

The Almanac

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

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SECTION 2

Industrial-strength

art

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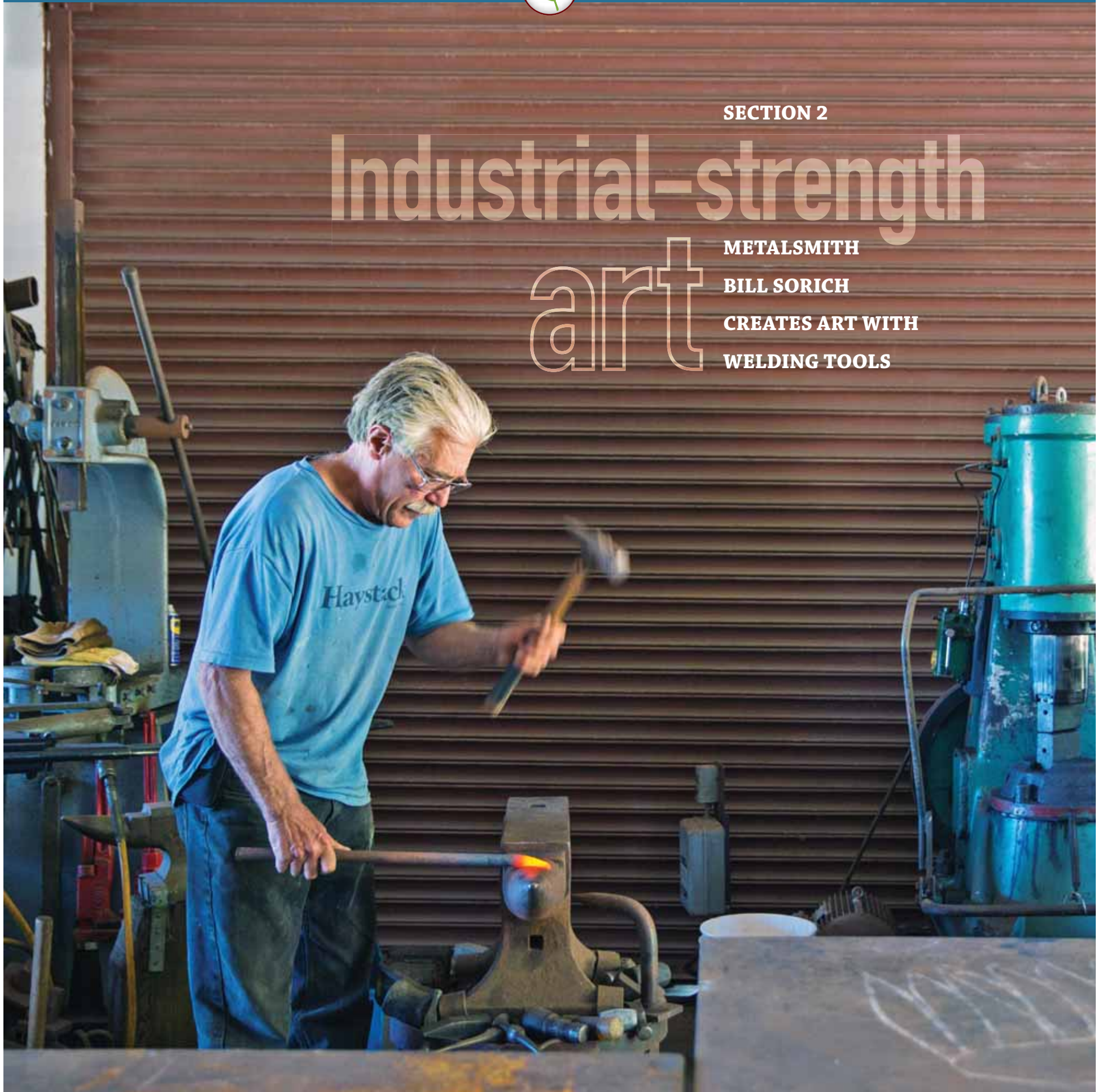




Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

● Elementary School teacher and author John Fuller checks in on student Maddy during a class project.

Oak Knoll teacher's book inspired by long commute

By Barbara Wood
Almanac Staff Writer

Oak Knoll School teacher John Fuller has a 100-mile round-trip commute to and from his home in Orinda, and that fact probably has a lot to do with the novel he's just published.

The commute provided both inspiration for, and the time to ponder, the plot and characters of his book, "Fly Car." The book is about a boy who invents a flying car to ease his father's commute so they can spend more time together.

"Fly Car" tells the story of Eli, a sixth-grader who wishes his father wouldn't spend so much time running the family's car company. Eli is also having trouble at school because he is bored and afraid of being picked on for appearing too smart.

"I was really trying to find a book that would win boys over to reading," says, Mr. Fuller, a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher at Oak Knoll.

The book, Mr. Fuller's first, is meant for 9- to 12-year-olds. He says he wanted it to be fun to read, but also to communicate a few universal themes. One is: "Just because you're young

doesn't mean you can't do great things," he says.

The book is also about redemption and reconciliation, "and finding out what really matters in life," Mr. Fuller says. "At the end of the day what really matters is family."

Fuller's own family, especially his daughters, Sophie, 19 and Hosanna, 20, inspired him to write the book. Well, actually, he says, they asked him to get a hobby, one that didn't involve

'At the end of the day what really matters is family.'

JOHN FULLER

posting embarrassing photos of them online.

"That's when Fly Car actually started popping into my head," he says. He wrote for 6-8 hours a day during two summers, and nights and weekends during the school year.

Mr. Fuller's students also inspired him. He teaches the same students for two years, starting in fourth grade and continuing through fifth grade. "I actually read them an earlier

draft of 'Fly Car.' When they stood up and started cheering at the end of the story, I knew I was on to something," he says.

Mr. Fuller has self-published the book, which is available on Amazon in a Kindle version or in softback. He has not tried working with a conventional publisher, but may do that later, he said.

"I probably need to figure out what's the next step," he says. "When you self-publish it's a pretty steep learning curve."

Mr. Fuller also sees his book as inspiring his students to know that someone who isn't a "writer" can write a book. "That's been a pretty powerful teaching tool," he says.

