



Where mountain lions roam:
Don't be alarmed, experts say | Page 3

The Almanac

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

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eyes and the palate

Section 2





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Mountain lions roam Woodside: Don't be alarmed, experts say

By Barbara Wood
Special to the Almanac

It was around 3 a.m. on Sept. 18 when strange noises roused residents of Audifred Lane in Woodside, a small cul-de-sac off Miramontes Road a few blocks from Woodside Elementary.

Bob Sawyer, at one end of the cul-de-sac, says he thought it was "a very confused person." Randall Schwabacher, at the other end, decided it was animals riled up by the full moon.

Janet and Bob Self, who live in between, were more disturbed. "The sound was very loud, low, and unworldly," Janet Self says. "I couldn't tell if it was human or animal, but I was pretty sure I would learn that someone or something had been murdered." It had been. With daylight the neighbors discovered blood and hair splattered on the curb and pavement, and tucked into some bushes about 15 feet away, a deer carcass. Bloody pawprints crossed a nearby driveway and drag marks led to the deer.

Marc Kenyon, senior environmental scientist at the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, says that photos the neighbors took of the deer and bloody pawprints "are typical of a (mountain) lion's kill and a lion's footprint."

Less than a week earlier, about a mile away on Olive Hill Lane near Albion Avenue, the Gilbert family had two face-to-face meetings with what they are certain was a mountain lion.

The first came when Willie Gilbert and a friend left the house at about 9 p.m. and noticed what they thought was a pit bull about 10 feet away. When it hid under a car with its distinctive long tail sticking out they realized it was a mountain lion, says Willie's father, Bill Gilbert, who noted that mountain lion tracks and scat had earlier been found on their property.

The two young men took another car on their outing.

Later that week, Bill Gilbert



A resident measured a bloody pawprint left by the mountain lion that killed a deer in the neighborhood.

saw the mountain lion for himself. After his two dogs raised a fuss, he went outside to look around and saw a cat about 20 feet away.

"I started calling here kitty, kitty," he says. "Then I saw the tail." Bill Gilbert went inside, grabbed a gun and called the Sheriff's Office. Several squad cars responded, but a search did not turn up the mountain lion, he says.

'I started calling here kitty, kitty — then I saw the tail.'

BILL GILBERT, RECALLING HIS ENCOUNTER WITH A MOUNTAIN LION

Bill Gilbert estimates the cat weighed between 80 and 90 pounds. The mountain lion was not aggressive, he notes. "He didn't make any moves at the boys."

A mountain lion has been reported to have twice killed goats in Woodside in recent months, and numerous other sightings have been reported, including at least two in broad daylight — at 8:45 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.

What do all these sightings mean?

Experts, such as Zara McDonald, executive director of the wild cat conservation organization Felidae Conservation Fund, say "this is nothing to be alarmed about." Mountain lions "do not want to attack, or befriend, human beings. They want to

avoid, and on occasion are simply curious," she says. "We see more lions now because lions have less room to roam, and they can't differentiate between where they are safe from humans, and where they are not."

"There are no more animals than there were a decade ago," agrees Jeff Norris, the district coordinator for the San Mateo County Office of Emergency Services.

In addition, people who live in Woodside, Portola Valley and other parts of the Midpeninsula that border open space may simply be using modern technology, such as the automated alerts and local websites, to share the reported sightings more widely.

It may also just be the local abundance of deer. Mr. Kenyon said deer attract mountain lions. "One general rule of thumb is that wherever you see a deer, a lion is not too far away," he says.

Ms. McDonald agrees. "They are there because the deer is there," she says. "Do not attract deer and you will never see a lion."

Residents of Audifred say that deer are often seen browsing on shrubbery where the deer carcass was found.

Mr. Norris says the recent sightings may be a young mountain lion. "It's unlikely that we're looking at an older adult; we're probably looking at an adolescent just about to go out and find their own range."

If sheriff's deputies find the mountain lion, Mr. Norris says, they would let the state's Department of Fish and Wildlife know.

Mr. Kenyon, who is DFW's expert on mountain lions, says the behaviors reported in Woodside are not cause for concern.

"Worrisome behaviors that would really pique our attention would be following people — stalking people," he says. "Sitting in someone's front yard watching people walk by — out in the open, out in the broad daylight,

See **MOUNTAIN LIONS**, page 13

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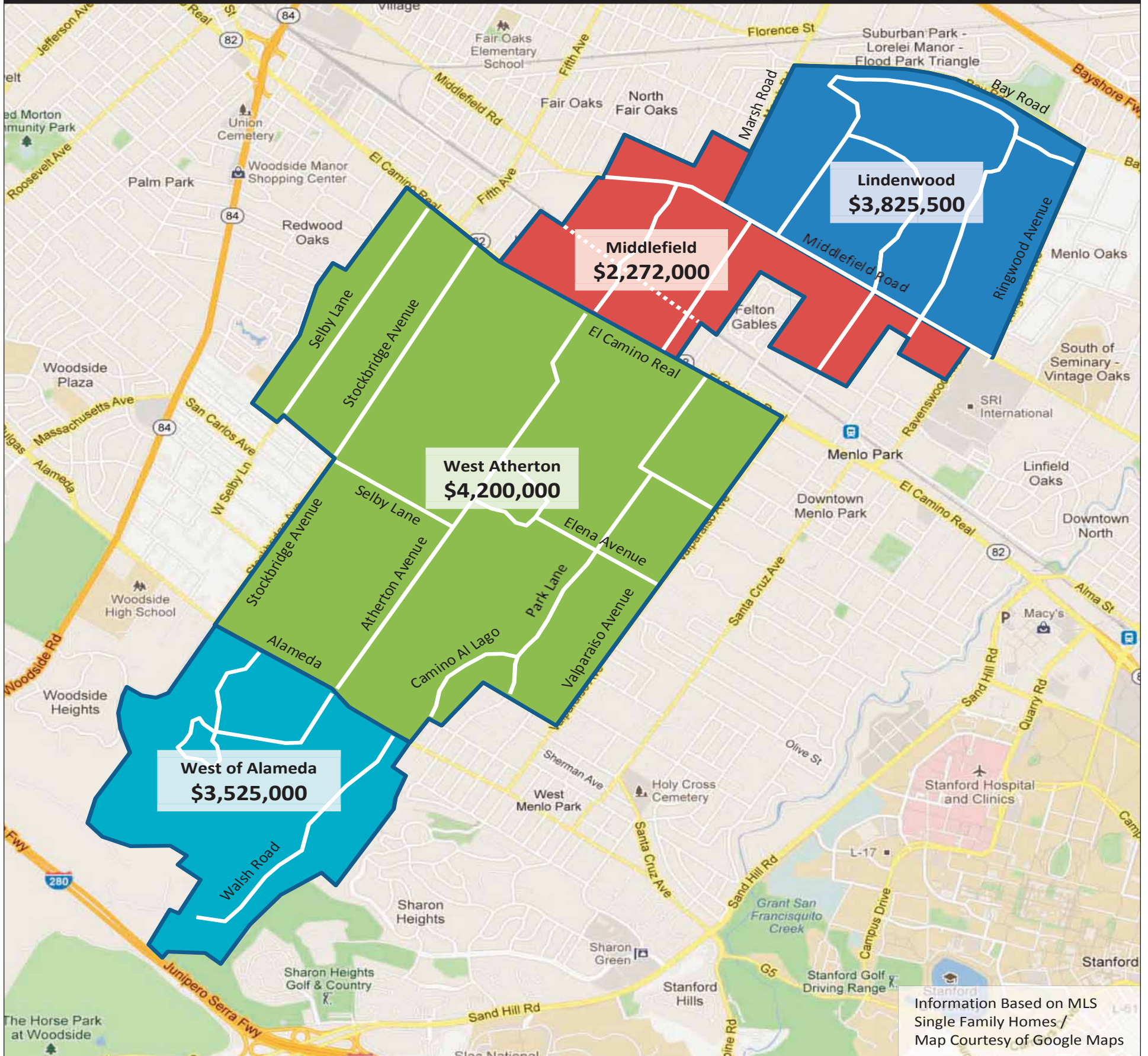
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Local News

