday, June 9th at the age of 59. Tracy was a loving husband and father and regularly spent his weekends cheering on his three sons at their basketball or soccer games or swim meets. He was a wine connoisseur and enjoyed sharing this passion with his friends and family.

Tracy is survived by his wife, sons, brothers, sisters and parents. He was born in Tucson, Arizona on May 9, 1954.

Tracy grew up in Tucson, where he was a talented athlete at Rincon High School, lettering in football, baseball and wrestling. Academically, he graduated at the top of his class and conducted chemistry research at the University of Arizona during his senior year of high school. He enlisted in the Air Force after graduating high school and was honorably discharged in 1980.

Tracy attended Boise State University where he graduated with a BBA in Accounting. He worked at both Dille, Crandall & Co. and Arthur Young & Co before joining Coopers & Lybrand in 1988, which is where he first met his wife, Jennifer. Tracy was promoted to Partner in 1994 and spent the rest of his career at what became PwC LLP after the firm merged with Price Waterhouse. He spent his first three years with PwC working in the Seattle, Washington office before moving to the firm's San Jose,



California office. He held the title of Global Managing Partner of Private Equity and Venture Capital at PwC and was in charge of services provided to the venture capital community, venture-funded technology companies and publicly-held, privately-owned and venture-funded life sciences companies worldwide. He also co-authored PwC's Practice Standards and Aids for the Life Sciences Industry.

Tracy was well-known for his insights on the venture capital and life sciences industries, serving as the primary spokesperson for PwC's venture capital survey, the MoneyTree Report, since 1999. He was quoted frequently in publications across the world and was a speaker at numerous life sciences and venture capital industry conferences. Tracy served on the Board of Directors of the Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO), the Stanford Venture Laboratory, the California Healthcare Institute and the Fogarty Institute for Innovation. He also served as Treasurer of the Washington State Biotechnology Association, Chairman of the MIT Enterprise Forum of the Northwest and as a Committee Member of the Washington Society of CPA's High Technology Committee. Tracy was also a member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the California, Washington and Idaho Societies of CPA's.

PAID OBITUARY

Thomas Michael Gill

Thomas Michael Gill passed away on June 18, 2013 at Moore Regional Hospital in Pinehurst, North Carolina. Mr. Gill was 87.

Mr. Gill was born in New York City on February 15, 1926 to Howard and Margaret Gill. A graduate of the United States Naval Academy, '49, Mr. Gill loved his family and his country and served in the Korean War. After retiring from the Navy as a Lieutenant, he had a 33-year career with IBM, holding management and executive positions in sales worldwide. A lifelong member of The New York Athletic Club, he loved playing chess and was an accomplished squash player.

Mr. Gill possessed a keen intellect and yet had a warm, hearty laugh and wicked sense of humor.

He is survived by his wife Joan Ann Gill; his sister Corita Ann Gill; daughters Susan Gill Casey; Catherine Holton Gill; Nancy Gill Tattersall; son Thomas Michael Gill Jr; and grandchildren Thomas Micah Gill and Ally Chu Gill.

Although he lived the last years of his life in North Carolina, he always felt his home was in Northern California. A funeral mass will be held June 29th at 10 a.m. at The Church of The Nativity in Menlo Park, Calif., followed by a burial at Holy Cross Cemetery in Menlo Park. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the Richard J. Casey Foundation, 3077 Britt, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27517, for the benefit of the Thomas M. Gill Fund.



PAID OBITUARY

Student wins high music honors

Pianist Anna Boonyanit, a ninth-grader at Menlo School, was the winner of many awards, including an invitation to perform a recital at Carnegie Hall, at the recent International Russian Music Piano Competition in San Jose.

Anna, 14, was the winner in the Junior Category, which had 27 entrants, and she was named the most promising young talent and best Bay Area contestant. She was also recognized for the best performance of a Beethoven

sonata and best performance of Russian music. In the last three categories, she was competing against many pianists in their 20s and 30s.

Her prizes included an invitation to perform at the opening concert of the Chopin International Competition in Hartford, Connecticut, in November.

Anna, the daughter of Kan Boonyanit and Wassika Vasi-kanond, has been studying piano since she was 4. She is now studying with Professor

Hans Boepple, chair of the music department at Santa Clara University.