Mr. Fuller was a business and finance major as an undergraduate, then got his teaching degree and a master's in educational administration. But, he says, "I see myself as a storyteller." Good literature, Mr. Fuller says, is story-telling set in type.

"Fly Car" uses episodes Mr. Fuller remembers from his childhood, as well as those from his classrooms. "There's a lot of goofy things that you get

See **FLY CAR**, page 18

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Election results

Go to AlmanacNews.com to see election results. The paper went to press before the results were released.

Electronic eyes along Portola Valley roads?

■ The Sheriff's Office wants license plate cameras, and the council wants to hear from the public about this.

By **Dave Boyce**
Almanac Staff Writer

Portola Valley residents are soon to confront a tradeoff: continuing privacy in their driving habits or giving up some measure of that privacy in the interest of combating crime.

The Town Council plans to hold public forums early in 2015 to discuss costs and benefits and seek opinions on round-the-clock police surveillance of the license plates of all vehicles passing through town.

The San Mateo County Sheriff's Office is seeking permission from the council to set up two or three permanent license-plate-reading cameras in strategic roadside

locations to improve the odds of identifying the vehicles of thieves, burglars and other miscreants.

The cameras would capture the comings and goings of everybody, transmitting the data to a regional police intelligence center, where it could be stored for up to a year in a database used for criminal investigations.

On Oct. 22, the council heard a presentation from the director of the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center (NCRIC) on the uses of license plate data and the procedures established to protect it from unauthorized access.

Access to the data would be restricted to law enforcement personnel who agree to abide by NCRIC privacy policies set by the state attorney general and the federal Department of Justice, NCRIC Director Mike Sena told the council. Users, including federal agents, must have a specific purpose for examining

the data, he added.

Is it safe?

Skepticism over the safety of the camera data came from councilmen Craig Hughes and John Richards. The possibility exists that someone could sue for and obtain the data, exposing the driving patterns of residents, Mr. Hughes said.

Referring to a recent lawsuit in Southern California by the American Civil Liberties Union over access to license-plate photos taken from patrol cars, Mr. Hughes noted that the ruling specifically classified data from mobile cameras as protected from disclosure in that it is evidence gathered in a police investigation.

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department argued that the term "investigation" covers an officer reacting to a license-plate camera inside a patrol car that detects a suspect plate. Such

data qualifies for nondisclosure, the department said. The judge concluded that the public interest weighed against disclosure.

But what about fixed always-on cameras that gather data on all passing vehicles, including vehicles not under suspicion? Would that situation constitute an "investigation"? If not, is that data a public record? The question has not been addressed in court, Mr. Hughes said.

Asked to comment, Town Attorney Leigh Prince said that an argument could be made that such data is a public record.

Mr. Richards called the cameras "shiny new tools" that people want to use. "It's one of those, 'If you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail' kind of thing," he said.

He pointed to the "phenomenal explosion" of data from many sources, and its potential as a chink in the armor of our civil

liberties. "It may not be a major chink, but it's a chink and I'm certainly worried about it," he said.

The cameras are "very valuable tools," Lt. Tim Reid of the Sheriff's Office said when asked to comment. Without cameras, unless deputies are on the scene, "we've got nothing," he said.

A compromise, Mr. Hughes said, might lie in how long NCRIC keeps data about vehicles of no interest to police. If data about suspect vehicles — a tiny fraction of the total — could be stored and the rest deleted after, say, two weeks, "it might not be a bad idea," Mr. Hughes said.

A year of storage gives reluctant victims and witnesses time to open up to investigators, Mr. Sena said. And a plate may be tied to other crimes, including future crimes. "We're really trying to push standardization," he said.

See **ELECTRONIC** page 8

Students skip World Series for candidates' forum

By **Barbara Wood**
Almanac Staff Writer

Nearly 80 Menlo College students, about three times the number of people who showed up for a recent similar event in Holbrook-Palmer Park, skipped the World Series' game 7 to listen to the four Atherton City Council candidates on Oct. 29.

The college now has nearly 6 percent of Atherton's registered voters living on its campus, according to the county's Elections Office.

Menlo College has reason to engage with the town, where it has been since it was founded in 1927. For the first time, the college recently reached the 750-student enrollment cap allowed by the town, and will need a new agreement to allow additional students. Also, the college — along with Menlo School, with which it shares athletic facilities — wants to rebuild and expand those facilities.

One of the questions posed to each of the four candidates for the three open council seats was whether they would support raising the campus enrollment cap from the current 750 to 1,000.

Menlo College now has nearly 6 percent of Atherton's registered voters living on its campus.

Bill Widmer, an incumbent running for his second term, said the school would first need to go through a public hearing and update environmental reports. "We have to go through those steps," he said. "One of the key things is going to be the traffic that those extra 250 students may bring."

Rose Hau, a longtime town volunteer running for her first term on the council, also mentioned traffic.

The issue, she said, is finding ways to reduce traffic impact, whether it's by carpooling or riding bikes. "Increasing the student population is not the problem," she said. "It's the traffic."

Another questioner quizzed candidates about what they could do about the town's limits

See **WORLD SERIES**, page 8



Photo by Rita Williams

Brothers Isaiah, 5, and Nathan, 7, try out the new furniture.

'Grateful Gathering' at Valley Pres

By **Rita Williams**

Seven-year-old Nathan plopped down on a chair and said, "Wow, this is comfortable!" And then just like Goldilocks, he tried out a couch, then another couch, and finally declared: "This is the most comfortable of all!"

His little brother, Isaiah, 5, started jumping on the brand new full-size mattress, where he will sleep with his big brother, and asked if all this was theirs.

The answer was yes. These are part of the new or gently used items donated to help

this three-generation family furnish their rented house, their first permanent home after two months living in a shelter run by InnVision Shelter Network.

Nathan's family and a

See **GRATEFUL** page 8

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Menlo Park: Consultant's proposal was rejected

By **Sandy Brundage**
Almanac Staff Writer

A consultant's proposal that Menlo Park take a proactive role in swaying public opinion with regard to the specific plan before the Measure M initiative qualified for the ballot was rejected, according to City Manager Alex McIntyre.

