

The Almanac

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

JANUARY 15, 2014 | VOL. 49 NO. 19



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SECTION 2



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Photo by Barbara Wood

Lee Appelbaum, left, Woodside Elementary School's educational technology coordinator, works with first-graders as part of National Computer Science Education Week. From left, they are Amelia M., Mia P., Bryn D., Georgia S., Brecon B., Jillian M., Alejandro D. and teacher Kathy McAdams.

Kids write computer code

By **Barbara Wood**

Special to the Almanac

During the recent Computer Science Education Week, educators across the nation were encouraged to spend an hour teaching students how to write, or code, computer programs (www.Code.org).

At Woodside Elementary School, Lee Appelbaum, the educational technology coordinator, arranged to have every student in the kindergarten-to-eighth-grade school spend a class period coding.

"The Hour of Code is just to get everybody to put their toe in the water," said Mr. Appelbaum.

Kids in kindergarten and first and second grades worked with cute little robots called Beebots, punching in instructions to get them from one square on a plastic mat to another. Older students used a programming language called Scratch to write short computer games.

On Thursday afternoon Kathy McAdams' first-grade students

joined Mr. Appelbaum in the school's computer lab, the fourth class of the day to try their Hour of Code.

Students first instructed the bee-shaped robots to move from one numbered box on a tabletop grid to another before Mr. Appelbaum gave them a more difficult challenge: Get to a numbered box to their left without making any left turns. Working in groups the students huddled together, punched in their instructions and then excitedly asked the others to watch the results.

There was jumping and shouting and laughing when it worked. "If it doesn't work out, then they just try again and it's no big deal," said Ms. McAdams.

While the task looked simple and the students appeared to be having a lot of fun, Mr. Appelbaum said the students were learning real programming skills: sequencing the order of instructions needed to reach a goal.

"It gives them some practice in actually thinking through the

steps in solving a problem," he said. "By the time they're in first grade, they're pretty good."

The Scratch language was developed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab and, said Mr. Appelbaum, is used even at the college level to teach non-majors how to program.

Older students use a slightly more sophisticated version of Scratch called BYOB (Build Your Own Blocks).

On Friday, middle-schoolers worked in their science or math classes to write a simple video game using BYOB. This reporter was handed a laptop and invited to join in, and is happy to report that while it did take her two class periods instead of just one, she was able to put together instructions to make a working game in which animated characters chased each other around the screen.

The enthusiasm for programming seems to be spreading through Woodside Elementary,

See **KIDS WRITE CODE**, page 6

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Local News

MENLO PARK | AHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

Giving another year of school to 4-year-olds

■ State Democratic leaders introduce bill in state Legislature.

By **Barbara Wood**
Special to the Almanac

A bill that would require public school districts in California to offer an additional year of school for 4-year-olds was introduced in the state Legislature on Jan. 7.

State Senator Jerry Hill, D-San Mateo, said at a press conference that one of his reasons for co-sponsoring the bill is that the Las Lomas and Menlo Park City school districts don't have the transitional kindergarten programs that almost every other district in the state offers.

Las Lomas has never had a transitional kindergarten program and Menlo Park has

announced it will end its program after this school year.

"Two school districts in my (senate) district — Las Lomas and Menlo Park City School — have interpreted the (existing) law to be voluntary and are not offering a transitional kindergarten program, causing children in San Mateo County to miss out on a critical developmental window," he said. "The fact that two school districts are not offering the program creates haves and have-nots — children who can benefit from the program and those who are left out."

"This isn't right," Senator Hill said.

Darrell Steinberg, the state

Sen. Hill cites local districts that don't, or won't, offer transitional kindergarten. 'This isn't right,' he said.

Senate president pro tem, is the main sponsor of the bill and California Democrats have listed the universal transitional kindergarten program as one of their priorities in the upcoming budget negotiations. However, Governor Jerry Brown's budget proposal released on Jan. 9 does not include any funding for transitional kindergarten.

The bill, which proponents are calling TK For All, proposes transitional kindergarten be phased in over five years, beginning with the 2015-16 school year, at an

estimated cost of \$990 million a year once fully phased in. The proponents claim that savings — from reducing need for special education services, having fewer students repeating grades, and having fewer Californians ending up in prison — will exceed the cost of the new program.

"I'm proud to call this wise spending in California," Sen. Steinberg said. "There are few better uses of the taxpayer dollars than investing in evidence-based change providing young people, 4-year-olds, the head start they need."

Tom Torklekson, the state superintendent of public instruction, also spoke in favor of the bill at the press conference. "It's a simple choice — invest in kids now and reap the rewards of a better-educated and more productive workforce and a health-

ier state or pay the price later with more high school dropouts and more young people dropping into trouble, gangs, drugs and jail," he said.

The proposed law has provisions that differ from the current transitional kindergarten law, approved in 2010, which now only applies to the 25 percent of children affected when the birth date for kindergarten admission was pushed back from Dec. 2 to Sept. 1.

It specifically makes providing the additional year of school mandatory for all districts, allows for districts to get facilities funding for transitional kindergarten classrooms, and says that if the program is seen as a state mandate, funding will be provided to all districts.

Go to tinyurl.com/mignw2x to see the text of the bill. ■

Judge lets defamation lawsuit proceed against John Woodell

By **Sandy Brundage**
Almanac Staff Writer

A judge declined to dismiss a defamation lawsuit filed by a fire board director against John Woodell, husband of Menlo Park Councilwoman Kirsten Keith.

The ruling, issued on Jan. 8 in San Mateo County Superior Court, found that the director, Virginia Chang Kiraly, had met the legal threshold for showing evidence of defamation as well as malice.

"We are very pleased the court very thoroughly analyzed all of the arguments, and rejected the assertion that anything goes when talking about a politician," said Harmeet Dhillon, attorney for Ms. Kiraly.

A recap of what has brought the parties to this point: Mr. Woodell filed a defamation complaint against fire board director Virginia Chang Kiraly and Menlo Park resident Chuck Bernstein in 2012, alleging the pair told the media, police and others that he had vandalized her campaign signs during the 2011 fire board election, after Mr. Bernstein discovered an

uprooted sign in his yard, lying next to a cellphone that turned out to be Mr. Woodell's.

Ms. Kiraly filed her own defamation lawsuit against Mr. Woodell late last year, and then Mr. Woodell filed an anti-SLAPP motion to dismiss it. The court's ruling concluded that she showed sufficient evidence to allow her lawsuit to proceed.

In mid-December 2011, Mr. Woodell made statements to a third party that "can reasonably be understood to mean that Kiraly had Woodell's cell

phone during the relevant time period and was entrenched in a set up to frame him for the sign incident," Judge Joseph Bergeron wrote.

Ms. Kiraly's lawsuit cited an email sent from Mr. Woodell to former Menlo Park council member Mickie Winkler that said, "Virginia is obviously entrenched, but I'd like to find a way to get her to consider another path. Chuck knows that Virginia had my phone, and now he obviously knows that she told him what he needed to hear... to get him-

See **DEFAMATION LAWSUIT**, page 8

An attorney for Mr. Woodell said they are considering all options, including an appeal.