MENLO PARK | AHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

City Council: Privacy rules before surveillance expansion

By Sandy Brundage

Almanac Staff Writer

■ MENLO PARK

After several hours of sometimes spirited discussion, the Menlo Park City Council voted 5-0 on Sept. 24 to approve the purchase of three automated license plate readers and four surveillance cameras, but delayed deployment of the technology.

The license plate readers will be mounted on three patrol cars, one per beat. The readers capture two images of every vehicle visible with a 360-degree radius. The images, one of the license plate and one of the vehicle itself,

would be automatically compared with a “hot sheet” listing alerts for vehicles associated with criminal activity. If no match is found, the images, along with the geographic coordinates of where the images were taken, are sent to a regional database for storage for up to 12 months.

The council opted to draft a privacy ordinance for the city as well as a memorandum of understanding with the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center (NCRIC), the agency that will store the license

plate data, to govern data retention and sharing. The regional agency is one of more than 70 centers nationwide affiliated with the National Fusion Center, which is under the auspices of the Department of Homeland Security.

Council members Kirsten Keith and Ray Mueller volunteered to serve on a subcommittee that will create the MOU and privacy ordinance with the help of the city attorney. Both expressed a desire to consider keeping license plate data for six months rather than a year, the maximum length of storage time NCRIC provides. The ordi-

nance may also include a clause making it illegal for any private vendors, such as repossession companies, to collect license plate data within Menlo Park using their own readers.

NCRIC representatives were on hand to answer questions during the council meeting. They stressed that the data is for use by law enforcement agencies, although data may also be provided to private sector companies categorized as “critical infrastructure” when evidence suggests those companies are potential targets of terrorist or criminal activity.

Mike Sena, director of NCRIC,

said that “99 percent of the time” no one else is going to see the data apart from the local agency that collected it.

Councilman Rich Cline suggested that the Menlo Park police department be notified when another law enforcement agency accesses the city’s license plate data and that the city be able to audit such requests. Ms. Keith wanted to include a clause in the MOU that requires the police department to approve any other agency’s request.

The issue of surveillance cameras posed less of a dilemma,

See **PRIVACY**, page 8

Head-of-line privileges likely for East Palo Alto kids applying to M-A

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

A change is increasingly likely for eighth-graders from East Palo Alto assigned to Woodside and Carlmont high schools but who want to attend Menlo-Atherton High School. The high school district board is leaning strongly toward giving these students a preference putting them ahead of most eighth-graders wanting to attend M-A but not automatically assigned there.

Superintendent Jim Lianides of the Sequoia Union High School District proposed the policy change and the board discussed it at its Sept. 25 meeting. Action to establish such a policy is likely sooner rather than later, as the period for choosing a high school for the 2014-15 school year begins in October.

The East Palo Alto students would be allowed to apply for an adjusted transfer to M-A on a space-available basis, before the start of open enrollment. In open enrollment, students also apply for a school other than their assigned school on a space-available basis, but if there are more students than seats, a lottery ensues.

For decades, East Palo Alto students have had to ride buses to Woodside and Carlmont in keeping with a now-expired desegregation-based judicial consent decree from the 1980s. East Palo Alto parents have been

vocal and persistent in trying to bring this practice to an end and keep their middle-school cohort intact by having their kids attend a neighborhood school.

The wish for an intact middle-school cohort was also heard in May from parents in the Las Lomas Elementary School District. They cited rumors and fears that the Sequoia board might divide the district between M-A and Woodside to address a coming enrollment surge in the Sequoia district of at least 22 percent by 2020.

Between 10 and 12 households from the Las Lomas district are assigned to Woodside High, and Las Lomas has long had an adjusted-transfer policy, but with guaranteed admission to M-A. That guarantee is not expected to change, Mr. Lianides said.

Comment

Public comment on the East Palo Alto proposal tended to differ according to geography.

“This effort to restore a high school for our children is wonderful because you are healing a community in pain,” said Assistant Superintendent James Lovelace of the Ravenswood City Elementary School District, which operates schools in East Palo Alto and part of eastern Menlo Park. The Sequoia district closed Ravenswood high school in East Palo Alto in the 1970s for reasons that included low enrollment.

See **M-A ENROLLMENT**, page 8



Photo by Michelle Le

Cyclists must ride in the traffic lane on Laurel Street between Oak Grove and Glenwood avenues when parents park in the bike lane to pick up their kids at Nativity School.

City may remove bike-lane parking on Laurel Street

By Sandy Brundage

Almanac Staff Writer

■ MENLO PARK

Some parents pick up their children from school using bikes; others use cars. This has launched a quest by the city of Menlo Park to figure out how to safely allow both — a quest for the moment centered on Nativity School on Laurel Street, but one that could lead to the elimination of parking in bike lanes along other city streets.

A parent last year whose child attended Encinal Elementary School, located not far from Laurel Street, com-

plained to the city that parents from Nativity School parked in the bike lanes.

“This forces bikers to have to ride in the road (w)here cars are. It’s extremely dangerous,” the parent wrote in an email to the transportation department in August 2012. “Please change the parking restriction to include ‘No Parking between 2-3:30 pm’ in front of the school. Thanks.”

Jesse Quirion, the city’s

transportation manager, confirmed that staff is looking at removing parking in bike lanes along Laurel Street, but said no decision has been made yet. The City Council would have to approve any changes, he said, after the bicycle and transportation commissions review the modifications.

According to Nativity School Principal Carol Trelut, the school has a drop-off/pick-up zone off Oak Grove Avenue that can’t accommodate the

See **LAUREL STREET**, page 8

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Specific plan review focuses on public benefits

By Sandy Brundage

Almanac Staff Writer

■ MENLO PARK

On the second day of reviewing the downtown/El Camino Real specific plan, the Menlo Park Planning Commission indicated a desire to take a closer look at how to ensure developments proposed under the new regulations will contribute to funding infrastructure improvements to benefit the entire community.

With a 7-0 straw vote on a motion made by Commissioner Katie Ferrick on Sept. 23, the panel signaled that it wants to move in the direction of recommending that the City Council investigate whether a formula that would produce a fee proportional to the size of the development, as opposed to a flat fee, would prove more effective in funding infrastructure prioritized within the specific plan, including pedestrian under-crossings and parking garages.