Malcolm Smith, now retired from 12 years as Redwood City's communications manager, pitched senior Menlo Park officials in March. The proposal included drafting letters to the editor to be signed by "supportive community members," writing talking points for use by the council and other officials, and preparing content for distribution via social media.

"We said no; we're looking for educational material, not advocacy," Mr. McIntyre told the Almanac on Monday, Nov. 3.

News of the proposal broke over the weekend after former councilman and Measure M supporter Heyward Robinson found a copy of the pitch among documents released by the city on Friday, Oct. 31, in response to his Public Records Act request.

Mr. McIntyre said the only piece of work the city hired the consultant to do was write content for the city's website about the specific plan and the initiative. The content was then

reviewed for impartiality before going live by the attorney contracted to represent the city on specific plan issues.

Mayor Ray Mueller, currently in China on a business trip, said he was not aware of the consultant's activities on behalf of Menlo Park. According to the city manager, the \$5,000 contract was not presented to the council "because it was so low profile. It was about getting the website done right."

Why hire out for the website content? According to Mr. McIntyre, the city wanted someone familiar with government who could write about the specific plan and initiative in a straightforward way without resorting to confusing jargon.

Initiative advocates have challenged whether the city's website, as well as information presented in its Menlo Focus newsletter, is truly impartial. State law allows a city to spend public funds to provide balanced information on a measure as long as the materials do not take a partisan position.

The state attorney general "declined to get involved" after Mr. Robinson filed a complaint over the newsletter, Mr. Robinson said, but he has also made complaints to the Fair Political Practices Commission, the San Mateo County District Attorney's Office and the grand jury. ■

■ POLICE CALLS

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

number, date of birth and home address. The resident took steps to cancel the loan and has filed fraud reports with credit reporting agencies. Oct. 21.

MENLO PARK

Auto burglaries:

■ Someone broke a passenger window on an unoccupied vehicle parked in the backyard of a Carleton Avenue home and stole a stereo. Estimated loss: \$1,000. Oct. 25.

■ The owner of a vehicle parked at Bedwell Bayfront Park on Marsh Road returned to her vehicle to find a broken window and that someone had stolen her purse, including her wallet, a small amount of cash and her makeup. Estimated loss: \$523. Oct. 25.

Thefts:

■ Two men with about 10 bottles of wine secreted under their clothing walked out of the Safeway supermarket on Sharon Park Drive, got into a turquoise van and drove away. Estimated loss: \$920. Oct. 25.

■ Someone cut the lock that had been securing a bike and stole it from the 1100 block of Alma Street. Estimated loss: \$400. Oct. 29.

■ A woman left her vehicle unlocked near La Entrada Middle School on Sharon Road and returned to find that someone had stolen her glasses, phone charger, CDs and hiking poles. Estimated loss: \$150. Oct. 29.

WOODSIDE

Fraud: A resident of Jane Drive told deputies that someone stole two credit cards from her wallet and used them at Apple stores in the Bay Area. Estimated loss: \$18,800. Oct. 26.

WEST MENLO PARK

Missing wallet: A man discovered that, about 30 minutes earlier, he had left his wallet in the vicinity of a pump at the gas station at the corner of Avy Avenue and Alameda de las Pulgas. When he returned, he and the station owner reviewed the security camera footage. They saw a commercial driver pick up the wallet and later learned that the company employing the driver was making arrangements to have the wallet returned. No reported loss. Oct. 24.

Fraud:

■ A resident of Camino de los Robles reported that someone had acquired the resident's debit card information and used it at a Macy's department store in Rancho Cucamonga. Estimated loss: \$359. Oct. 18.

■ A resident of Barney Avenue discovered that someone had taken out a loan in his name, using his Social Security

See **POLICE CALLS** page 14



Photo by Dave Boyce/The Almanac

John Mahoney, a chain-saw sculptor, works Saturday on converting a tree stump to a chair in Fremont Park in Menlo Park. It's one of three pieces of furniture to be made from a fallen pine.

Chain-saw sculptor at work

Taken down in September after reports that it was leaning precariously, the huge pine tree in Fremont Park at the corner of University Drive and Santa Cruz Avenue no longer towers over its space, but it will continue to inhabit it. From the remains of the humble stump, a throne-like chair — perfect for climbing on — now rises, the work of chain-saw sculptor John Mahoney of West Coast Arborists.

On either side of the chair lie two massive and immovable pieces of the pine.

A section of trunk nearer University Drive will become a two-part bench for about six people, graced in the middle by an elevated reclining seat, said City Arborist Christian Bonner.

The other piece, an angular limb lying in a way that invites climbing, will become a climbing structure. Mr. Mahoney

will probably be cutting some steps into it, Mr. Bonner said.

Ideas for the transformation of the wood came from city staff brainstorming with community members, Mr. Bonner said. Mr. Mahoney, an old hand at sculpting with chain saws, knows his assignment. "We figured he would just run with it," Mr. Bonner said. "We're definitely giving him some artistic license."

— Dave Boyce

Fine diluted again for felling trees

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

It's been eight years since Woodside's Town Council amended the town's tree protection law. The 2006 ordinance defines when a particular species of tree is large enough around to be considered "significant," and the stiff penalties for taking down a significant tree without first obtaining a \$50 permit.

Take down three or more significant trees and it can cost you \$10,000 per tree.

Except that it never does. The council has heard at least five appeals of major fines since 2009, including one for \$92,000. None of the penalties paid have been even close to what the statute calls for. The most recent, on Oct. 28., was more of the same.

Sudhir S. Dixit of Woodside Drive asked the council for mercy over a fine of \$12,500 for the felling of two pine trees of significant size without getting a permit. The fine is \$5,000 for the first tree and \$7,500 for the

WOODSIDE

second. Mr. Dixit said he'd been misinformed by the contractor about the need for a permit, a common complaint.

The council reduced the fine, this time to 10 percent of what is specified. Past penalties have been 7 percent of the fine on the books, 11 percent, and two at 50 percent, both of which included refunds if ameliorative steps were taken.

As in past deliberations, council members were not happy with their record. The council has acted with "terrible inconsistency," said Councilwoman Anne Kasten. The permitting process is not well understood, Councilman Ron Romines said, and a study session is in order.

Mayor Dave Burow said he meets with Town Manager Kevin Bryant "every two weeks, and every two weeks I ask him, 'When are we going to schedule this session?'"