File photo by Dave Boyce

This stump and the one in the background are what remained of two of 18 significant trees felled without a permit within an open-space easement in late December 2012 or early January 2013 at 18 Redberry Ridge in Portola Valley.

Town lifts sanctions over felled trees

By **Dave Boyce**
Almanac Staff Writer

■ **PORTOLA VALLEY**

It hasn't rained much this winter, but 13 new native oak trees and vegetation are reported to be growing vigorously on a Portola Valley slope on an undeveloped property at 18 Redberry Ridge. The lack of moisture and bad timing may have been critical to the death of three madrones that were also planted in the spring of

2013, according to staff report for the Jan. 8 Town Council meeting.

The news is probably welcome to property owner David Douglass, who paid for the new trees and efforts to get them to thrive. His plans to build a house on the 2.1-acre property have been on hold since the town learned of 18

significant trees there that had been felled without a permit — including in an open space easement — in late December 2012 or early January 2013.

The new oaks, which have the benefit of irrigation, are one element of a remediation program to reforest the slope, part of an agreement negotiated in April 2013 between

See **FELLED TREES**, page 8

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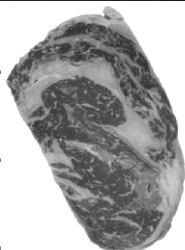
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Bill would outlaw sale of license-plate camera data

State Sen. Jerry Hill, D-San Mateo, has introduced a bill that would prevent law enforcement agencies from selling data gathered by license-plate-reading cameras to private parties, such as parking and car-repossession companies.

The city of Menlo Park has bought license-plate readers but does not plan to use them until a privacy policy is approved, and one of the clauses of the policy is supposed to address the sale of data.

Senate Bill 893 would protect the driving public's privacy where there is now no protection, but still allow law enforcement the use of a technology on the roof of a police car that can capture as many as 2,000 plates a minute, according to a statement from Mr. Hill's office.

Citing a report from the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department, the statement says that over 30 days, the cameras led to the location of 495 stolen vehicles, five carjacked vehicles and 19 vehicles involved in felonies — and 45 arrests.

Violations would entitle victims the right to sue and recover damages, including costs and attorneys fees.

The bill would also require agencies to get a court order to gain access to license plate data more than five years old.

"Law enforcement will still be able to continue to use (the) technology to catch criminals, but Californians will have peace of mind that their personal information is safeguarded," Mr. Hill said.

Food truck updates online

The Menlo Park Planning Commission held a public hearing Monday night, Jan. 13, on whether to allow Off the Grid to bring a changing roster of eight to 12 food trucks to the

Menlo Park train station parking lot on Wednesday nights. The hearing was held after the Almanac went to press.

Check AlmanacNews.com for updates on this story.



Photo by Barbara Wood

Woodside Elementary School first graders Bryn D. and Brecon B. strategize solutions to getting their bee-shaped robot from one place to another as they spend a class period leaning about computer programming.

Kids write code

continued from page 3

with students coming in to the computer lab before and after school and during recess and lunch periods.

Mr. Appelbaum is teaching interested students the Python programming language so that by the time they reach high school they are ready to program in Java.

Mr. Appelbaum said he believes that because computer programs are part of so many aspects of

modern life that everyone needs to at least understand them, even if they do not become computer programmers.

"Some day it's going to be reading, writing, arithmetic and coding," he said of the traditional school basics. ■

Links

- <http://scratch.mit.edu>
- <http://byob.berkeley.edu>

Sequoia high school district plans new school in 'Menlo Park area'

By Dave Boyce

Almanac Staff Writer

Enrollment projections for Menlo-Atherton High School show a 31 percent increase by the 2020-21 school year. That number is at least 7 percentage points higher than projections for the Sequoia Union High School District as a whole, so it makes sense that the district plans to build a new high school in "the Menlo Park area."

For months, district officials have been proposing two new small high schools of 300 to 400 students each to address a gradual increase of enrollment over the next seven years. A note on a discussion item for the school board meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 15, is the first mention that one of the schools "will be located in the Menlo Park area." The other school "will be situated between Redwood City and San Carlos."

The board meets at 5:30 p.m. at the district office at 480 James

Ave. in Redwood City.

Enrollment projections in the district, and the possible consequence of evenly distributing the load by reassigning neighborhoods to different schools, was of intense interest at a series of community meetings in 2013. Families from the Las Lomas Elementary School District argued passionately to keep graduates of La Entrada Middle School as an intact cohort by assigning them all to M-A. Much of the enrollment growth is coming from the Las Lomas and Menlo Park districts.

Just as passionate to attend M-A were families from East Palo Alto whose students have, for decades, had to ride buses to Woodside and Carlmont high school in compliance with a court-ordered desegregation plan that expired in the 1980s but carried on nevertheless. M-A will thus feel the brunt of the district's higher enrollment.

At the Jan. 15 meeting, the board will discuss a draft map of

neighborhood and school boundaries. Among the highlights:

■ All East Palo Alto students will be assigned to M-A. Open enrollment options will continue, including the option to ride a bus to Carlmont or Woodside high.

■ All Las Lomas households will be assigned to M-A, reassigning the 10 to 15 households assigned to Woodside High but with a guaranteed option to attend M-A.

■ Households from the Avenues neighborhood in the southern part of North Fair Oaks will continue at M-A, while households to the north will be re-assigned to Sequoia High.

Also on the agenda, and related to the new Common Core standards: The board is expected to choose a traditional math pathway rather than that used internationally. Math teachers at two of the four comprehensive high schools prefer the international curriculum, according to district staff. ■

Suspect may be tied to Atherton burglaries

By Renee Batti

Almanac News Editor

A burglary suspect arrested Jan. 7 in Redwood City may be tied to a series of Atherton burglaries in the Selby Lane area, according to police.

In a bulletin issued on Jan. 8, the Atherton Police Department said the unnamed suspect had been arrested in the Oakwood Boulevard neighborhood, which straddles Atherton and Redwood City, after a resident contacted the Redwood City police about a suspicious person in the area.

The night before the arrest, a four-agency effort ensued after an Atherton resident of Oakwood Boulevard called police to report hearing noises in the garage, according to the police bulletin. Atherton officers found a broken window leading

into the garage, and discovered that property had been stolen from cars inside the garage. The department later said the burglar had used a shovel to break the window.

That same night, an Atherton officer came upon a suspicious person a few houses away in Redwood City, but the person fled, leaving a backpack containing an item stolen from a car in the Atherton resident's garage, the police bulletin said.

Atherton, Menlo Park, and Redwood City police, along with a canine unit from Palo Alto, searched the neighborhood for the suspect in a two-hour door-to-door effort, to no avail.

The bulletin stated that the suspect arrested in Redwood City on Jan. 7 "may be tied to Atherton's string of burglaries in the Selby Lane area," but

nonetheless urged residents to remain vigilant, particularly in the Selby Lane area. "Continue to lock doors, use exterior lighting, and please call the police when there are suspicious people or unusual noises," it said.

The Redwood City Police Department didn't respond to the Almanac's multiple requests for the name of the arrested person before press time.