She practices two to three hours a day during the week, five hours a day on weekends, but still finds time for photography and watching sports, the family says. A Giants fan, she went to a game at AT&T Park for her birthday on June 18.

Does this talented teenager intend to be a concert pianist? "I'm not sure. I also really like science," she says.



Photo by Doug Peck

Anna Boonyanit, 14, was competing against many pianists in their 20s and 30s at the Russian music piano competition.

Film forum features diverse fare

By Sam Borsos
Special to the Almanac

From human trafficking, to Internet romance, to Jeremy Lin's journey to the NBA, the fourth annual Windrider Film Forum in Atherton will screen a diverse group of six films between Thursday, June 27, and Saturday, June 29, at the Performing Arts Center at Menlo-Atherton High School.

The forum will show three full-length and three short films intended to not only entertain the audience, but to reflect on issues raised by each film. The documentary "Linsanity" will be shown on Saturday, June 29. (Tickets are sold out, organizers say.) It tells the story of Jeremy Lin, a 2006 graduate of Palo Alto High School, whose fame skyrocketed in February 2012 when he was given the opportunity to play starting point guard for the New York Knicks.

"This is such a feel-good film at a time when people are really hungry for good news," said Terri Bullock of Atherton, co-founder of the Windrider Film Forum. "It's not just a story of a basketball superstar. It's universal — everyone has some sort of a dream. Maybe your dream is basketball, maybe your dream is to create the next Facebook, maybe your dream is to cure cancer."

The "Linsanity" film, she said, was recently purchased by a distributor, meaning it will be shown in theaters sometime this year. The film screened at both the Sundance Film Festival and the South by Southwest Conferences and Festivals this year.

The other full-length films are "Not That Funny," a love story that stars Tony Hale (who plays Buster on the show "Arrested Development") and "Trashdance," which sheds light on the saying, "one man's trash is another man's treasure." In

"Trashdance," to be shown on the second night of the forum, a choreographer changes lives in a community with a dance performance involving two dozen trash collectors and their trucks.

"You leave that film and want to say 'Hi' to your garbage men and recognize them as an important part of the community," said Ms. Bullock.

'Our films tell a story. They tell a point and a message. The audience participates in that journey.'

TERRI BULLOCK, CO-FOUNDER,
WINDRIDER FILM FORUM

The three short films cover a range of topics, such as Internet romance presented in "Love Hacking," and the story of an Iraqi boy who confronts his past from 45 years ago in the film "Thief." The topic of human trafficking appears in the 15-minute short film "Hark," directed by Santa Clara University professor Jonathan Fung.

"My film 'Hark' doesn't provide answers for the viewer," Mr. Fung said. "It takes the viewer on a personal journey and raises questions and breaks stereotypes along the way. I would like the viewer to recognize that human trafficking happens in our backyard and we can all take part in stopping this horrific nightmare for the victims if we choose to."

The Windrider forum gives locals an opportunity to participate in Q&A sessions with the filmmakers. The films are selected by three founders of the forum who travel to the Sundance, Heartland and Palm Springs film festivals to seek

out films and meet with filmmakers.

"Our films tell a story, they tell a point and a message. The audience participates in that journey," said Ms. Bullock.

The complete list of films and show times:

■ "Not That Funny," at 7 p.m. Thursday, June 27. The director and screenwriter, Lauralee Far-ner, will be at the Q&A session.

■ "Trashdance," at 7 p.m. Friday, June 28. Producer Andy Garrison, director and choreographer Allison Orr and Ivory Jackson, who appears in the film, will participate in the discussion.

■ "Linsanity," at 7 p.m. Saturday, June 29. Producer Chris Chen will discuss the film after the showing.

■ Three short films at 2:30 p.m. Saturday, June 29: "Hark" (Jonathan Fung, a Santa Clara professor who created the film, will be there to discuss it); "Love Hacking" (Jenni Nelson, a Stanford graduate and Santa Cruz filmmaker, will discuss the film); and "Thief" (the filmmaker Julian Higgins will attend the Q&A session following the screening).

The forum takes place at the Performing Arts Center at Menlo-Atherton High School, 555 Middlefield Road in Atherton.