Commissioner Vince Bressler pushed for setting a formula as well as lowering the threshold at which developers would have to provide public benefit, citing the eight-acre Stanford Arrillaga mixed-use project on El Camino Real as evidence for the necessity of adjusting the threshold.

The project, which would replace mostly vacant car lots along 300 to 500 El Camino Real with 199,500 square feet of office space, 10,000 square feet of retail, and between 203,000 to 250,000 square feet of apartment space — a total of up to 459,500 square feet — wouldn't trigger any public benefit requirements under the new specific plan. Stanford has also agreed to pay for an additional traffic study as well as contribute substantially towards constructing a pedestrian-bicycle railroad under-crossing at Middle Avenue.

Mr. Bressler made a brief presentation regarding a proposal to build two four-story office towers, with a total of 311,000 square feet, in Palo Alto at 395 Page Mill Road. Menlo Park's neighboring city is currently involved in extensive negotiations for public benefits and may receive a new \$49.3 million police headquarters in exchange for development rights.

By comparison, he said, Menlo Park is "getting nothing" out of the Stanford project. "Mitigation is not public benefit," Mr. Bressler commented. "It's damage done."

Staff reviewed previous times that public benefit has been discussed by Menlo Park and walked through why the specific

plan opted not to use a formulaic approach, perhaps taking 1 to 2 percent of the project's construction value, which had been proposed in 2006 and 2008. No other city was found to be successfully applying a formula to calculate public benefit; what did seem to be working was a negotiated process such as the one incorporated into Menlo Park's specific plan, they said.

Which was not to say the idea could not be revisited again, staff noted, adding that it could provide a mechanism for creating a public benefit fund as well as certainty for developers as to what would be expected.

Other planning commissioners, as well as staff, suggested that they did not support lowering the threshold for public benefit, given that the threshold was set at a point where the city believed it would encourage development after years of stagnation along El Camino Real.

Commissioner Henry Riggs compared the new regulations to loosening overly restrictive barriers to development rather than up-zoning.

"You don't expect a thank-you for releasing a chokehold," Mr. Riggs commented.

Attempting to grab more money for public benefit should take into consideration that building within the El Camino Real zones of the specific plan already carries heavier costs because of the requirement to provide on-site parking, Mr. Riggs said, which makes one- to two-story buildings financially unfeasible since the lot sizes force the parking to go underground — an expensive proposition at an estimated \$30,000 per car space.

As midnight approached, the commission opted to continue the specific plan review to a third meeting. Topics to be taken up include public plaza design and, as suggested by Commissioner John Onken, whether there's a way to ensure that projects comply with the specific plan when renovating existing buildings as well as when constructing new ones from the ground up. (See Mermaid Inn story, next page.)

"It's going to be a complete mess," Mr. Onken suggested, given the heaps of old buildings along El Camino Real that could make a hodgepodge out of the specific plan's regulations.

Once the commission has completed its review, it will pass on any recommendations to the City Council, which will decide whether to approve the changes. ■

Three emergencies leave two men dead, snarl traffic throughout day

Three emergencies dramatically slowed north-south traffic through Redwood City and Atherton on Friday, including separate incidents that left two men dead.

At 5:46 a.m. on Sept 27, Atherton police were notified of a body lying on the side of Glenwood Avenue near Middlefield Road. Police closed Middlefield Road between Encinal and Oak Grove avenues for much of the day; Middlefield reopened at about 4 p.m. The man, fatally struck by a hit-and-run driver, was Jeffrey Zeman, 60, of Redwood City, according to police.

At about 2:15 p.m. the same day, a three-vehicle collision on El Camino Real in Atherton took the life of Ning Lenin Lee, 64, of Redwood City, and left the driver of the car in which Mr. Lee was riding with major injuries, police said. Authorities closed southbound El Camino, and it remained closed into the evening.

Exacerbating the traffic situation was the closure of Woodside Road at El Camino Real — the result of an 8:20 a.m. propane-tank explosion at a U-Haul storage facility in Redwood City that had firefighters draining a

1,000 gallon-tank of propane. El Camino did not reopen until about 4:15 p.m.

Hit and run

Because the Glenwood Avenue site was considered a crime scene, police “locked down” the area to minimize disturbances so that investigators, including the county coroner and crime-lab personnel, could collect evidence without compromising the integrity of what could become a criminal case, Atherton Police Chief Ed Flint said.

The investigation is expected to be lengthy, Chief Flint said. “There are more unknown answers right now than we have questions,” he said.

Police issued a news bulletin Friday morning letting residents along Glenwood and Middlefield know that police will be asking for any surveillance video from security cameras to assist in the investigation.

The vehicle that struck the pedestrian drove away and has not been found, Atherton Police Lt. Joe Wade said. Police are asking witnesses or anyone with information on the case to contact the Atherton police at 688-6500. “We have received

a couple of phone calls,” Chief Flint said.

The Menlo Park City School District had issued morning bulletins warning parents of the Middlefield Road closure, and later asked parents to find alternative routes to pick up their children after school.

Selby Lane collision

Mr. Lee, who had been a passenger in a red Buick Century, died at Stanford Hospital later that day. The Buick’s driver, a 55-year-old Cupertino man, suffered major injuries but is expected to make a full recovery, Officer David Metzger of the Atherton Police Department told the Almanac.

The Buick was making a left turn onto Selby Lane from northbound El Camino Real when it was hit broadside by a southbound silver Honda Acura driven by a 21-year-old East Palo Alto man, police said. The force of the collision pushed the Buick into the side of a white Ford van turning onto El Camino from Selby Lane, police said.

Investigators have not yet made a determination as to who was at fault in the Selby lane accident, but are “close to it,” Officer Metzger said.

Larger motel on the way for Menlo Park

■ Mermaid Inn to renovate existing building.

By Sandy Brundage

Almanac Staff Writer

A Menlo Park motel is getting a makeover along with more rooms. The Planning Commission approved the renovation of the Mermaid Inn, located at 727 El Camino Real, during its Sept. 23 meeting.

The project includes modernizing the inside and outside of the building, adding new amenities such as breakfast and fitness rooms, and increasing the number of rooms from 39 to 47. The motel’s owners, BPR Properties, expect the revamped motel to deliver an additional \$150,000 to \$200,000 of transient occupancy tax revenue once the upgrade is finished.

Commissioners John Onken and Vince Bressler pointed out during the meeting that the renovation highlights a potential problem with the new downtown/El Camino Real specific plan, namely that buildings

undergoing renovation rather than construction from the ground up may not be required to comply with the specific plan’s regulations.

The specific plan would have required 12-foot sidewalks, but according to the staff report, the constraints of the existing layout prevented widening the sidewalk beyond the current 6 feet. BPR representatives said it would be “prohibitively expensive” to shift a portion of the existing building back to allow for wider sidewalks.

Staff also recommended allowing 38 parking spaces for the 47-room motel rather than the 59 spaces the specific plan requires for a full-service hotel — one with banquet and conference facilities — with the same number of rooms.

The key aspect of the proposal for the commissioners, who voted 6-1 to allow the exceptions to the specific plan and for the makeover to proceed, was that

the motel was being renovated, not rebuilt from the ground up.