The Atherton Police Department issued a bulletin in mid-November after a thief or thieves prowling the Selby Lane area overnight entered unlocked vehicles parked in driveways, and in one incident, entered a home through an unlocked door and stole an electronic device. The incidents had been preceded by other residential and vehicle break-ins in the same area. ■



Photo by Anna Moorman

Day of service

Faculty and staff of Sacred Heart Schools in Atherton gave more than 750 hours of their time to 12 local nonprofit organizations, including Haven Family House in Menlo Park, during their annual day of service on Jan. 6. More than 250 faculty and staff members participated, preparing food for the homeless, removing invasive plants, visiting with the elderly, and reading and singing with children, among other tasks, the school said.

REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman



New Law Regarding Fences

Dear Monica: The fence around my property needs to be replaced and I would like to share the expenses with my neighbor. Is my neighbor obliged to do this? Or can he refuse to pay his share? Bill D.

Dear Bill: There is a new law in California that clarifies the rules regarding this. It states that "Adjoining landowners must share equally the responsibility for maintaining boundaries between them...they are presumed to share an equal benefit from any fence dividing their properties, and unless otherwise agreed in writing, are presumed to be equally responsible for the reasonable costs of construction, maintenance, or necessary replacement of the fence." The law

includes the steps that must be taken to notify the neighbor and how to assess whether the costs are reasonable. It also includes steps the neighbor can take to overcome the presumption of equal responsibility.

The best way to maintain good relations with your neighbor is to present the proposed fence project and agree on what is reasonable. If you want a much more expensive fence for specific reasons, your neighbor may not be responsible to share the cost of this upgrade.

In the past the sharing of fence expenses was assumed but not always enforced. The new law leaves no doubt that unless there are exceptions, neighbors should share these costs.

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Judge lets defamation lawsuit continue

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self entrenched. ...”

Ms. Kiraly stated in her court filings that she has never had Mr. Woodell’s cellphone.

In this type of hearing, the court does not evaluate the strength of any evidence, but rather accepts as true all evidence favorable to the plaintiff to determine whether the plaintiff shows a probability of prevailing.

Attorney Seth Rosenberg of Minami Tamaki LLP, who represents Mr. Woodell, said they are considering all options, including an appeal.

According to the attorney, Ms. Kiraly’s defamation claim relies upon a single piece of evidence despite hours of depositions and the collection of hundreds of documents.

“Trust me, if Ms. Kiraly had any additional evidence at all in support of her claim, she would have submitted it in opposition to our motion. If not, that was a remarkable gamble to take to rely on that one e-mail in opposing our motion. That one email is all they have and I have seen or heard nothing to indicate any different,” Mr.

Rosenberg told the Almanac by email.

Ms. Dhillon said that a single false statement is all she needs. “There’s no weight or volume requirement by law.”

She pointed out evidence collection is far from over, as each anti-SLAPP motion suspends discovery until the court rules; Mr. Woodell has not yet finished giving his deposition, and her firm has not yet been able to seek discovery from other people as a result.

From her perspective, the case is about “Mr. Woodell’s hurt feelings over other people’s conclusions about his phone being found (next to the sign). ... People say mean, mean things about me as a lawyer and politician all the time. That’s just life. You move on from that.”

According to the opposing counsel, the real story is Mr. Woodell’s evidence that from the beginning, Ms. Kiraly and Mr. Bernstein “wanted to create a scandal at the expense of an innocent person for their own purposes.”

Mr. Rosenberg highlighted an email dated Oct. 17, 2011, where Mr. Bernstein informed Ms. Kiraly that he had found what

appeared to be Mr. Woodell’s cellphone. He asked whether she would like a scandal that would make the front page, or whether she would rather forget the whole thing.

Ms. Kiraly replied by email that she thought he should go to the police, said she didn’t want to forget the matter because she had “a feeling (Mr. Woodell’s) involved w/ other shenanigans too re: my campaign” and wondered whether to call the Post.

After Mr. Woodell filed his defamation complaint, Ms. Kiraly in turn filed an anti-SLAPP motion, but lost, leaving his lawsuit free to proceed as well.

Mr. Bernstein, elected to the fire board in November 2013, represented himself in a defamation countersuit against Mr. Woodell; his complaint was dismissed when a judge granted Mr. Woodell’s anti-SLAPP.

“This is one for the record books,” said Ms. Dhillon, who has been an attorney for more than 20 years. “I’ve never seen a case before with three different anti-SLAPP motions.”

The court has scheduled a settlement conference for March 20, and set a trial date of April 7. ▀

New high-tech thriller has local connection

Names are changed, but many of the settings in Ursula Ringham’s new book, “Privileged Corruption,” are based on real life locations in the Menlo Park and Palo Alto area, says the author.

Ms. Ringham, a resident of the Willow Glen area of San Jose, is the daughter of former Menlo Park mayor and council member Chuck Kinney and his wife, Marilyn. Raised in Menlo Park and Palo Alto, she attended Castilleja, and graduated from UC Davis.

“Privileged Corruption” is about the inner workings of a

software start-up on the eve of its IPO, says Ms. Ringham, an alumna of both Adobe and Apple. The story is set in the fictitious town of Oakview, said to be modeled after Menlo Park and Palo Alto.

“Privileged Corruption” marks Ms. Ringham’s literary debut and is a self-published book available on Amazon.com and iBooks (\$14.99).



Ursula Ringham

FELLED TREES

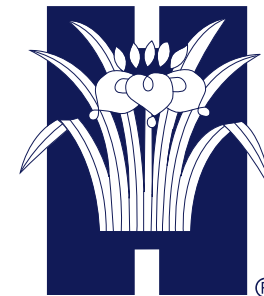
continued from page 5

Mr. Douglass and the council. The agreement included a \$75,000 fine for the downed trees and \$150,345 to cover costs of replanting and maintaining the plantings over the succeeding five years, officials said at the time.

The weather has not been helpful, Town Planner Tom Vlastic said, adding that staff would be monitoring the program as it

proceeds. There are “several more very hard checkpoints ahead” for Mr. Douglass, he said.

Mr. Vlastic summarized for the council the successes so far and the work still to be done on the remediation effort. The council voted 5-0 to open the door to Mr. Douglass to present his building plans to the Architectural and Site Control Commission. “I’m willing to release the hammer-hold on their head(s),” Councilwoman Maryann Moise Derwin said before the vote. ▀



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Atherton council may be near deal on Little League park facilities

By Renee Batti
Almanac News Editor

Menlo-Atherton Little League and the town of Atherton may be close to an agreement that will allow the sports league to build new facilities and improve the playing field in Holbrook-Palmer Park.

The City Council on Wednesday, Jan. 15, will review and possibly approve a set of requirements, conditions and constraints for the project, which was overwhelming approved by voters in 2012. The approval of Measure M cleared the way for M-A Little League to build permanent covered seating for 200 spectators (a structure that will include covered dugouts), build restrooms facilities, and resurface the existing field that has hosted ballgames for a

number of years.