Go to windriderbayarea.org for more information and tickets. For individual shows, tickets are \$10 for general admission and \$5 for students and seniors. A forum pass for all three days of screening is \$35 for general admission and \$15 for students and seniors. ■

The Almanac
AlmanacNews.com

LET'S DISCUSS:
Read the latest local news headlines and talk about the issues at Town Square at AlmanacNews.com

Venture capital executive Tracy Leteroff dies at 59

OBITUARIES

Obituaries are based on information provided by families and mortuaries.

Tracy Leteroff of Portola Valley, managing partner of the venture capital practice at PricewaterhouseCoopers, died at home June 9. He was 59. He had been the firm's life sciences partner, aiding in mergers and venture capital funding transactions.

Mr. Leteroff was born in Tucson, Arizona, where he was an athlete at Rincon High School, lettering in football, baseball and wrestling. He graduated at the top of his class and conducted chemistry research at the University of Arizona during his senior year of high school. He enlisted in the Air Force after graduating from high school and was honorably discharged in 1980.

Mr. Leteroff graduated from Boise State University with a degree in accounting. He worked at both Dille, Crandall & Co. and Arthur Young & Co. before joining Coopers & Lybrand in 1988, where he met his wife, Jennifer. He was promoted to partner in 1994 and spent the rest of his career at what became PwC LLP after the firm merged with Price Waterhouse.

Well known for his insights on the venture capital and life sciences industries, Mr. Leteroff served as the primary spokesperson for PwC's venture capital survey, the MoneyTree Report, since 1999. He spoke at numerous life sciences and venture capital industry conferences.

Mr. Leteroff regularly spent his weekends cheering on his three sons at their basketball and soccer games, and swim meets. He was a wine connoisseur and enjoyed sharing this passion with friends and family, say family members.

He is survived by his wife, sons, parents, brothers and sisters. A private memorial service is planned.

Pete Chow

Menlo Park resident

Pete Chow of Menlo Park died suddenly June 3 with loved ones at his side. He was 52.

Mr. Chow was born in San Francisco and grew up in Portola Valley. He graduated from Woodside High School. His passions included riding motorcycles and mountain bikes, and fishing. He was always ready for a new adventure and family gatherings, say family members.

He is survived by brothers Victor Chow of Torrance, Jeff Chow of Sunnyvale, Tim Chow of Norwich, Vermont, and Vince Chow of Diablo; and nieces, nephews, cousins, and lifelong friends, the Olsen family.

A celebration of his life will be held this summer.

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WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

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

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the Viewpoint desk at 223-6507.

Viewpoint

IDEAS, THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS ABOUT LOCAL ISSUES FROM PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY. EDITED BY TOM GIBBONEY

Hands off open government laws

Residents of California, you nearly got screwed. The latest attempt by Sacramento to weaken the public's access to their government has been defeated, thanks to quick-acting open-government advocates who last week succeeded in getting lawmakers to kill a provision in a bill, soon to be signed into law, that would have made compliance with a key component of the California Public Records Act (CPRA) optional for local governments.

AB 76 would have suspended the CPRA provision that requires local governments — cities, school districts and other public agencies — to respond to public records requests within 10 days and to provide certain types of assistance to those seeking the records. The language that would have done so was stripped from the bill last week after a groundswell of public opinion forced the legislators to back down. We're grateful for the victory, but seriously troubled that a move to curtail the public's right to know what government is doing was attempted at all.

The Legislature and Gov. Jerry Brown say that the provision's suspension — crammed into an already wide-ranging bill and therefore landing largely under the radar — was intended to save money. The state reimburses local government agencies for some of the costs associated with complying with CPRA requests. There was no intent, the lawmakers claim, to sabotage the public's right to review nonexempt records — a right enshrined in the 1968-enacted CPRA, which is considered a model law for government transparency.

The argument is identical to another made last year when the Legislature suspended an important provision of the state's open

meeting law — the Brown Act. Dumping the state's obligation to reimburse public agencies for posting agendas before meetings — thereby making such postings voluntary rather than mandatory — would save the state \$96 million over three years, the lawmakers claimed. They had to backpedal on that one, too, under pressure from government watchdogs.

Whether the moves were intended primarily to save money or as underhanded attempts to thwart public scrutiny of government business may never be fully understood. But the public outcry heard once government watchdogs waved the red flag about the latest maneuver should give lawmakers a clear message: Don't try to eviscerate laws that have been instrumental not only in keeping the public informed but also in helping to expose government corruption at every level.