Commissioner Katherine Strehl said that short of tearing the building down completely, this was about significantly improving the existing property within the given constraints.

Mr. Bressler cast the dissenting vote. In a comment emailed to the City Council on Sept 24, he said, “Given this mode of operation, most properties along El Camino may well remain nonconforming for the foreseeable future. We may as well not have a specific plan if staff and the planning commission see fit to ignore it.”

The motel’s existing blue-and-white sign, bearing a mermaid and font that calls back to an earlier era, will vanish from the El Camino Real streetscape. The project will return to the Planning Commission for final approval of new signs as well as the design of a two-story wall to be constructed at the front of the building. ■



REAL ESTATE TRENDS

by Samia Cullen

Can a Seller Accept Another Offer Before A Counter Expires?

A counter offer usually gives the buyer an expiration date and time by which to accept the terms of the seller’s counter. Some buyers and their agents interpret this as having until that specified time to respond and sign the counter and automatically have a valid, binding and enforceable contract. However the counter offer form that we use in our local market states that: “Seller has the right to entertain and to accept other offers at any time prior to actual contract formation herein, unless there was a proper delivery and personal receipt of executed documents.”

This provision gives the seller the right to ratify another offer and cancel any outstanding offer at any time prior to the delivery and receipt of the signed counter offer from the other party. Signing the counter is not sufficient. In order to create a

valid contract there must be proper “delivery” of the acceptance (i.e., the signed counteroffer) to the seller as stated in the contract. Offers and counter offers can be revoked even though there is time remaining before they expire.

The purchase agreement requires that the signed offer or counter offer be delivered and “personally received” by the principal or the designated agent or brokerage, depending whether the agent inserted the agent’s name or the company name in the blank. This, then, makes “delivery” conditioned upon the recipient actually receiving it.

Time is of the essence. Buyers should review the counter offer with their agent as soon as possible after receipt. Buyers should also make sure that ALL terms are understood before they sign the counter offer and act quickly if they wish to buy the house.

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M-A enrollment rules likely to change

continued from page 5

“Our community really feels the lack of a high school,” said Ravenswood Superintendent Gloria Hernandez. It’s “a wound that has not healed.”

In its community outreach on the East Palo Alto proposal and enrollment growth, the Sequoia district has come under fire for its apparent inability to effectively communicate with the public, particularly with affected families in the Ravenswood district. Effective outreach is vital for students lacking advocates who are paying sufficient attention to high school choice.

There could be unforeseen consequences to ending busing. Taking a bus to school can make it easier to leave a gang, said Sequoia board member Carrie DuBois, an ardent spokesperson on the board for kids who don’t have advocates, foster children

and the very poor.

“We have to remember,” board member Olivia Martinez said, “that we are an institution of learning and that our students learn to take care of themselves. I’m encouraged by the board’s decisiveness and moving forward.”

“We do have an issue of profound educational inequity in Ravenswood,” said board member Allen Weiner. “It takes some time to roll out this campaign. We want to do it in a way that is successful.”

Board President Chris Thomsen said, “I think that we are a board that fundamentally cares about equality of education.” He later said that he might also have put it as “equality of educational opportunity.”

The Sequoia district will be providing application forms pre-printed with a student’s name, assigned school and choice of

schools, Mr. Lianides said. “The intent would be, in all of this, to reach every eighth-grader in (the Ravenswood) district,” he said. It should also inform the district as to what Ravenswood parents want, he added.

The board took comment on the process of possibly redrawing the map that assigns neighborhoods to schools, a key factor in addressing the coming enrollment surge. Las Lomas parents pressed the board about M-A’s strong academic reputation.

“I haven’t heard a consideration of performance (and) academic excellence at M-A,” said Greg Portugal. “M-A is a result of a very special and unique ecosystem that I don’t think any of us can figure out. ... You should consider engaging experts before you consider such a major decision.”

“Is education (at M-A) going to suffer in the interim?” another

parent asked. “I’m just trying to figure out what to do with my children in the interim. I may be a little selfish.”

More schools

Mr. Lianides spoke earlier of adding one or two small magnet schools that would be accessible to

anyone in the district and ease the pressure on the large schools.

“People are really looking at many alternatives to a comprehensive high school,” he said. Among the important questions: Where would the schools go? Would people living nearby enroll? Who would enroll? ■

LAUREL STREET

continued from page 5

flow of parents for the school’s current 275 students, in part because students from Menlo-Atherton High School illegally park in the private school’s lots.

“M-A is notorious at taking pretty much a lot of the spaces that are available,” Ms. Trelut said, noting that her staff has lodged complaints with both the Atherton and Menlo Park police departments. If enrollment grows at M-A, Nativity School will have to hire private security to patrol the parking, she said.

So losing the eight parking spaces in the bike lane “would have a huge impact,” she said.

Forcing cars off Laurel Street could create a safety hazard instead of solving one, Ms. Trelut said, in situations when Middlefield Road becomes closed to traffic — as it was on Friday, Sept. 27.

“It is the only thoroughfare off of Middlefield Road that you can get a clear shot through, so they have to keep it moving and they have to (be able to) pull out for emergency’s sake,” the

principal said.

Ms. Trelut added that the parking spaces on Laurel Street are used by the parents of kindergarteners, who have to walk their children into the school.

Traffic studies Nativity School conducted found at most six to 10 bicyclists traveling along Laurel Street during pick-up and drop-off times, according to Ms. Trelut. “I just don’t understand why” anyone thinks eliminating the bike lane parking is necessary, she said. “Just leave the parking the way it is.”

Numerous parents with children attending Nativity School told the Almanac they wholeheartedly agree with that sentiment. They’re also wondering why the city wants to start with a location near a private rather than public school.

“We need a common-sense solution that makes the safety of Nativity School’s children a priority,” one mother, Erin Glanville, said.

A community meeting will be held Oct. 3 at 6 p.m. at Nativity School to talk about the potential removal of parking in bike lanes. ■

PRIVACY

continued from page 5

although where the cameras would be mounted remains to be determined. The council and police department shared stories of residents in Belle Haven as well as Sharon Heights requesting coverage in light of recent crimes.

The equipment “is not a silver bullet. It is not going to stop all crime everywhere,” Police Chief Bob Jonsen told the council, but it will help with investigation. Multiple recent shootings within Belle Haven appear to

have been carried out by the same people. “We have good leads on almost every single one of those shootings, and not one of those suspects we believe (is) from that neighborhood,” he said, which illustrates why video footage of the shooters in action would aid investigators.

The cameras and license plate readers will be paid for with \$107,682 from Menlo Park’s general fund and \$20,000 from a state law enforcement grant. Ongoing costs for this equipment are expected to be \$6,500 annually. ■

League sponsors candidate forums

The League of Women Voters of South San Mateo County is sponsoring candidate forums on local elections this month. The public is invited, and written questions will be accepted from the audience.

Forums include:

■ Sequoia Union High School District board, Thursday Oct. 3, 7 p.m. Birch Conference Room, 480 James Ave., Redwood City.
■ Portola Valley Town Council, Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2013, 7 p.m. Historic Schoolhouse, 765 Portola Road, Portola Valley.