The project also will include installation of an electronic scoreboard, foul poles and fencing. M-A Little League will pay for the project, and contribute additional funds for park beautification and to improve the park's tennis courts.

Although the ballot measure garnered the support of 75 percent of voters, hammering out the project's scope and details has involved rigorous back-and-forth among planning commissioners, council members, staff and Little League officials.

At the council's Sept. 4 meeting, the council asked the sports organization to reconsider the proposed size of the seating structure, and to consider the possibility of making the scoreboard and foul poles removable rather than permanent, among other suggested tweaks

to the project. Town staff has since been meeting with Little League officials to work out a final plan.

At the Jan. 15 meeting, the council will review a staff report that indicates the Little League doesn't support reducing the seating structure's size, and that it was unable to find a removable scoreboard that met its requirements. But the league agreed to modify its original plan for foul poles.

Also on the agenda, the council will discuss a recommendation to increase Recology green waste rates, and possibly approve a contract for event services in Holbrook-Palmer Park.

The meeting begins at 7 p.m. in the Town Council Chambers at 94 Ashfield Road, in the Town Center.

Go to tinyurl.com/Atherton-Council15 to view the agenda and staff reports. ■



Composers Joshua McGhee, Valerie Capers and John Robinson with pianist Jodi Gandolfi of Menlo Park onstage at the music center of Eastside College Preparatory School in East Palo Alto.

Concert benefits school's music program

Music by African-American composers will be featured by local musicians in a concert at 3 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 26, in the Performing Arts Center of Eastside College Preparatory School in East Palo Alto.

Proceeds from the fifth annual concert will benefit the tuition-free school's music programs.

The concert will feature music drawing from African-American traditions — spirituals, jazz, blues — and other American, European and world sources. It includes

works by Duke Ellington, Valerie Capers, William Grant Still, Margaret Bonds, Joshua McGhee, John Robinson and others.


There will be a musical tribute to the memory of Trayvon Martin and a new piece by Ms. Capers, based on the life of Ruby Bridges, who in 1960, at age 6, integrated the schools of New Orleans.

Performers include soprano Yolanda Rhodes, pianist/vocalists LaDoris Cordell and Deanne Tucker, violinist Susan Brown, cellist Victoria

Ehrlich, pianist Jodi Gandolfi, clarinetist Carol Somersille, bassist John Robinson, trumpeter Fred Berry, trombonist John Monroe, and percussionist Jim Kassis. The Eastside choir, with David Chaidez as director, will also perform.



Eastside College Preparatory is located at 1041 Myrtle St. in East Palo Alto.

Tickets at \$20 general, \$5 for students and seniors, may be ordered online at Brown Paper Tickets or purchased at the door. For information, call 688-0850.



EYE CARE NEWS

**Presented by
Mark Schmidt
Licensed Optician**

STICKING TO THE SCRIPT

If you are curious what your eyeglass prescription means, begin with the headings "OS" and "OD." These are Latin abbreviations for left eye (OS, oculus sinister) and right eye (OD, oculus dexter). The numbers listed under each refer to how much vision correction is needed. The further the number is from zero, the more vision correction you need. A plus (+) sign in front of the number indicates farsightedness, while a minus (-) sign indicates nearsightedness. As

for the numbers themselves, they represent "diopters" (D), which are the units used to measure the correction (or focusing power) required by the lens. If you have astigmatism, there will be three numbers describing the type, degree, and orientation of the irregular curvature.

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P.S. Astigmatism is a type of refractive error (along with nearsightedness and farsightedness) that is caused by an eye that is not completely round.

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

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Photo credit: Loli Kantor

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Raised in Atherton.
A Woodside resident.

Hasko named to Planning Commission

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

■ PORTOLA VALLEY

Judith Hasko, a Portola Valley resident and attorney working in the life sciences industry, was named to the Portola Valley Planning Commission to complete the two years remaining in the four-year term of longtime commissioner Arthur "Chip" McIntosh, who stepped down in December.

The Town Council interviews candidates for the five-member commission in public session and then usually votes on the appointment. There were two candidates on Wednesday, Jan. 8: Ms. Hasko and Los Trancos Woods resident and former serial entrepreneur Mike Mokolke. The vote for Ms. Hasko was unanimous.

In remarks before voting, council members noted that

both candidates were qualified for the position, but the fact that Mr. Mokolke lives in an unincorporated community weighed against him, given the

centrality of Planning Commission decisions in town affairs.

One such decision was the commission's highly controversial 3-2 vote in March 2013 approving the use of artificial grass to resurface a soccer field at the Woodside Priory School. In an unusual twist, the council reviewed that decision two months later, without anyone having appealed it, and then reversed it on a 3-2 vote. The



Judith Hasko

commission's action came up during Ms. Hasko's interview.

The Planning Commission handling of the matter was "balanced and allowed everybody to be heard," Ms. Hasko said in response to a question by Councilman John Richards about commission decisions that might have been handled differently. "I think it was the right process. I think that it should have been a hard decision and it was."

In a lighter moment, Mr. Richards noted that Ms. Hasko's appointment would bring to three the number of attorneys on the commission, joining Nate McKitterick and Nicholas Targ. Ms. Hasko said she would not draw on her inner library of jokes and that her legal training would be useful and evident in her ways of thinking.

Ms. Hasko and her husband Phil Reilly have lived in the Bay

Caltrain celebrates its history

In its ongoing celebration of being the oldest continually operating passenger railroad in the West, with 150 years of service, Caltrain will run a special train down the Peninsula on Saturday, Jan. 18.

The train, free to the public, will stop briefly at each of Caltrain's historic stations to leave a commemorative plaque recognizing the station's status

on the National Register of Historic Landmarks. The stop at the Menlo Park station, at 1120 Merrill St., will be from 10:28 to 10:33 a.m.

The event, which includes a festival of food, music and exhibits at the Santa Clara station, observes the January 1864 completion of the line from San Francisco to San Jose.

Area since 1994 and in Portola Valley since 2007, she wrote in her letter of application. Until her appointment, she chaired the Trails and Paths Committee and served on the Portola Road Corridor Plan Task Force and the Ad Hoc Affordable Housing Committee, all panels involved in key town issues.

She has a bachelor of arts degree in bio-psychology and a

master's degree in the philosophy of neurobiology, and worked as a scientist at Genentech Corp, she wrote. The couple chose to live in Portola Valley "because we perceived that the town was built on values reflecting our own, and because it was a beautiful and peaceful place to live," she said in her letter. Her recreational interests include running, hiking and riding horses. ■



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Portola Valley begins a nine-month anniversary party

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

What if Portola Valley threw a nine-month party and everybody came? The next nine months will tell. A rolling party of that duration gets going in January to celebrate the town's 50th anniversary with various events and activities and culminates on Sept. 21 with a giant get-together at Town Center.

A 50th anniversary is usually a reason to celebrate. The question of how to do that for a town of 4,600 caught the interest of residents Danna Breen and Cindie White. They've been brainstorming for months, they said in an interview.