Councilman Dave Tanner suggested sending letters to every resident on the need for tree-destruction permits, and to every contractor within 50 miles "to put them on notice that we fine people for this." Maybe a sign at the entrance to town, he said: "Welcome to Woodside. Get a permit."

Mr. Dixit's drought-stricken Monterey pines were already in their last days and were infested with bark beetles, an arborist told the council.

Fire Marshal Denise Enea of the Woodside Fire Protection District recently singled out Monterey pines, along with eucalyptus, as being fire hazards when located near power lines. But if they're big enough, the municipal code requires a permit to fell even these non-native and potentially hazardous trees.

"I'm kind of torn about whether we should have permits at all for these trees," Mr. Burow said. "They're going to be a fire hazard, so let's get them out of here." ▀

REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman



Seller's Overreach

Dear Monica: I made a full price offer on a property last week and was very surprised to get a counteroffer from the seller that was \$50,000 higher than my offer. It was not a multiple offer situation but the seller wanted more than the property was listed for. This didn't feel right to me so I rejected it and thus, did not get the property. Did I do the right thing? Bob A.

Dear Bob: You responded reasonably to the seller's overreach, and it ended in a lose-lose situation. The seller didn't sell the house and you didn't get the property. What you have described happens too often in this market. Sellers price their properties low hoping to get multiple of-

fers and when they only get one offer, they don't want to accept it because they really want a higher price. Sellers should price their properties such that if they only get one offer, that they will be okay with it. They should price it at least at the minimum they would be comfortable selling it for.

When a buyer makes a full price offer and the seller rejects it, buyers feel that they are being taken advantage of and they don't like it. Many go away and never return. Even if they eventually get into contract, the initial experience can set a bad tone for the rest of the transaction. Sellers would do better to price their properties honestly, reflecting what they truly want.

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When Amanda isn't teaching, she loves playing volleyball, hiking, rock climbing, and getting out on the water. She also loves playing and listening to music, playing her guitar or clarinet, attending concerts, symphonies, or musicals, and learning new music.

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Electronic eyes along Portola Valley roads?

Continued from page 5

Councilman Jeff Aalfs acknowledged “a little” concern about privacy, but wondered if the council was concerned about the right issue. The town may have an implicit obligation to communities already using the cameras, to contribute to what he called a network effect.

If a suspect plate is detected in Redwood City and passes unnoticed through Portola Valley, is Portola Valley pulling its communal weight? “For the system to have a benefit, we ought to be on the same playing field as everybody else,” Mr. Aalfs said.

The Sheriff’s Office has contacted Woodside Town Hall on the question of license plate readers, Mayor Dave Burow told the Almanac. “Before they (do) anything, we should have them come and present to the council,” he said.

Mayor Ann Wengert said that civil liberties should be a top priority, but that crime is an important issue in Portola Valley. “We all know that there’s an economic disparity that’s

increasing,” she said.

Asked in an interview to elaborate, Ms. Wengert said that a wealthy community can create incentives for would-be criminals. “Any time you have that kind of bifurcation in the economic situation of your residents in the whole place, that can certainly result in a targeted location,” she said.

A few residents commented at the Oct. 22 meeting. Slawek Wojtowicz, who said he lived in Poland during the Cold War, compared the proposed surveillance to life under Communism and the dystopian society portrayed in the novel “1984” by George Orwell. “Do we want more of that?” he asked. “I don’t.”

In England, known for the ubiquity of surveillance cameras, “there’s no place to hide,” Mr. Wojtowicz said. “Do we really want to live in that kind of a society?”

Virginia Bacon asked Mr. Sena whether the public would know the locations of the cameras.

“Normally, we don’t advertise where the cameras are,” he replied. ▣

WORLD SERIES

continued from page 5

on noise and night-game lighting that “restrict campus life.”

“Lights and noise, those are hot buttons and they always have been in town,” Mr. Widmer said. However, he said, the town recently gave Sacred Heart Preparatory high school one-time permission to hold a night game, which engendered no complaints. Perhaps Menlo College could do the same, he said.

“I really think the issue is you all deciding what you want ... and communicating that to those of us in town,” said incumbent Rick DeGolia, who was elected a year ago to fill the seat left vacant when Jerry Carlson resigned to move from Atherton. “Until you communicate it, we can’t guess what you want.”

Mike Lempres, a member of the town’s transportation and rail committees running for his first term, said he also favors the school’s trying one night game. “I think that’s a great idea,” he said. “There’s going to be some noise, but it’s going to be a reasonable amount of noise. ... One of the great things about the valley is people actually understand beta testing.”

Ms. Hau said the question surprised her because it had

never come up during her eight years on the Planning Commission. She also favored trying out one night game. “You all need to make sure there’s nothing that happens with disruption of the neighborhood,” she said. “This is the same regulation that we impose on everybody, not just your school.”

One issue that was not raised was the expansion of the athletic facilities at Cartan Field, although that topic was highlighted in a press release Menlo College sent out about the forum.

The explanation probably lies in an email sent from City Manager George Rodericks to Richard Moran, Menlo’s newly inaugurated president. Mr. Rodericks suggested that Cartan Field might not be a good forum topic because it is a “pending land use matter” that will come before the council. As such, he said, any of the candidates who expressed an opinion on it, before the usual process involving the public, could possibly find themselves barred from voting on the matter in the future.

At the end of the forum, as the final candidate to deliver his closing arguments, Mr. DeGolia said: “I’m happy to announce that the Giants have won the World Series.” He received the loudest applause of the night. ▣



Menlo School musical

Menlo School’s drama department will present “Urinetown, The Musical” on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Nov. 7-9, in the school’s Florence Moore Auditorium, 50 Valparaiso Ave. in Atherton. The cast includes: front row, from left, Maya Donato, Taylor Taweel, Matthew Bates, Sarah Rantz and Jessie Guthrie; and back row, from left, Scott Stevens, Amitra Misha, Lucas Loaiza, JB Horsley and Connor Pace. Tickets, at \$10 for adults and \$5 for students, are available at the school’s campus store.