■ Menlo Park Fire Protection board, Thursday, Oct. 10, 7:30 p.m. Menlo Park City Council Chambers, 701 Laurel St., Menlo Park.

■ Atherton City Council, co-sponsored by the Atherton Civic Interest League, Tuesday, Oct. 15, 7 p.m. The Pavilion at Holbrook-Palmer Park, 150 Watkins Ave.

A forum for Woodside Elementary School board candidates was held on Oct. 1.

For more information contact Ellen Hope at ellenjhope@aol.com.



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Committee recommends splitting Menlo Park in county redistricting move

By Barbara Wood

Special to the Almanac

Menlo Park would be split into two San Mateo County supervisorial districts under all three possible redistricting maps an advisory committee has forwarded to the Board of Supervisors, which is scheduled to make a decision on district boundaries on Oct. 8.

With slight variations in boundaries, all the plans given the nod at the Sept. 24 meeting of the San Mateo District Lines Advisory Committee put the western part of Menlo Park into District 3, which also includes Woodside, Portola Valley, Atherton, San Carlos, part of San Mateo and the coastside; while leaving the eastern part of Menlo Park in its current district, District 4, which also includes East Palo Alto and Redwood City.

Several Menlo Park City Council members have said they oppose dividing the city into two supervisorial districts.

But several speakers at the advisory board meeting asked to have East Palo Alto, the eastern part of Menlo Park and the North Fair Oaks neighborhood of Redwood City end up in the same district. "If we have people with similar interests, similar cultures, language, income, people who go to school together, and keep them together, I think it's going to be better for us," said Julio Garcia of the North Fair Oaks neighborhood.

District 3 is represented by Don Horsley and District 4 by Warren Slocum.

Menlo Park opposition

The Menlo Park council briefly took up the topic during its Sept. 24 meeting, reviewing a letter that Councilwoman Kirsten Keith had drafted to send to the advisory committee.

"A split of Menlo Park, would negatively impact the City and its residents. It would undermine City efforts toward community building in our Belle Haven Neighborhood and reduce the ability of residents to build strong relationships, solve problems that reach across new district boundaries, and further complicate access to County resources," Ms. Keith wrote.

During the council's discussion, Vice Mayor Ray Mueller said he saw a political argument, but not a strong policy argument, for keeping the city together. A

lawsuit opposing county-wide elections highlighted the difficulties of minorities being elected to the board of supervisors, he said, and two Menlo Park districts would also give residents two points of contact on the board.

Councilman Rich Cline said that splitting the city in two was the wrong solution, comparing it to a Band-Aid.

The council ended up voting 5-0 to send the letter once Mayor Peter Ohtaki had reviewed the final draft. Mr. Mueller stated that he was supporting the letter as a courtesy vote.

Voters wanted change

In November San Mateo County voters approved a measure changing the way county supervisors are elected. Previously, the supervisors representing each district were chosen by all county voters. Now only the voters in each supervisorial district can vote for their own supervisor.

'A split of Menlo Park, would negatively impact the City and its residents. It would undermine City efforts toward community building in our Belle Haven Neighborhood and reduce the ability of residents to build strong relationships ...'

FROM COUNCILWOMAN
KIRSTEN KEITH'S LETTER
TO THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

San Mateo County was the only one of California's 58 counties not electing supervisors by district voting.

As part of the settlement of a 2011 lawsuit brought by three Asian and three Latino county residents represented by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and demanding an end to county-wide elections, the supervisors agreed to also consider changing current district boundaries.

The nine-member San Mateo District Lines Advisory Committee, made up of supervisors Adrienne Tissier and Warren Slocum plus council members from Daly City and East Palo Alto and a resident from each current district, has held 10 meetings, taking public comment and study-

ing district boundaries. William Nack of Menlo Park represents District 4.

The Board of Supervisors can choose to leave the district boundaries as they are, but the advisory committee did not recommend a plan that does so.

Mr. Nack said he would be happy with any of the three plans the committee is recommending to the supervisors.

Atherton resident Greg Conlon told the advisory committee that he supports a plan that changes the current boundaries to include Menlo Park and Atherton in the same supervisorial district, because they share school districts and commercial services.

"I think the temptation is going to be very great for you to leave things the way they are," he said. Doing so, he added, might lead to trouble. "I think there is a risk of being challenged," he said.

Redistricting plans could be submitted by anyone, with the three that were ultimately recommended coming from the Community Unity Group, the Republican Party Central Committee of San Mateo County, and former San Mateo County resident James Nakamura, each having been modified by the submitters several times.

The advisory committee, with the supervisors and Mr. Nack abstaining, also prioritized the redistricting proposals they have recommended. Their unanimous top choice was the Community Unity 4 plan, which was submitted by a group attempting to give more representation to minority groups in the county.

Second priority went to the Republican AA plan, which at the request of South San Francisco Mayor Pro-tem Karyl Matsumoto, a Democrat, will be renamed the Equity plan. Third priority was given to the Nakamura 1G plan.

The three plans that were recommended each divide Menlo Park at a different location. In the Community Unity plan the line is at El Camino but includes Menlo Oaks in District 3. The Nakamura plan draws the line at Middlefield and Bay roads, and also includes Menlo Oaks in District 3 while the "Equity" map draws the line at Bay Road and Highway 101.

Go to tinyurl.com/SMCMaps to see the three recommended versions.

—Sandy Brundage contributed to this report.

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He believes what students learn in the classroom is incredibly important, but that there's a lot more to school than just academics. He loves working with kids outside the classroom with things like student government, sports, clubs and more. Matt says, "My hope is that through all of their activities in school, students have the opportunity to begin exploring their passions while also learning life lessons like resilience and the value of hard work."

When Matt isn't performing his duties as Dean of Students, or as the Cross Country coach, he enjoys being outdoors, especially running and cycling. He also likes spending time with his wife and their dog, trying (and failing) to fix things around their home, and cheering on his hometown Kansas City Royals, Kansas City Chiefs, and KU Jayhawks.

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Hillview field reopens

By Barbara Wood

Special to the Almanac

Soccer balls should once again be flying on the playing field at Hillview Middle School.

The field, originally scheduled to open for use in December 2012, was finally completed, for the second time, on Sept. 27 and was ready for use on Monday, Sept. 30, according to Ahmad Sheikholeslami, facilities director for the Menlo Park City School District.

The field completion was initially delayed in 2012 due to a wet winter and other problems, Mr. Sheikholeslami said. It opened last March, but problems were soon discovered and it was closed at the end of the school year for repairs.

It turned out the field was not level and did not drain properly — problems, Mr. Sheikholeslami said, that occurred because a subcontractor did not follow the architect's specifications on the field's construction.

The district asked to have the entire field rebuilt. "We wanted to ensure that the completed work met our requirements and (was) the highest

quality. Even having to rip out the field and redo it, that's what we had to do in order to make sure that we got the product that we had paid for," Mr. Sheikholeslami said.

"The general contractor stepped up and has made the repairs. They have borne the cost of those repairs," Mr. Sheikholeslami said. "The district did incur some costs with inspection and oversight," and the contractor is going to be asked to pay those costs as well, he said.