One reason to celebrate, they said, is to heal wounds. The past 18 months in Portola Valley have been notable for frayed tempers. The Town Council in mid-2012, moving to comply with a state mandate to plan for affordable housing, announced its intention to buy a former plant nursery at 900 Portola Road. Residents, particularly neighbors of the site, erupted in anger with claims that they had been insufficiently included in

Flag-raising

The town of Portola Valley will start its 50th anniversary celebration with a flag-raising ceremony from 4 to 5 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 16, at the Old Schoolhouse at Town Center. The white anniversary flag was designed by Town Manager Nick Pegueros.

Go to portolavalley50.blogspot.com to see a new blog about the anniversary.

Go to pv.beaucamera.com to see a website on "Portola Valley, Past and Present."

the process. The council's plan came to naught, but amid bitter recrimination.

In the spring of 2013, the community again found itself divided, this time on the question of resurfacing a soccer field with artificial grass at the private Woodside Priory School. The town is not shy about its longstanding advocacy of going green, though artificial grass, with no need to irrigate, has some green bona fides.

In a contentious 3-2 vote in March, the Planning Commis-

sion allowed the fake grass, to the joy of the Priory community and the distress of green advocates. Emotions flipped two months later when the council overturned the decision, also on a 3-2 vote.

"We were acutely aware of how much tension there is in town and that people were not getting along," Ms. Breen said.

What to do? Maybe an enjoyable and free-form review and celebration of the town's history, values and goals would be helpful to reorient and reinvigorate the community, they concluded.

Pose implicit questions such as why Portola Valley looks the way it does, and what the legacy of incorporation has become. Get the schools involved, have fun in coming up with ways to celebrate, and then spend the year celebrating.

"It's been so fabulous," Ms. Breen said about the process so far.

An agreeable Town Council on Jan. 8 appointed an 11-member Ad-Hoc Town's 50th Anniversary Committee, with Ms. Breen and Ms. White as co-chairs.

Among the ideas that may have legs: summer concerts organized around a 1964 theme; scavenger hunts; a multi-generational game involving consultations with town elders; a spring cleaning and planting day; a star party; a commemorative song and poem; a bonfire; an equestrian event; a race that involves progressively different modes of transport.

"Everybody is kind of out there and has an idea and we're saying, 'Go with it.'" Ms. Breen said. "Come along. Come along and have fun and understand what living in the Valley is about."

If there's support for a skateboard race down Alpine Road, there will be a good faith effort to arrange one, she said.

"There are no rules," Ms. White said.

"And the circle (of participants) gets larger," Ms. Breen added.

There are presences online as well.

As for the celebration in September: "We didn't want it to be a gala and we don't want money to change hands," Ms. Breen said. There's been talk of a potluck, of a picnic, of a roasting pig and beans cooking over an open fire. There will be a barn dance. A caller for square dancing has already been arranged, Ms. White said.

Most important to the council is an actual calendar of events with dates, the members said. ■

Freedom Train commemorates civil rights march

For nearly 30 years, the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Association of Santa Clara Valley has commemorated the distance civil rights activists walked from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, during Dr. King's historic march by chartering a special Caltrain

run, and the association will uphold its annual tradition this year.

On Monday, Jan. 20, the "Freedom Train" leaves the San Jose Diridon station at 10 a.m. and arrives in San Francisco an hour later. Event tickets will be accept-

ed on southbound trains departing San Francisco after 1 p.m. that day.

Tickets for the "Freedom Train" must be purchased from the association, available at scvmlk.org, presmlkscv@yahoo.com or 408-861-5323.



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Death of 150 ducks behind plans to drain Redwood City pond

The recent death of about 150 wild ducks from an apparent outbreak of avian cholera is behind plans to drain a bird-watching pond at 1400 Radio Road in Redwood City, according to the South Bayside System Authority, a waste-water treatment agency.

"Please note that this does not pose a threat to humans, but can cause death to waterfowl, gulls and other species," said Melisa Amato, a wildlife specialist for the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife service confirmed a recent outbreak of avian cholera in Hayward and suspects the disease has spread west to Redwood City. The deaths at the Radio Road pond occurred between

BRIEFS

Jan. 3 and 9.

Ms. Amato is asking the public to report die-offs of more than 10 birds to Cheryl Strong or Rachel Tertés of the Fish & Wildlife service. Reports by the public are particularly important "if these birds appear to be fresh and have no obvious signs of death," Ms. Amato said.

Send email to cheryl_strong@fws.gov or rachel_tertes@fws.gov.

Recycled fresh water from the nearby treatment facility feeds and freshens the water in the Radio Road pond, according to the waste-water authority.

The pond "is a perpetual favorite among local birders for its fabulous numbers of waterfowl and shorebirds, and the constant hope, often fulfilled, of rarities," according to the Sequoia Audubon Society website. "It is not uncommon to see over 10,000 birds from the security of your car, all close enough to be identified with binoculars (although a scope is a spectacular asset at this location)."

Las Lomitas School registration opens

The kindergarten registration period for children who will turn 5 on or before Sept. 1, 2014, is now open at Las Lomitas Elementary School, 299 Alameda de las Pulgas in Atherton.

To begin the registration process, bring the child's original birth certificate or passport, immunization records to date, and proof of residence in the form of two utility bills, or one utility bill and lease agreement or mortgage paper, to the school

office. Office hours are 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The Las Lomitas School District does not offer transitional kindergarten.

There will be two kindergarten sessions; the first, from 9 a.m. to 12:20 p.m., and the second, from 10:15 a.m. to 2:05 p.m. Session requests will be taken starting at 10 a.m. Feb. 1. Call 854-5900.

Tours of the school for parents of incoming kindergarten students will held on these dates: Friday, Jan. 24; Friday, Jan. 31; and Thursday, Feb. 13. The tours run from 9:45 a.m. to 11 a.m. Call the school office at 854-5900 to reserve a tour.

Ormondale School

A parent visitation day will be held at 8:30 a.m. Thursday, Jan. 30, for parents whose children will be attending either transitional kindergarten or kindergarten at Ormondale School in Portola Valley in the fall of 2014.

Afterward, parents will have the opportunity to briefly visit the three kindergarten classrooms. Registration forms for kindergarten will be available in the school office after the classroom visits. Do not bring children to the visitation day.

Children must be 5 years old on or before Sept. 1, 2014, in order to be registered for kindergarten. Transitional kindergarten will be offered for children whose birthdays fall between Sept. 2, 2014, and Dec. 2.

Ormondale School is located at 200 Shawnee Pass in Portola Valley. For more information, call the Ormondale school office at 851-1777, ext. 2651.



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Saturday, January 25 at 8:00 pm
Valley Presbyterian Church
945 Portola Road, Portola Valley
Free reception after the concert

Sunday, January 26 at 2:30 pm
Los Altos United Methodist Church
655 Magdalena (at Foothill), Los Altos
Free reception at intermission

Tickets:


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Sisters raise money for orphanage

The Holland sisters — Kylie, 14, Devon, 13, and Piper, 11 — of Portola Valley are entrepreneurs, activists and musicians. Giving back to the world is something their family believes in.