The silver lining of this sad debacle is the public discussion that is now taking place. An effort by some lawmakers and open government advocates to require the sunshining of all bills at least 72 hours before the Legislature votes on them is growing in strength. This would avoid the last-minute deviousness that has led to some bad laws being enacted without proper scrutiny by the public — and even by legislators pressured to vote before having the time to fully understand what they were voting on.

According to CalWatchdog, Republican Sen. Mark Wyland of Escondido has pushed, unsuccessfully so far, to require a 21-day mandatory review period for all budget bills after being required to vote for a budget "literally hot off a printing press." These ideas are worth serious consideration in the name of good, and open, government.

EDITORIAL

The opinion of The Almanac

LETTERS

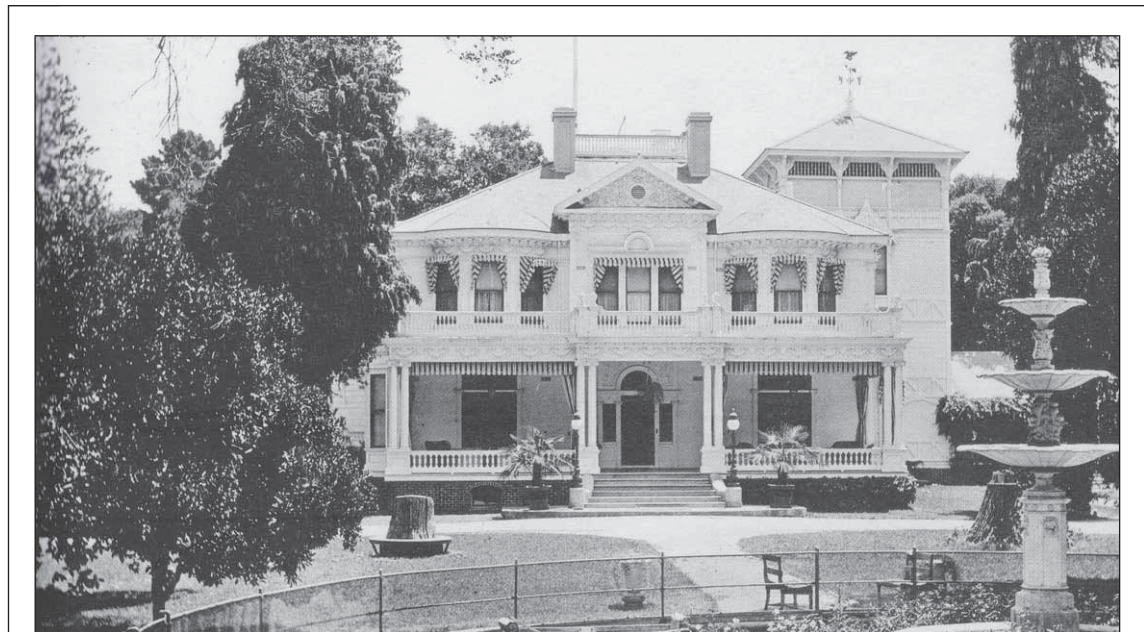
Our readers write

Atherton officers perform important work

Editor:

In response to the "Viewpoint" article (Atherton faces big decision on police costs) in the Almanac by the editor dated May 22, I do not agree with some of the opinions stated in the Viewpoint.

As a retired police officer (sergeant) with over 26 years service to the town of Atherton, I do not agree with the comments that were made that "officers often perform mundane tasks like checking the residents' homes while they are on vacation or stopping suspicious vehicles that might venture into the town." These tasks are anything but mundane, especially when you consider the low number of burglaries that take place in Atherton. Stopping suspicious persons and vacation checks are proven tools in crime prevention and this has proven itself over and over again in the past years. While there is no way to give a statistic on crimes prevented, the low number of



Atherton Heritage Association

Our Regional Heritage

Albert and Harriet Fenn Hahn bought this house on Glenwood Avenue in Atherton in 1908. They renamed their new estate Fennwood, and remodeled the house to eventually comprise 25 rooms, including servants' quarters for the cook, housemaid and governess; a laundry; a billiard room; and a studio on the top floor for daughter Louise, according to "Under the Oaks" by Pamela Gullard and Nancy Lund. Proceeds from the sale of the estate were used to establish the Coro Foundation in 1947.

crimes speaks for itself. Also added to this, vacation checks allow the officers to become familiar with the properties so that when they respond to a call for service they know how a property is laid out, allow-

ing for a successful outcome of whatever the nature of the call for service. Over the years the courts have ruled in favor of the Atherton police officers' justified right to stop suspicious vehicles and persons.