In the meantime the school's students having been getting exercise by using the basketball courts, gym and dance studio at their new middle school. "The PE teachers have created a curriculum around the spaces they had for physical education," Mr. Sheikholeslami said. The city and other groups that use the field also found other venues for their activities.

The Hillview campus at Santa Cruz and Elder avenues was completely rebuilt in a project that began in summer 2010. Work on the campus, except for the playing field, was completed in time for school to open in 2012. ■

OCT. 2013

COMMUNITY HEALTH EDUCATION PROGRAMS

For a complete list of classes and class fees, lectures and health education resources, visit pamf.org/healtheducation.

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This presentation will discuss what arthritis is, the different types of arthritis, how it is diagnosed and treated, as well as tips for managing everyday symptoms.

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RAVIN AGAH, M.D., PH.D.
PAMF INTERNAL MEDICINE

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Pumpkin Festival Oct. 12 at St. Raymond School

Pony rides, climbing wall, bounce houses, trampoline, face painting, and, of course, pumpkins will highlight the fourth annual St. Raymond Pumpkin Festival to be held from 3:30 to 7 p.m. Friday, Oct. 11, and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 12, at the school, 1100 Santa Cruz Ave., in Menlo Park.

Visitors are invited to hunt for the perfect pumpkin in the pumpkin patch and enjoy food and beverages. Proceeds will benefit St. Raymond School.

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Gas leaks leads to brief shelter in place alert

A construction crew accidentally broke a 1-inch gas line in Menlo Park on Sept. 30, leading to a “shelter in place” alert late Monday morning for residents and businesses within 400 feet of the 1300 block of Hoover Street.

The Menlo Park Fire Protection District responded to 1330 Hoover St. shortly before 11 a.m. and with the assistance of Pacific Gas & Electric, the leak was repaired by 12:30 p.m.

Ten customers had gas service

■ MENLO BRIEFS

shut off, according to PG&E spokesman Jason King.

Why the construction crew hit the line remains a mystery; Mr. King said “811” marks at the site indicated the location of the underground lines. He emphasized the need for workers to always call 811 first for guidance before digging, no matter how small or large the project.

Polo event benefits Lyme Foundation

The Bay Area Lyme Foundation will hold its second annual Polo for Lyme benefit from noon to 5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 13, at the Menlo Circus Club in Atherton. The afternoon will include a gourmet lunch, champagne, polo, auctions, fine wines, and performances by the Pride & Joy band and renowned violinist Carlos Reyes.

Television personality CeCe Sammy will act as master of

ceremonies for the event, which will include such polo traditions as a hat parade and competition, and a champagne divot stomp.

Ticket prices start at \$125. Polo for Lyme is put on in association with Heart of Silicon Valley, a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing people together through music for important causes.

Visit bayarealyrme.org or call 530-2439 for more information.

MOUNTAIN LIONS

continued from page 3

where it’s not trying to hide.”

The department’s policy is to try non-lethal options first, including “hazing” an animal with loud noises, shooting it with bean bags, or trapping and relocating it, he says.

For those thinking of taking matters into their own hands, Mr. Kenyon warns that only “a mountain lion that is either threatening to attack or injure people, or (is) in the act of attacking or injuring pets or

livestock” can legally be shot. “People may not kill a lion that is simply on their property and not exhibiting any of the aforementioned behaviors,” he said.

He also suggested that if a deer is killed by a mountain lion, it be left alone. “Lions will typically feed on their cache for up to four or five days, and they typically won’t roam far from the carcass,” he says. “Most often, they’re hiding but are within eyesight of their cache.” He suggests letting neighbors know of the presence of a suspected lion’s cache so they can avoid it. ■

Playing it safe in cougar country

Here are tips on co-existing with mountain lions from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Keep Me Wild website: dfg.ca.gov/keepmewild/lion.html.

■ Don’t feed deer; it is illegal in California and it will attract mountain lions.

■ Deer-proof your landscaping by avoiding plants that deer like to eat. For tips, request “A Gardener’s Guide to Preventing Deer Damage” from DFW offices.

■ Trim brush to reduce hiding places for mountain lions.

■ Don’t leave small children or pets outside unattended.

■ Install motion-sensitive lighting around the house.

■ Provide sturdy, covered shelters for sheep, goats, and other vulnerable animals.

■ Don’t allow pets outside when mountain lions are most active — dawn, dusk, and at night.

■ Bring pet food inside to avoid attracting raccoons, opossums and other potential mountain lion prey.

■ Don’t hike, bike, or jog alone.

■ Avoid hiking or jogging when mountain lions are most active — dawn, dusk, and at night.

■ Don’t approach a mountain lion.

■ If you encounter a mountain lion, do not run; instead, face the animal, make noise and try to look bigger by waving your arms; throw rocks or other objects. Pick up small children.

■ If attacked, fight back.

Rick DeGolia

Atherton Council

Please join Rick and this growing list of your neighbors who support him for Atherton Town Council:

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Rick’s Vision and priorities for Atherton

- Manage the town’s resources in a careful, fiscally conservative manner
- Prioritize communication to and involvement of Atherton’s residents
- Maintain Atherton’s close, cooperative relationship with its police force
- Build consensus on the Council and always respect different opinions



Rick DeGolia

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Francesco Demuro, Fenton
Fabio Capitanucci, Ford
Renée Rapier, Mistress Meg Page

Sung in Italian with English subtitles

Bring a picnic and pack a blanket for a night under the stars with the San Francisco Opera! Stanford Live hosts this comic masterpiece based on Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to be simulcast live from the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House direct to Stanford audiences at Frost Amphitheater.

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Stacey Stofferahn is Tosca and David Gustafson is her lover, the artist Mario Cavaradossi.

'Tosca' brings song, passion to West Bay Opera stage

A new production of Puccini's classic tale of passion, oppression and death, "Tosca," will be presented Oct. 11 through 20 at Lucie Stern Theatre, 1305 Middlefield Road in Palo Alto.

"Tosca" was first presented at West Bay Opera in 1977. This is the company's sixth production of the work, which is sung in Italian with English titles.

Stacey Stofferahn sings the title role, and David Gustafson is Mario Cavaradossi — Tosca's lover who shares her tragic fate.

Philip Skinner returns to West Bay Opera as Scarpia, Rome's unscrupulous chief of police. Mr. Skinner portrayed Iago in last year's production of "Otello."

The cast also includes Nadav Hart as Spoletta, William

O'Neill as Angelotti, Carl King as the Sagrestano, and Mathew Pierce as Sciarrone. The opera's general director and conductor is Jose Luis Moscovich. Stage direction is by Richard Harrell.

Show times are 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 11, and Saturday, Oct. 19; and 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 13 and 20. The Oct. 13 performance will be followed by a post-performance discussion with the cast and directors seated onstage.

There are no performances on Saturday, Oct. 12, or Friday, Oct. 18. There will be a free preview with piano at 8 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 3, at Avenidas, 450 Bryant St. in Palo Alto.

Tickets are \$40 to \$75. For tickets, call 424-9999 or visit WBOpera.org.

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© Nancy Dunlop Cawdrey



After Pearl Harbor, to help guard our rugged coast, the **Mounted Patrol of San Mateo County** evolved into a service organization that promotes community charitable activities, equestrian events, horsemanship and whose members also participate in Search and Rescue.