‘Grateful Gathering’ at Valley Pres

Continued from page 5

family of three in East Palo Alto were the recipients of a “Grateful Gathering” at Valley Presbyterian Church in Portola Valley on Oct. 25. The all-volunteer nonprofit, Grateful Gatherings, started two years ago in Oakland when KTVU anchor Frank Somerville and his wife Donna asked friends to donate household essentials to fill an empty apartment a homeless family was moving into.

Now, 25 families later, the Somervilles asked former KTVU colleague Rita Williams and Valley Presbyterian Church to hold the first-ever Grateful Gathering in San Mateo County.

Almost 100 people on the Peninsula supported the event, which helped 13 people (seven of them children plus one more due to be born on Christmas Day) turn their rental housing into homes.

Sleep Train donated new mattresses to the families, whose members have worked hard with the nonprofit InnVision Shelter Network to get jobs and stabilize their lives as they moved out of homelessness.

“It’s a simple model that we now know for sure can be duplicated by any organization in any community — anytime,” said Donna Somerville.

“It was so touching to see the faces of the family members ... first wide-eyed at all the beautiful items donated with love and then big smiles as they realized they were theirs to keep,” said Gwen Halterman, a co-chair of Grateful Gatherings along with her husband Chuck, Lindsay Bowen and Rita Williams. Anita Wotiz provided tech support.

Other local churches are now talking about a community-wide Grateful Gathering on the same day.

And there is great need. InnVision Shelter Network helps about 70 individuals or families each month move from shelters or other transitional housing into permanent housing and self-sufficiency.

“We hope that others are inspired to follow this example of positively changing the lives of more of our neighbors in need,” said Adam Klein, who is marketing and strategic projects manager at Shelter Network.

Nine-year-old Maria sat on her new bunk beds saying she



Maria, 9, hugging Grateful Gatherings co-chair Rita Williams.

was going to sleep on the bottom bed, then the top the next night. And she said she was going to dream about who to invite over for her very first sleepover. ▣

Go to Grateful-Gatherings.org for more information.

Rita Williams of Portola Valley, a former reporter at KTVU (Channel 2), is a co-chair of the Grateful Gatherings all-volunteer nonprofit.



Photo by Natalia Nazarova

Cardboard Challenge

This all-boys' team called Pink Prancing Ponies created a Pink Bowling Alley, with Colin Jonson testing it out, during Woodside Elementary School's first annual CardboardChallenge event on Oct. 24, part of the school's design program. Each team, over the course of two hours, created games, rides and play structures.

Menlo Mandarin charter school to get \$375,000 federal grant

By Barbara Wood
Almanac staff writer

The Menlo Mandarin Immersion Charter School, which has petitioned to start up in the Menlo Park City School District next fall, is set to receive a \$375,000 federal grant that will go toward paying the costs of starting up the new public school if its charter petition is approved.

The grant comes from the federal Public Charter Schools Grant Program, via the Charter Schools Division of the Califor-

nia Department of Education.

The charter was notified of the grant on Oct. 23. The money, according to the state's website, is meant to supplement local and state funding for the school and is for one-time costs, not ongoing operating expenses.

Backers of the charter school have argued that the charter will save the district money by operating a Mandarin immersion program within the existing district schools, but opponents fear it will take funds from existing programs.

The school district board is scheduled to vote on whether it will authorize the charter on Nov. 12. Carol Cunningham, a district resident and parent who has headed the Mandarin immersion movement, said she will present the district with a revised budget that reflects the grant before the vote.

If the charter is not approved by the district, the backers can appeal to the county school board, and if the county board turns it down, to the state board of education. The grant is conditioned on approval of the charter. **A**

Redwood City School District OKs Mandarin immersion program

By Barbara Wood
Almanac Staff Writer

As the Menlo Park City School District struggles with a proposal for a Mandarin immersion charter school in the district, the Redwood City School District has approved its own Mandarin immersion program to start next fall.

District officials say students from the district, which includes parts of Atherton and Woodside as well as Redwood City, will be given first priority but that out-of-district students will also be accepted as long as classrooms have space for them.

Parents in the Menlo Park district began pushing the district to start a Mandarin immersion program early in 2013. In April of this year, however, the board declined to take any action on a program, saying they wanted to take a close look at their existing Spanish immersion program and had too many other things, such as building a new school, on their plate.

When the Menlo Park district board declined to start an immersion program, backers proposed the Menlo Mandarin Immersion Charter School, submitting a charter school petition on Sept. 12. The board will vote on authorizing the charter on

Nov. 12.

The proposal has engendered a lot of opposition from district parents and teachers, but under state law, the district has limited grounds on which to deny the charter.

In Redwood City, the board has approved a Mandarin immersion program to start next fall at John Gill School, located north of Jefferson Avenue and east of Alameda de las Pulgas.

Depending on the number of students interested in enrolling, the program could start with transitional kindergarten (for students turning 5 between

See **MANDARIN** page 16

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a guide to the spiritual community



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Potentially hazardous trees may be downed by year's end

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

■ PORTOLA VALLEY

While the exact number of trees living in Portola Valley is not known, there is now one tree-related number that is: 31.

There are 31 trees in the public right-of-way and on private property that, if they fell, might start wildfires because of their proximity to power lines, according to the officials from the town, the fire district and the power company.

Public Works Director Howard Young drove around town recently looking for potentially hazardous trees near power lines. With him were Fire Marshal Denise Enea of the Woodside Fire Protection District and a representative from the Pacific Gas & Electric Corp.

The town is collaborating with PG&E to take down as many of the 31 trees as possible before the year ends, at a total cost of about \$120,000, Town Manager Nick Pegueros told the Almanac.

Under the plan, PG&E pays for the cutting — about \$60,000

for all 31 trees, drawn from a hazard-abatement account whose funds expire at the end of the calendar year.

Property owners pay to have the wood removed. The town's share could be around \$25,000, Mr. Pegueros said. Trees felled on private property require owner approval.

In a note to the Almanac, Mr. Pegueros noted the timeliness of this project, given the drought and its weakening effect on trees, predictions of a not-so-wet winter, and the fact that two serious fires in Woodside were the direct result of trees falling on power lines, including one in July along Canada Road near Godetia Drive.