I strongly believe that most Atherton residents would rather pay officers who are working to prevent crimes to their property than to have them

Continued on next page

LETTERS

Our readers write

Continued from previous page

respond to their property after a crime has been committed. The residents can leave their homes during the day and sleep well at night knowing that their police department is doing its job with a high degree of professionalism.

I do agree that Atherton "officers enjoy relatively easy duty." But compared to other cities with a higher crime rate there is no comparison for the type of policing that Atherton does. The police constantly work to prevent crime and it is a constant job that continues twenty-four seven. The entry level of standards for the Atherton police officers are as high if not higher than other cities. At the entry level it is up to the candidate to decide what kind of policing they want to be involved in. In my case I came from a department (prior to Atherton) that did not give the quality of service that the Atherton police department does. And I learned very quickly the value of the quality of service that the Atherton police department gives.

In the years 2011-2012 the department had over 12,000 calls for service. And for an understaffed police department like Atherton, that is a huge number. I enjoyed giving the service and never regretted my years serving the town with a very proud police department that has proven itself over and over again. The quality of the Atherton police officer has continued to show itself over the years by showing that when an Atherton officer did decide to leave that they went on to distinguish themselves by rising within the ranks to become sergeants, lieutenants, captains, sheriffs, chiefs and even a California Highway Patrol commissioner.

In closing I do agree that something has to be done about the high cost of salaries and retirement plans for all of law enforcement in California. I saw this coming years ago and the answer won't come easy. Both sides have to work together and be reasonable. All the citizens of this "great state" should continue to enjoy the highly professional quality of its law enforcement employees. It seems that the unions only add to the costs with their outrageous demands that are not realistic.

Bottom line is that the Atherton police department is doing their job. I know from my experience that the Atherton residents greatly appreciate their police department" (as they have stated many times) and the quality of service given.

*George Carr
Sergeant retired A.P.D.
Menlo Park*

No fan then, and no fan now

Editor:

I had to laugh when I saw the letter from Tawny and Bob Barnett (6/19/13). I originally wrote a letter to the Almanac when this "pile" was erected in the mid 90s! And yet, here it still sits. I'm thankful my daily route does not take me past this eyesore! I was at Lyngso Garden Supply recently and saw a similar "installation."

*David Mitchell
The Willows, Menlo Park*

City should remove Willow Road sculpture

Editor:

The Art Commission in Menlo Park did a lot of bad things, like forcing business to add art to their projects. I am glad the commission was stripped of its power. Now the ugly "art" on Willow Road, as

the Barnetts wrote, needs to be removed. We did not like it when it first went up and removing part of it did not make it any better.

*Kurt and Carol Armbrust
Almanor Avene, Menlo Park*

Editor's note: To read a 1998 Almanac article about the commission of the sculpture by Brian Goggin, go to tinyurl.com/Couches98.

Safe Routes to School

Editor:

Is traffic bad in the mornings? According to a recent presentation by the Climate Task Force of Joint Venture Silicon Valley, a quarter to a third of morning traffic is caused by cars driving individual students to school. In San Mateo County, 57 percent of students are driven to school in a car containing one child. Only 5 percent of school children commute by bus and only

3 percent by bike. This is pretty outrageous when you consider that 39 percent of these students live within a quarter-mile of their school and 54 percent live within a half-mile.

Thirty years ago, most children commuted to and from school by bus. Fortunately, help is on the way in the form of the "Safe Routes to Schools" program initiated nationwide and funded in Santa Clara County by the VTA and in San Mateo County by C/CAG. There are so many great alternatives to one child commuting in one car to and from school each day.

There is a wealth of information at www.smcoe.k12.ca.us in San Mateo County or www.sccgov.org in Santa Clara County in the "Safe Routes to Schools" section. This provides promising avenues to promoting a healthier community for everyone.

*Kaia Eakin
Redwood City*

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