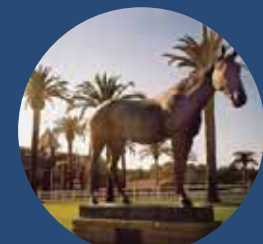


The **San Mateo County Sheriff's Mounted Search and Rescue Unit** consists of civilians trained to assist with search and rescue operations within the county and provide mutual aid throughout the state. The unit also participates in parades, patrols, kids educational programs and is trained in large animal rescue techniques.

The beautiful 100 year old **Folger Stable in Wunderlich County Park** has been renovated thanks to the efforts of over 600 community donors dedicated to preserving our equestrian heritage. Public horse boarding will continue a century old tradition at the stable.



October 12th 2013 Woodside Town Hall



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CALENDAR

Visit AlmanacNews.com/calendar to see more calendar listings

Classes/Workshops

'Influential Families of San Francisco & the Peninsula' Michael Svanevik will talk about the Peninsula's history and those who created it. The class will combine stories of San Francisco with talks about the Peninsula and Santa Clara Valley. Wednesdays, Sept. 4-Oct. 30, 1:30-3:30 p.m. \$50. Little House Roslyn G. Morris Activity Center, 800 Middle Ave., Menlo Park. Call 650-326-2025, ext. 222. www.penvol.org/littlehouse/contact.cfm

Concerts

St. Lawrence String Quartet Concert for the Community Each fall the St. Lawrence String Quartet offers this free concert for students in grades 3-12. Families and teachers are welcome to attend. Sponsored by the Friends of Music. Oct. 2, 4:30 p.m. Free. Dinkelspiel Auditorium, 471 Lagunita Drive, Stanford. www.music.stanford.edu/Events/calendar.html

Family and Kids

'Woodside Day of the Horse - Riding Around the World!' This horse fair will have a petting zoo, pony rides, riding info and the Wells Fargo Stagecoach. Trail ride for \$40. Oct. 12, 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Free. Woodside Town Hall, 2955 Woodside Road, Woodside. www.whoa94062.org/index.php/day-of-the-horse

Film

Family Movie: 'Koran By Heart' This movie is about a global contest reading of the Quran by young Muslim children that takes place in Cairo, Egypt annually during Ramadan. Oct. 5, 2-3:30 p.m. Free. Woodside Library, 3140 Woodside Road, Woodside. www.smcl.org

Health

Tai Chi There will be a series of Tai Chi classes in the Woodside Library Native Plant Garden (weather permitting). Instructor Ben

Dineen leads this 60-minute class, which is open to all ability levels. Oct. 4-25, Fridays, 10-11 a.m. Free. Woodside Library, 3140 Woodside Road, Woodside. www.smcl.org

Special Events

'Ride for Ravenswood 2013' The Ravenswood Family Health Center's annual ride for Ravenswood, sponsored by Wells Fargo, helps support the local community health center. Oct. 6, 7 p.m. Free. 210 Park Lane, Atherton. www.ravenswoodfhc.org/index.php/get_involved/events

Sports

Woodside International Horse Trials The Woodside International Horse Trials take place annually at the Woodside Horse Park. Watch equestrians compete in Dressage, Cross Country Jumping and Stadium Jumping. There will also be a trade fair and food. Oct. 4-6, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Woodside Horse Park, 3674 Sand Hill Road, Woodside. Call 951-303-0405. www.woodsideeventing.com

Lectures & Talks

'An Appetite for Wonder: The Making of a Scientist' Author Richard Dawkins has been active in many debates surrounding creationism, intelligent design and religion. His new book is a memoir covering his early life in colonial Kenya, studies at Oxford University and the creation of his books and philosophy. Oct. 5, 7:30 p.m. \$20. Kepler's Books, 1010 El Camino Real, Menlo Park. Call 650-324-4321. www.brownpapertickets.com/event/470761

Author: Katy Butler In "Knocking on Heaven's Door: The Path to a Better Way of Death," Katy Butler explores what happens when a fear of death collides with the technological imperatives of modern medicine. Her thesis is that advanced medicine, in its single-minded pursuit of maximum longevity, often creates more suffering than it prevents. Oct. 3, 7:30 p.m. Free. Kepler's Books, 1010 El Camino Real, Menlo Park. Call 650-324-4321. www.keplers.com/event/katy-butler

www.museum.stanford.edu/news_room/weems.html

The Roundtable at Stanford University

ARE YOU HAPPY NOW?

The New Science of Happiness and Wellbeing

Friday, October 18, 2013

9:30 a.m. President's Welcome for alumni
10:00 a.m. Roundtable
Maple Pavilion, Stanford University
www.stanford.edu/roundtable

The science of happiness is a growing and intriguing field. Research about what truly makes people happy is not only surprising, but applicable no matter how much money we make or where we live. Join moderator Katie Couric and a panel of experts in psychology, business, neuroscience and design for a Roundtable discussion about the happiness and sense of wellbeing that elude so many, but are sought by all.

KQED happy to be media partner for the 2013 Roundtable at Stanford University



Katie Couric
ABC News



Jennifer Aaker
Stanford Graduate School of Business



Firdaus Dhabhar
Psychiatry and Behavioral Science, Stanford School of Medicine



Ian H. Gotlib
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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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Email your views to: letters@almanacnews.com and note this it is a letter to the editor in the subject line.

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Call the Viewpoint desk at 223-6507.

As technology proliferates, privacy is lost

The Almanac's special report last week titled "Who's Watching?" raised some serious questions about the quickly accelerating ability of government, at all levels, to monitor our comings and goings, our email, and our trail on the World Wide Web.

The surge in surveillance has been fueled by giant leaps in technology, which has lowered the prices on many devices that local police departments now covet. Other major advances are making it possible for huge federal agencies like the NSA to read every email we write if they wish.

Our coverage was sparked by the Menlo Park Police Department's request to purchase license plate readers and several surveillance video cameras, which would be aimed mostly at law-abiding residents, but would help the police track stolen cars. The readers are a relatively new device that is housed in a small box that can be attached to a police car and photograph the license plates of every vehicle that comes near the cruiser. It then transmits the photograph to a regional system in San Francisco that can compare the plates with those on stolen cars.

Our concern, and that of many residents, is two-fold:

- How long will these records be kept?
- How many other agencies can access the data?

During his tenure in the state Legislature, former state Senator Joe Simitian, who is now a Santa Clara County supervisor, chaired the senate's Select Committee on Privacy. A bill he authored to control some practices in the collection of license plate data was unfortunately withdrawn without a vote last year. But Mr. Simitian has not lost his concern about the widespread use of data-mining techniques to invade the privacy of citizens all over the state. Mr. Simitian told the Almanac that key questions about privacy in the high-tech era are not even being asked.

Others have raised concerns over what appears to be a rush to acquire license plate readers for Menlo Park. Last week the City Council did take one cautionary step after a 5-0 vote to approve purchase of the equipment when it agreed to delay deployment of the devices to provide time to create a privacy policy and a memorandum of understanding with the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center, which now holds records generated by the license-plate readers for a year. We hope the council is successful in reducing that time to a maximum of

six months, although the ACLU suggests keeping the data for as short a time as possible, perhaps 30 days.