"We must prepare the town for what could be one of the most threatening fire seasons on record," he wrote. "In that regard, every little bit we do today to remove variables from fire risk, like large trees overhanging power lines ... is a positive step toward improving the safety our community." ▣

Menlo council amends specific plan

By Sandy Brundage
Almanac Staff Writer

Menlo Park now allows less medical office space within the boundaries of the downtown/El Camino Real specific plan, following a unanimous vote by the City Council.

With Mayor Ray Mueller calling in from China on Wednesday, Oct. 29, the council voted 5-0 to limit medical office space per project within the specific plan area to 33,333 square feet for projects of 100,000 square feet or more; smaller developments may include up to one-third of their total size as medical offices. The mayor was out of town on work-related business.

The Planning Commission had also unanimously support-

ed the changes, which were first proposed in 2013 during the first specific plan review. The amendments then underwent analysis as required by state law, and were brought back for approval this fall.

Not everyone was pleased. Former council member Steve Schmidt, who supported Measure M, the specific plan initiative on the Nov. 4 ballot, described the council's action as "political silly season theater."

Referencing the analysis done by the attorney who drafted Measure M, Mr. Schmidt said the changes could have been made in the future if the measure passes, contrary to the analysis by the city's contracted attorney. He decried the city's "commitment to misinformation." ▣

His comments sparked the ire of Vice Mayor Cat Carlton and Mayor Mueller, who asked for politeness.

"I am so tired of the inflammatory rhetoric and innuendo," Mr. Mueller said. "The public is tired of the inflammatory rhetoric and innuendo. For months as mayor I sat quietly while people said terrible things about my colleagues and myself. And that kindness has been met with nothing but further rebuke and character attacks."

The night's vote had nothing to do with Measure M, he said. "The world does not revolve around Measure M. This is just action that needs to be taken." He urged everyone to consider how to work together in the future regardless of the election's outcome. ▣

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Truck shears off hydrant, water gushes

A column of water erupted from the southwest corner of Santa Cruz Avenue and University Drive in Menlo Park after a pickup truck making a turn sideswiped a fire hydrant and sheared it away at about 1:25 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 1, police said.

A witness told police that a gray or silver pickup truck struck the hydrant at Fremont Park while making a right turn from Santa Cruz onto University. The witness said that the driver, a woman, stopped after the incident, emerged from the truck, then got back in and drove away, police said. She was gone by the time police arrived.

Firefighters shut off the water within minutes.

Fire-hydrant designs include hydrants that shear away when struck, Fire Chief Harold Schapelhouman of the Menlo



Firefighters quickly shut off the water gushing from a busted hydrant at Fremont Park.

Park Fire Protection District told the Almanac.

While the fire district main-

tains hydrants and responds when a hydrant is damaged, the local water company owns

Work starts on community garden

By Sandy Brundage
Almanac Staff Writer

There's one construction project in Menlo Park that may be expected to proceed with no drama and even a helping hand from the community.

Twenty-three residents joined six members of the Rotary Club of Menlo Park on Sunday, Nov. 2, to start building a community garden at Ivy Drive and Hill Avenue for the Belle Haven neighborhood. They finished creating 25 beds, according to Rotarian Glen Rojas, and work will continue the next weekend.

Priority for the 4-foot-by-8-foot beds, which will be free to use (with gardeners getting a one-year lease), will be given to those living closest to the garden. The club said it would take applications for the remaining beds.

In addition to the club and main sponsor, Greenheart Land Development, other contributors include Bavarian Nordic, Farmscapes, the city of Menlo Park, Recology, CalWater, Mis-

BRIEFS

sion Engineers and Lynsco.

Alleged graffiti vandal arrested

An 18-year-old Menlo Park resident has been arrested for allegedly spray-painting graffiti on public and private property along U.S. 101 from San Francisco all the way down to Santa Clara counties, according to police.

Aderis Williams surrendered to police and was arrested on Wednesday, Oct. 29, for felony vandalism that caused an estimated \$15,000 in damage, Menlo Park police said in a press release.

A search carried out at his Carlton Avenue residence reportedly found evidence connecting Mr. Williams to the crimes. He was booked into the San Mateo County jail.

General plan update

Belle Haven's new police substation at 871 Hamilton Ave. will host an open house on Wednes-

day, Nov. 5, which will include city officials discussing the ongoing general plan update.

The free event runs from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Networking event

The Rotary Club of Menlo Park is hosting a business networking event on Tuesday, Nov. 11, at SMB Fitness (1019 El Camino Real) from 5:30 to 7 p.m.

Tickets are \$20. Contact Yuhui Chen at yuhuifitness@gmail.com or Brett Caviness at brettcaviness@gmail.com to RSVP.

State of the city

Breaking with tradition, Menlo Park's state of the city event this year will take place downtown, at a temporary paseo created at 1080 Chestnut St., between Santa Cruz and Menlo avenues.

The free event starts at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 13, and will include dance and musical performances by local youth. ▣

POLICE CALLS

continued from page 6

■ Two boxes containing a sports drink and supplies for a water polo tournament were stolen from the front porch of a home on Bay Laurel Drive. Estimated loss: \$112. Oct. 29.

■ Someone stole a backpack from an unlocked vehicle parked near La Entrada Middle School on Sharon Road. Estimated loss: \$110. Oct. 25.

■ A white man between 40 and 60 years old with gray hair and wearing a blue-and-white checkered shirt entered Big 5 Sporting Goods, "walked straight to the fleece sweater rack," put on a fleece sweater and walked out. Estimated loss: \$25. Oct. 24.

■ **Fraud:** Someone stole personal checks belonging to someone in the 1100 block of El Camino Real and successfully cashed several of them. Estimated loss: \$9,300. Oct. 27.

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ERIC WOLFINGER

Atherton narrows architect choices for new civic center

By Barbara Wood

Almanac Staff Writer

Five architectural firms are competing to design Atherton's new civic center. On Wednesday, Nov. 5, the City Council will discuss what it would like to see in the architects' proposals. The meeting starts at 4 p.m. in the town's council chambers at 94 Ashfield Road.

The five firms — chosen from 16 that asked to be considered — are Bohlin Cywinski Jackson, Harley Ellis Devereaux, Siegel & Strain, Swatt/Miers and WNS Studio.