Daughters of Paul Holland and Linda Yates, the girls founded the Earth Saver's Club for Kids in 2010, and have volunteered near (Haven House, food bank) and far (including the Kliptown Youth Program in Soweto last summer).

Their latest effort is forming a new social cause record label, Painted Wolf Records. Their first release, "Invitation to Dream," is a collection of bedtime ballads and lullabies, sung by Devon. It was recorded at Skywalker Sound and Fantasy Studios with Grammy Award-winning sound engineer and head of Skywalker Sound, Leslie Ann Jones, producer Peter Maleitzke, and concert-level musicians.

Kylie, Devon and Piper are using 100 percent of the profits from "Invitation to Dream" to raise the last \$250,000 the U.S. Green Building Council needs to break ground on the first LEED-certified orphanage in the world



The Holland sisters, from left, are Kylie, Piper and Devon.

in Haiti in spring 2014. It will be called the William Jefferson Clinton Children's Center.

The orphanage will provide a model for orphanages throughout the Third World, using sustainable materials to withstand natural disasters.

"With the fourth anniversary of Haiti's devastating earthquake just a few weeks away (Jan. 12), and tens of thousands of children still homeless, these young women are more determined than ever to achieve their goal," says Marisa Long, public

relations director of the U.S. Green Building Council.

The Holland sisters are no strangers to big ideas. They not only started the Earth Saver's Club for Kids a few years back, sister Devon has invented the Maji Mobile, designed to help women in Africa carry clean water.

Visit paintedwolfrecords.com to purchase "Invitation to Dream" for a donation of \$20 or more. To learn more about the Holland girls, watch their video on YouTube.

■ POLICE CALLS

This information is from the Menlo Park Police Department. Under the law, people charged with offenses are considered innocent unless convicted. The dates police received the report are shown.

WEST MENLO PARK

Fraud report: A resident of Manzanita Avenue is out \$12,600 in rent paid to someone claiming, over email, to be the owner of a vacation home. Dec. 28.

Theft report: Someone stole a laptop computer valued at \$1,500 from an unlocked vehicle parked on Camino A Los Cerros. Jan. 6.

LADERA

Theft report: An outdoor heater worth \$1,200 is missing from the front of the Lobster Shack restaurant in the Country Shopper mall on Alpine Road. Dec. 22.

PORTOLA VALLEY

Residential burglary report: Someone broke into a house on Escobar Road through a smashed front window and stole jewelry and cash, a total loss estimated at \$5,500. Dec. 18.

Fraud report: A resident of the 4000 block of Alpine Road reported an unauthorized cash advance of \$4,800 charged to his credit card. Jan. 2.

WOODSIDE

Residential burglary report: Gardeners alerted deputies from the Sheriff's Office to a broken rear window of a house on Moore Road. The house appeared to have been ransacked while the residents were away; dresser drawers and closets were found opened. A tabulation of losses is not expected until the residents return. Dec. 18.

MENLO PARK

Commercial burglary report: In an overnight incident, someone pried open the rear door of Beltramo's Wines and Spirits at 1540 El Camino Real, broke into a wine cabinet and stole \$15,000 worth of fine wine. Jan. 12.

Residential burglary reports:

■ Tools valued at \$4,500 are missing from a residence on Fanita Way. Someone entered the house through an unlocked rear door and stole a rake, wet (tile) saw, radio, toolbox, mixer, grinder and polisher. Jan. 10.

■ Two bicycles are missing from an unlocked garage on Oak Knoll Lane, a total loss of \$1,500. Jan. 12.

■ Someone pried open a rear door and stole an air compressor, chop saw, bucket, paint sprayer and paint brush from a house on Stanford Ave-

nue. Jan. 04.

Theft reports:

■ An electric Razor scooter that had been locked with a bike lock under a carport on Coleman Place is missing. The loss is estimated at \$250. Jan. 11.

■ A package containing two men's ski shirts worth a total of \$220 and another package containing a \$100 pair of shoes were missing from the front porches of two homes on Bay Laurel Drive. The empty boxes were found further up the road. Jan. 3.

Fraud reports:

■ A resident of Partridge Avenue sent a postal money order for \$535 to an address in Florida in response to a phone call from someone claiming to be working for the "U.S. Treasury Department." The caller told the resident to send the money order to claim a lump sum of money that he'd won. Jan. 8.

■ Using the personal identity information of a resident of Continental Drive, someone tried twice and failed twice to open credit accounts with two retail stores, but succeeded in getting a \$300 payday loan. Jan. 4.

Hearing on recovery center

Will a Skyline Boulevard meditation center in the unincorporated woods above Woodside become a non-medical rehabilitation center for clients with drug and alcohol-addiction problems? Neighbors of 16350 Skyline Blvd. have objected to the proposed

change in the use permit for the facility. Of particular concern is the likelihood of recovering addicts smoking cigarettes on the grounds and inadvertently starting a forest fire.

The proposal to change the use permit from a medita-

tion center, the Stillheart Institute, to a rehabilitation facility, the Stillpath Recovery Center, comes before the San Mateo County Planning Commission on Wednesday, Jan. 22, in the Board of Supervisors chambers at 400 County Center in Redwood City. The meeting begins at 9 a.m. The proposal is the first item of business on the agenda.

Thank you for supporting the Holiday Fund

Through January 8th, 182 donors have contributed \$146,127 to the Holiday Fund

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Thomas & Maggie Mah Johnson *	Karen Sortino 75
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Katherine Bryant *	Lucy Reid-Krensky 100
Gerald and Candace Griffin 50	Don Lowry 100
Ladera Mens Tennis & Domino 185	Hobart S. Johnson 50
Peter and Deborah Nelson 250	Barbara Brennan 500
Joan Rubin *	
David Reneau 150	
Paul Perret 250	
The Calhoon Family 500	
Subbaiah Malladi 5,000	
Jeffrey Volckmann 1,000	
Gary Peterson 1,000	
Robert Mullen & Marsha Campbell 500	
Bruce Willard 500	
Pegasus Family Fund 1,000	
Bill and Nancy Ellsworth *	
Robert A. Page 1,064	
Betty Jean Meissner 100	
Lynn T. Swisher 100	
Stone Family 100	
Lisa Ryan 50	
Richard Sibley 100	
Mary Soloman 50	
Andrea G. Julian 300	
Anne G. Moser 100	
James E. Esposito *	
Frederick R. Mugler, Jr. 60	
Richard and Jean Duda 10	
Mark and Karen Weitzel *	
Caroline Beverstock 250	
Raymond & Nancy Rosendin 500	
Vicky Rundorff *	

In Memory Of

Richard H & Louise J. Barbour 100
Bill Hewlett & Dave Packard 500
Esther Johnson *
Bill Lend 100
Helen Gibboney *
Annie Strem 50
Jack Pfluke 75
Janice M. Pausa 100
Robby Babcock 100
Marilyn Berry 100
Esther C. Judd *
John Inglis 200
Margaret Green 500
Frank and Celine Halet 500

In Honor Of

Ray Mauss 50
Dennis McBride 30

Foundations, Businesses & Organizations

William & Flora Hewlett Foundation 100
Lutticken's After 5 15,000
Packard Foundation 15,000
Rotary Club of Menlo Park Foundation 15,000

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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.