Local resident Steve Taffee, a member of the Menlo Park Police Department's citizens advisory committee, said he understands why license-plate readers, which automate a tedious manual task, appeal to police departments. But Mr. Taffee's fear is that the collection and retention of "big data" is rarely understood by residents, law enforcement officials, legislators and others.

Before this technology existed, residents were relatively sure that no one was tracking their auto trips or could see what they were wearing downtown on a particular day. But in recent years it has become clear that cell phones with GPS can be used to track a user's whereabouts and also provide a record of where he or she has been over time. In addition, if a vehicle is scanned by a license-plate reader, that record can

show exactly where that vehicle has been and can even see if the driver was accompanied by a passenger.

In other words, our expectation of privacy when we engage almost any electronic device has vanished and there is little that we can do about it. It is our hope that local officials will respond to pressure from residents to slow down the police department's move to implement the license-plate readers. We also urge that the city put some restriction on who can access these records.

We respect the police department and trust that its motives are to simply do a better job for the community. But unless we apply some common-sense safeguards to this information-gathering, we can see the day when all our private information will be available to everyone who has the right tools. If you think the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center servers are impregnable one has only to consider the NSA's trust in Edward Snowden. Hacking large databases happens every day. In our view, it is not worth the risk to hold these records for more than 30 days and certainly at the most six months.

In addition, state and local governments need to examine the totality of electronic surveillance in our communities and begin to ask more questions about what is necessary and why. Unless there is reason to believe otherwise, there is no reason for the government to know our whereabouts every waking hour.

EDITORIAL

The opinion of The Almanac

LETTERS

Our readers write

The story behind repair of Ramona Road

Editor:

Last week's Almanac article reporting on the Ramona Road repair in the Los Trancos Woods/Vista Verde area left out some important information about how the work was funded and initiated.

In 2011, the Los Trancos County Water District (LTCWD) commissioned a geotechnical survey to study the soil conditions under the road and recommend repair solutions. However, over the following two years, the district's efforts to engage the county Dept. of Public Works in fixing the road to their recommendations resulted in no action.

Due to the severe rains at the end of December 2012, soil erosion put the edge of Ramona Road in peril, along

with portions of Alpine Road. At a community association meeting, a group of concerned local residents formed an ad hoc committee, named "Save Alpine and Ramona Road" to initiate action by the county in early January 2013. Local engineering experts in the community, Ross Edwards and Mario Wijtman, provided the Dept. of Public Works with the technical reasons for the type of structure that would ensure a long-term solution.

Funding, however, was the main issue. The Save Alpine group worked with Supervisor Don Horsley, County Manager John Maltbie and Jim Porter, director of Public Works, who approved the repair recommendation to receive emergency funding. Their action put the project on a fast track to identify a contractor to provide a design-build solution.

Work began July 1 and 12 weeks later a new retaining wall



Menlo Park Historical Association

Our Regional Heritage

U.S. Senator Charles N. Felton with his granddaughter, Marie Louise Elkins, in the 1870s. (No information was available about the dog.) Sen. Felton built a pink-frescoed mansion on 35 acres north of Encinal Avenue near the train tracks that was called Felton Gables. The home was visited by three presidents, Rutherford B. Hayes, Benjamin Harrison and Ulysses S. Grant. The source of Sen. Felton's fortune was his investment in the Comstock Lode, which he later sold for \$190,000.

Continued on next page

Time to rein in 'big data' creep

By Steve Taffee

Kudos to Menlo Park City Council members for the civil, intelligent discourse I witnessed at last week's council meeting as they discussed various surveillance technologies.

Each of them demonstrated a concern for the rights of law-abiding citizens embodied in the First and Fourth amendments to the U.S. Constitution, especially the rights of a free press to review law enforcement surveillance data, and the rights of law abiding citizens to go about their business in public spaces without the shadow of police surveillance over their shoulder.

The creep of "big data," so named as to remind us of Orwell's "big brother" state, permeates the lives of all citizens. It is, therefore, heartening for local authorities to resist the steamroller that technology presents and simply ask to take time out while we understand the trade-offs we are being asked to make.

Some who commented at the meeting said that increased surveillance is "what the citizens are asking for." It is more accurate to say that this is something that "some" citizens, perhaps even a relative few who take the time to show up at meetings or write to council members, are asking for this. Most citizens are likely oblivious or have not fully considered the issue. I suspect that many may be more interested in crime prevention than catching criminals after the fact.

It was not made clear in the presentations from NCRIC (Northern California Regional Intelligence Center) or the Menlo Park Police Department that if and when the city submits its data to NCRIC if it will end up co-mingled with the data of other jurisdictions. In other words, if a search is made for license plate number HMS-007, the program searches a large database consisting of all of the data rather than a search through Menlo Park, then Redwood City, then San Francisco, etc. (This is based on what I heard at the Menlo Park Police Department Advisory Com-

mittee meeting, although the technical details were vague.

One idea that was not floated is the possibility of Menlo Park police using license plate readers, but not sharing it with NCRIC. Keep the data local during a trial period of time and see how we use it and its impact on crime.

As was stated at the meeting, no system is hacker proof and those connected to the Internet even less secure. Despite NCRIC's assurances that their system is very secure, recent news events suggests that the NSA would have little problem accessing it. I'm pleased that

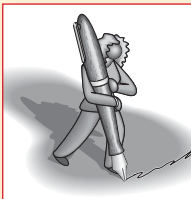
NCRIC is audited periodically, but it might be valuable for their systems and for those of the city to contract with a "white hat" security firm that specializes in finding vulnerabilities in systems to see how they withstand attacks.

The type of surveillance systems being considered are great investigative tools. Their effect on crime prevention comes indirectly when evidence leads to arrest and conviction. If I was a criminal, and concerned about license plate reader systems, I think I would simply steal a bunch of license plates or invest in ways to obscure license plates. I hear mud works.

Finally, claims were made that the system will not include any personally identifiable information. This may be factually correct, but it ignores how technology can be leveraged so that as few as four geospatial data points can predict with extreme accuracy who someone is. See the article in Nature that is linked to from this posting in the Electronic Frontier Foundation's website: eff.org/deeplinks/2013/05/alpr.

Again, I applaud City Council members for their work on this important issue. I am hopeful that the city will lead the way in creating model policies for the region and the nation.

Steve Taffee is a member of the Menlo Park Police Department's citizens advisory committee



GUEST OPINION

LETTERS

Our readers write

Continued from previous page

was in place, preserving the utilities under the roadbed and providing a safe road for the community.

I believe it is important to recognize the efforts of Save Alpine and Ramona Road and the community volunteers who got the repair work completed. Your readers should understand the full story of how this long-standing safety issue was

resolved through the efforts of a wide number of citizens and agencies working together.

*Ken Kormanak
Ramona Road in Vista Verde
area of Los Trancos Woods,
Portola Valley*

We are better off without license plate readers

Editor:

Shame on the Menlo Park City Council for buying license plate readers.

The Police Department should not be made into a local version of the NSA.

Instead of compiling a database of residents from license plate records and crafting rules for use to protect privacy, privacy will be served more effectively by not collecting the information in the first place.

*James Madison
Holly Avenue, Menlo Park*

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