Dec. 10 is the deadline to submit their proposals. The firms will be interviewed in mid-January by Atherton's Civic Center Advisory Committee. On Jan. 27, the council is scheduled to interview the finalists chosen

by the committee.

The advisory committee recommends that residents be included in the design-review process and that the project be budget-driven, and, if possible, include environmentally friendly "green" building elements.

Among the design goals recommended by the committee are that the structures "be consistent and compatible

with Atherton's rural, neighborhood residential character" and reflect the town's building types rather than those of an urban civic center. Sensitivity to impacts on neighbors is another priority.

Because much of the cost of the project will be paid for with donations that have not yet been publicly committed, the architects are asked to come up with alternatives that

can be added if enough money is raised. These include an underground garage, a design that is highly energy efficient or creates all its own energy on-site, and renovation or reuse of the historic council chambers.

Also on the Nov. 5 agenda: a study session on a new law to regulate cell phone transmission facilities in town. Atherton does not have such a law and has been negotiating individually with those who want to put such facilities in the town. ▀

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School board knee-deep in law governing charter schools

By Barbara Wood
Almanac Staff Writer

Since the Menlo Park City School District board was presented with a petition to authorize a Mandarin immersion charter school in the district six weeks ago, board members have been participating in their own cram course on charter school law.

District staff, teachers and parents have also been immersing themselves in the complex regulations that govern charter schools in California.

While the state's laws governing public education, known as the "ed code," are notoriously labyrinthine, charter school regulations may be even more so.

The district is working with an attorney specializing in charter school law, John Yeh, from the Mountain View offices of Burke, Williams & Sorensen LLP.

On Monday night, Oct. 27, Mr. Yeh spent several hours briefing the board, and an audience of about 25 people, through the process and criteria the board must use to guide its decision on the charter.

The board is scheduled to make its final vote on authorizing the charter on Wednesday, Nov. 12. The meeting starts at 6:30 p.m. in the Encinal School Multi-Use Building at 195 Encinal Ave. in Atherton.

Mr. Yeh told the board that

The board must decide whether to grant a charter to a Mandarin-immersion school.

the law states: "The governing board of the school district shall grant a charter ... if it is satisfied that granting the charter is consistent with sound educational practice."

To deny the charter, the board must, he told them, use one or more of the following reasons:

- Find it proposes an "unsound educational program."

- Find the petitioners are "demonstrably unlikely to successfully implement the program."

- Find that there are not the required number of signatures on the petition.

- Find the charter does not contain "reasonably comprehensive descriptions" in 16 required areas.

- Find the charter does not clearly and unequivocally affirm it will be non-sectarian, not charge tuition, not discriminate, and not allow admission to be based on where the parents or students live.

Mr. Yeh said member of the district's leadership team are examining the 218-page charter petition, its 118 pages of appendices and its signatures to see

how they line up with charter school law requirements. A report on the results of that scrutiny should be available to the board and the public sometime during the week before the Nov. 12 vote, he said.

If the charter is not approved by the district, the backers can appeal to the county school board, and if the county board turns it down, to the state board of education.

Supporters of the Menlo Mandarin Immersion Charter School asked the district on Sept. 12 to authorize a 5-year charter for a kindergarten to eighth-grade school. The school would start next school year with 100 students in two classes of kindergarteners and two classes of first-graders, with plans to expand by one grade each year until eventually including kindergarten through eighth grades and 450 students.

A charter school is a public school that cannot charge tuition to its students, but it can be run by a nonprofit corporation, and does not have to follow many of the laws governing other public schools.

In a language-immersion program, many of the classes are taught in the target language, with more classes taught in English as the students move through the grades. The Menlo Park district now has a popular Spanish immersion program. ▀

MANDARIN

continued from page 9

Sept. 2 and Dec. 2), kindergarten and first-grade classes, district officials say. One grade will be added each year, and the Mandarin immersion model will continue at the Kennedy Middle School for sixth to eighth grade, according to Naomi Hunter, director of communications for the Redwood City School District.

A kindergarten information night will be held at the school at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 4, followed by a tour for those interested in the Mandarin immersion program at 7 p.m. People can register in advance by calling the John Gill School office at 482-2406.

Parents who asked for the Mandarin immersion program in Redwood City said they first spoke to the district superintendent about the program in the fall of 2013. They were asked to come back with more information about the budget, the curriculum and parental interest. Parents said that once they had

that information for the district, the program was unanimously approved by the district board.

Traffic that would be generated by parents bringing children to the program from outside the John Gill School neighborhood was one of the only concerns raised about the program, parents who were involved said.

A report to the Redwood City board before its Sept. 24 vote said the new program would have no financial impact on the district. Ms. Hunter said that is because the district's revenue limit funding, which is different from Menlo Park's basic aid funding, comes from the state and depends on the average number of students who attend each day. Menlo Park's funding is not based on attendance.

"The total funding for a classroom of students will cover the cost of a teacher, supplies and other costs associated with the program," she said. In addition, the state will give the Redwood City district the same amount of funding for a student who transfers from another district as it does for in-district students,

she said.

Ms. Hunter said the Mandarin immersion program will teach 80 percent of kindergarten and first-grade classes in Mandarin and 20 percent in English. The ratio of Mandarin to English slowly decreases until it is 20 percent Mandarin and 80 percent English by eighth grade.

New students will be admitted to the program after first grade only if they pass a Mandarin language proficiency test.