Viewpoint

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

Gym teacher's firing still hurts

Despite a state ruling that there was no illegal behavior involved prior to the dismissal of Menlo Park gymnastics instructor Michelle Sutton, she may continue to press her case in a civil lawsuit.

The ruling by the Department of Fair Employment and Housing said there was not enough evidence to cite the city on the very specific grounds of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation as a result of her being fired after she had asked for guidance from the city's human resources director and her union representative about how to file a complaint against her supervisor, Karen Mihalek. The common misunderstanding is that just treating someone unfairly is a violation when it is actually not, a state official said.

But while Menlo Park City Manager Alex MacIntyre said a third party investigator found that Ms. Sutton had not been illegally harassed or fired in retaliation for trying to file a complaint, he did say that certain supervisors and employees interacted inappropriately with Ms. Sutton on occasion. And in a search of Ms. Sutton's personnel file by the Almanac her record was clean: no reprimands or other citations were found.

Ms. Sutton is apparently not satisfied with these findings and said she may sue the city. Although her case will not be helped by the state ruling, it is certain to bring up the inept way the city handled her dismissal. Perhaps the most egregious mistake was after a week on the city's website, a copy of the complaint filed against Ms. Sutton was removed, along with at least a dozen emails posted by outraged parents in support of the popular gymnastics instructor. After a huge public outcry, the city restored the letters.

At the time the media law expert Jim Ewart told the Almanac removal of the email and comments was ludicrous, saying that such records are just like public comments made at a city council

meeting. Mr. Ewart works for the California Newspaper Publishers Association in Sacramento.

Another instructor, Chris Ortez, quit the gymnastics program in protest over Ms. Sutton's firing, and told the City Council that Ms. Mihalek held "none-too-discreet" contempt for Ms. Sutton and reportedly had a history of complaints filed by at least two female staff members.

During her employment in Menlo Park, Ms. Sutton was a part-time, at-will employee, a status that carries few rights when compared to full-time city employees. As the name implies, such employees can be terminated without the need for documented justification.

But in this case, the legal findings do not square with all that we know about how Ms. Sutton was viewed by parents whose children attended her classes. Why was she dismissed after

the city received just one letter from a parent who Ms. Sutton simply asked to follow the rule that parents are not permitted to be on the gym floor during certain routines? There were no citations for misconduct in her personnel file. Did one angry letter justify her quick dismissal?

The Almanac has learned that the state can now track whether multiple complaints are lodged against the same employer, so in the future it will be possible to determine if multiple claims have been filed against Menlo Park or other cities. To bring more transparency to such employee actions, the city should release statistics each year showing how many claims have been filed and within which department, as well as the outcomes, if any, from the state. Such a practice may give a supervisor pause before abruptly firing an employees without due cause, and allow the public to see whether one department has an inordinate number of disciplinary problems.

EDITORIAL

The opinion of The Almanac

LETTERS

Our readers write

Incredible response after accident

Editor:

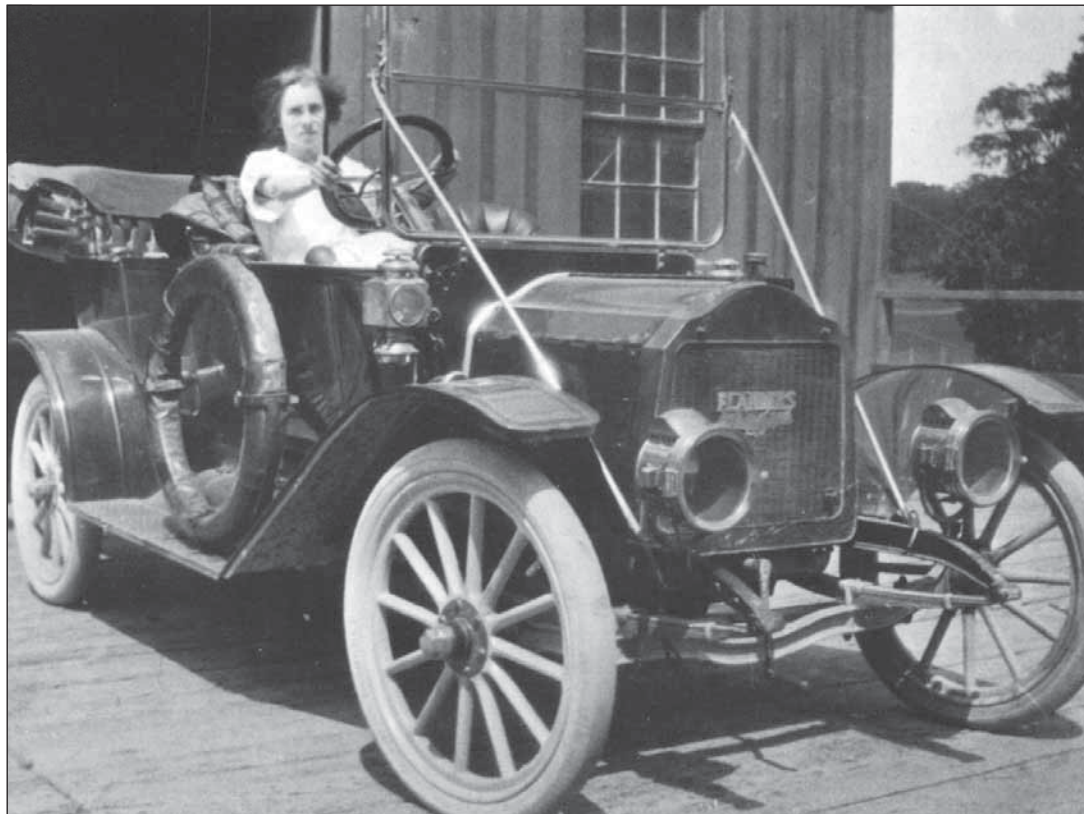
Unbelievable. That's one of the few printable words I can use to describe the lawsuit by Edward Nelson against a couple of 6-year-old kids.

This 90-year-old runs his SUV onto the sidewalk, severely injuring two children, and then has the temerity to blame them for being negligent and reckless.

Unless there are some undisclosed facts in this case, Mr. Nelson's response is an embarrassment to Stanford and the legal profession, along with the attorneys who agreed to represent him. Mr. Nelson should apologize profusely to all involved and offer to make restitution.

Unfortunately, too many people are afraid to admit responsibility for their actions, and our country is worse off for it.

*Marty Mackowski
Los Charros
Portola Valley*



Woodside History Committee

Our Regional Heritage

Grace Andreen sits in a Flanders motorcar in front of the Andreen Blacksmith Shop in Woodside during the early 1900s. The Flanders company operated in Detroit from 1910 to 1913 after Flanders left the Ford Motor Co., which used some of the techniques he developed to build the popular Model T automobile.

A New Year's invitation from Menlo Park's mayor

By Ray Mueller

Menlo Park is many different things to many different people. To some, it is the country's foremost venture capital destination. It is a social media technology hub. It is a gateway to a world-class academic institution. It is a beautiful suburb with excellent schools. It is a center for bio-medical research. It is a birthplace for high tech and robotic innovation. It is a fount of revolutionary approaches to green and sustainable living practices.

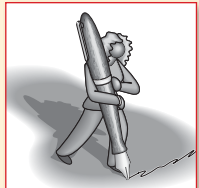
Menlo Park is all of these things and many more, depending upon whom you ask, but there is just one thing Menlo Park is to all of its residents: It is our home.

At the end of the day we are all just neighbors, striving to renew and preserve a place we cherish and are proud of — to raise our children in, and in which to grow old with those we love. Do we always agree on what that means and how it should be accomplished? No.

But in Menlo Park there is a tradition that we cherish: Our neighbors care enough to be part of the conversation. We all gather and work together to build a better future, because we recognize that a city is not defined by its boundaries and structures, but rather by the strength

and health of the community that dwells within.

We know that our greatest resource is the intellect, passion, and goodwill of our residents. Does it get messy sometimes? Of course, absolutely. But in Menlo Park, that is just part of the fun — the challenge of gathering and distilling all of the information, all of the data, and all of the opinions, and settling upon a course for the future."



**GUEST
OPINION**

In 2014, the city of Menlo Park will face many challenges, some old, and some new, including:

- Working with small business owners to revitalize our downtown and retail areas all over the city.

- Determining how to expand the sales tax base in our industrial areas.

- Determining how to implement the Downtown Specific Plan.

- Collaborating with the Las Lomas and Menlo Park City school districts as they embark upon infrastructure improvements.

- Tackling how to provide educational equity to students of the Ravenswood School District.

- Planning how to implement an infrastructure for electrical vehicles.

- Finding new ways to expand transportation

options for seniors.

- Finally opening our new police station in Belle Haven.

- Determining how to effectively implement an ordinance that balances the residents' right of privacy against government surveillance.

All of these challenges and many more await us in the new year. I invite you to participate in the discussion, whether it be as a resident, or if you have the time, more formally as a city commissioner.

The city has extended recruitment efforts until Jan. 20 for the following commission vacancies: Bicycle Commission, one vacancy; Library Commission, three vacancies; Parks and Recreation Commission, two vacancies; and Finance and Audit Committee, three vacancies.

For more information, visit the city of Menlo Park's Commissions webpage at menlopark.org/city_commissions.html and click the link on the left titled "Commission Vacancies January 2014." Or call the City Clerk's office at 330-6620.

I confidently know I speak for all of my colleagues on the City Council when I say I hope you will consider joining us.

*Happy New Year,
Mayor Ray Mueller*

History of Park Theatre, from owner's perspective

By Howard Crittenden

I know many residents of Menlo Park were disappointed and frustrated when the Park Theatre was demolished in November of 2013. It was heartbreaking for me, too — I have owned the property for 27 years and invested over \$400,000 in architectural plans, consultants, attorney fees, and required city costs to try and make it a viable property and keep its historical essence intact.

There have been many misconceptions regarding the theatre and why it was torn down, and as the owner of the building, and as someone who worked hard to find a common ground, I would like to explain my side of the story and clear up any confusion as to why demolishing the building became the most sensible option.

I purchased the Park Theater property in 1986 as a real estate investment. Around the late 1990s, the theatre tenant, Landmark, declared reorganization bankruptcy. They were a good tenant, and the theatre was popular, so I reduced the rent to \$.61 a square foot (in a market where \$1.75 a square foot was the going rate). The space was drastically under-performing, so I tried numerous times to make the building a mixed-use space, with office space in addition to the theatre. Repeatedly, the Menlo Park Planning Commission did not support my attempts to add office space — or add more parking — even when I came back with plans for underground parking options.

During the late 1990s and through the 2000s,

I spent tens of thousands of dollars on architect plans and consultants, and I devoted countless hours to presenting my ideas to the City Council, hoping that somehow, together we could come to a workable solution that would keep the historical theatre in place, while allowing me to operate an investment that could be profitable.

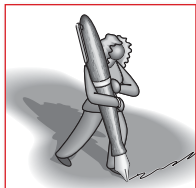
In the following years, the city decided to encourage development downtown by creating the Downtown Specific Plan. Encouraged by the new rules, I dusted off my original plans and hired a respected attorney to help me push forward with renovating the building.

To meet the city's requirements, the new construction bid came in significantly higher than what the architect had estimated, making the project financially untenable. I attempted to work with the city to grant a variance on some of the parking restrictions, and I asked Caltrans to partner with me in installing bike parking along El Camino Real, as this was the only way to preserve the theatre's marquee from being hit by passing trucks. The city wasn't ready to accept this idea, and the added requirements would have added additional years to the project's completion.

Reluctantly, I was finally forced to abandon the project. We demolished the building, and the property has now been sold. I regret that there were no winners in the demolishing of the Park Theatre, and I want to offer my sincere apologies to the members of the Menlo Park community who wished to see the theatre stay. I put a huge amount of financial resources and time into the project, but I finally realized it wouldn't be viable in the current environment.

Thank you for reading this and hearing my side of the story. ■

Howard Crittenden



**GUEST
OPINION**

Struggle outlined by Dr. King continues today

By Henry Organ

These are times of 50-year anniversaries, and it is nearing 50 years ago that The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

In the opening paragraph of Dr. King's acceptance speech in Oslo, he spoke of young people in Philadelphia, Mississippi, who, the day before his speech, were brutalized and murdered while seeking the right to vote. How sad, but predictable, that this non-violent pursuit of the right to vote must continue a half-century later.

Last year, the Supreme Court handed down a decision that weakens the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which was enacted only a year after — prompted by Dr. King's Nobel speech in 1964. Within hours of the court's decision last year, some "pre-clearance" states moved immediately to suppress voting rights.

It was almost sinister that that same Supreme Court deflected the subject back to Congress, with a House of Representatives dominated by states that are not eager to expand voting rights. In her Supreme Court opinion, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said that Dr. King's legacy and the nation's commitment to justice had been "disserved by today's decision." Amen!

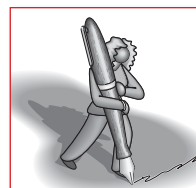
This Supreme Court decision also reminded the nation of a related sinister, non-violent move in many states: gerrymandering voting districts. One of the major goals of gerrymandering is to dilute and negate the effect of equal voting rights and interests of people and communities of color.

Locally, it was prudent for San Mateo County to move from county-wide to district elections. I was honored to have been chosen by former Supervisor Rose Jacobs Gibson to be a member of the county's Charter Review Committee in 2010, which addressed this subject. I strongly support this change, because it should increase voting and enhance representation for residents throughout the county.

Special recognition must go to the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights in San Francisco, which prompted this move. It is hoped that the district boundaries drawn by the county satisfy constitutional concerns set forth by the Lawyers' Committee at the outset.

Dr. King's birthday is an annual reminder, and challenge, that civil rights are never achieved absolutely and irreversibly. They must be vigilantly sought and protected.

Henry Organ is a Menlo Park resident.



**GUEST
OPINION**

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