The report to the Redwood City board says the district's existing immersion programs "share the goal of developing bilingual/biliterate citizens capable of competing in a global economy." Further goals include "academic excellence and multicultural competence." ▀



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Police seek three suspects in attempted sexual assault

By Sandy Brundage
Almanac Staff Writer

Three men confronted a woman early Thursday, Oct. 30, and attempted to pull her clothes off as she carried trash to a dumpster enclosure behind businesses on the west side of the 100 block of El Camino Real, near Harvard Avenue in Menlo Park, police reported. The attack occurred around 12:47 a.m., police said. The men ran away after the victim screamed. The suspects are described as three Hispanic men. One, shown



A Menlo Park police sketch of a suspect in the attempted assault.

in the sketch, was described as in his early 20s, approximately 5 feet 6 inches tall and weighing 130 pounds. He had dark hair, a white shirt, white tennis shoes and a dark backpack, and may have been spotted loitering in the area earlier in the evening before being confronted by a co-worker of the victim. The other two suspects were said to be similar in appearance, with one possibly wearing a black sweater and black shoes. Police ask that anyone with information call 330-6300 or the anonymous tip line at 330-6395. **A**

Four Portola Valley homes burglarized

Burglars hit four Portola Valley homes in mid-October, stealing jewelry and computers for total estimated losses to the residents of at least \$10,500, according to a report from the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office. Investigators have no suspects in any of the cases, deputies said. A couple living on Hayfields Road discovered that someone had been inside their home on Oct. 20 and had gone through their things. After an inventory of their belongings, the couple gave deputies a preliminary

**Loss estimate:
at least \$10,500.**

estimate of \$5,000 in losses. The other three burglaries were in the Westridge neighborhood. Someone entered a home on Fawn Lane through a bedroom window, ransacked the residence and stole three small jewelry boxes and jewelry for a total estimated loss of \$3,500, deputies said in an Oct. 14

report. The burglar set off an alarm upon entering the master bedroom, deputies said. A thief entered a Cresta Vista Lane home by forcing open a rear door, then stole two laptop computers and jewelry, deputies said in an Oct. 23 report. The residents did not provide an estimate of losses. Sometime in the morning of Oct. 23, someone entered a home on Dos Loma Vista Drive through an unlocked door and stole an Apple MacBook Pro computer and jewelry for an estimated loss of \$2,000, deputies said.

Pinewood School

Pinewood is an independent, coeducational, non-profit, K-12 college-prep school. Students benefit from **small class size**, **challenging academic curricula**, and a wide choice of **enrichment activities**.

We offer an environment where **each student is a respected and vital member of our educational community**.

We invite you to explore the opportunity for your student to become a part of the Pinewood tradition of academic excellence.

For more information, please visit our website.



Preview Day November 8th

Open House Preview Day
Upper Campus Grades 7-12
Saturday, November 8th, 2014
10:00 a.m. - Noon
26800 Fremont Road,
Los Altos Hills, CA 94024

Register online at:
www.pinewood.edu

SHERLOCK WHO?

Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts
Sunday, November 9, 2014 • 4pm
Tickets: 650-903-6000 • mvcpa.com

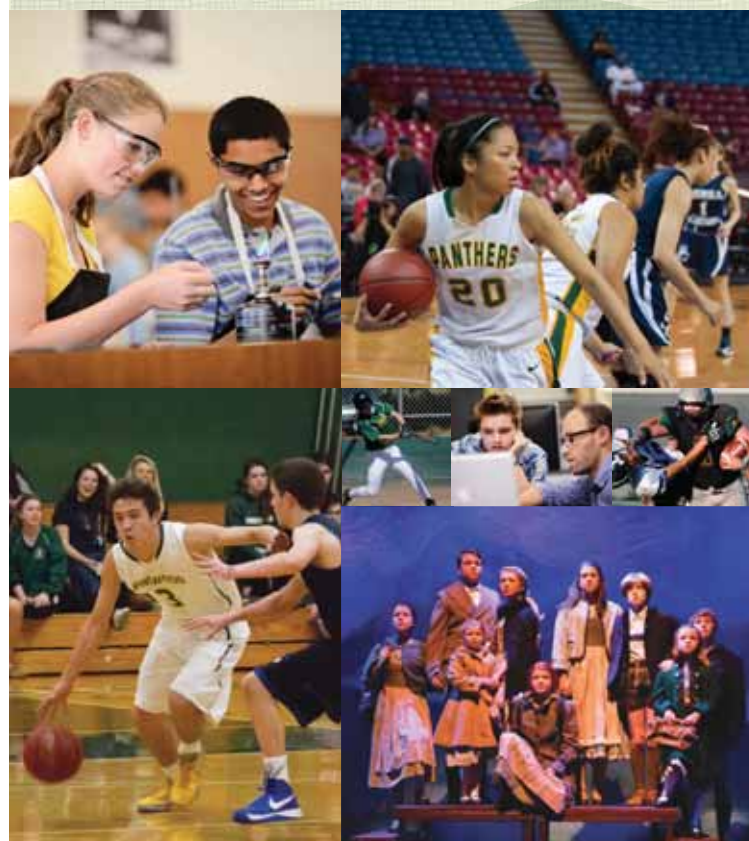
A Royal Wedding is about to take place, but a photograph of the groom in a compromising position with someone other than the bride has gone missing. Sherlock Holmes has been hired to retrieve the photograph in order to save the wedding but a strange turn of events leads him to somewhere unexpected: the future.

The performance is a full-length, musical spoof and is combined with a silent auction (3pm) and a post-performance champagne reception with the cast.

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Oak Knoll teacher's book inspired by long commute

FLY CAR

continued from page 3

to see kids do over the years," he says.

"For me what's been really rewarding is that the kids who have actually read the book really liked it."

Who knows what fantastic thing Mr. Fuller is thinking out on his commute nowadays? "I see a sequel to Fly Car for sure," he says. "Once you have those characters inside of you, you kind of know how they think and feel."

Critiques

Here's what a few of John Fuller's favorite critics, his fifth-grade students, had to say about "Fly Car."

■ Joe: "I really thought it was creative. Sometimes you'd think it would be over and then he'd add another part. I couldn't stop reading it. I stayed up until 9 o'clock reading it. I stayed in recess reading it."

■ Lucas: "It's one of my favorite books now. I love airplanes and I love inventing things. That's part of the reason I like this book."

■ Ekta: "I had fun reading it. I liked how Eli and his dad became closer together."

■ Antoine: "It's one of the only books that I can picture ... in my mind."

■ Sohrab: "I think it was a really good book because it encourages people to think big. It made me more responsible as a person, because sometimes I

forget to walk my dog and now I always remember." Why? The book taught him, he says, "you should spend more time with your family and cherish all that you have," and his dog is a member of his family.

■ Maddy: "I liked how you can create stuff, like Eli created Fly Car. ... like I can invent some stuff."

■ Dylan: "I really liked it because Mr. Fuller did a great job of getting to the point." Dylan says his favorite part of the book was "when they designed the wings of Fly Car," because it showed him how planes become airborne.

■ Jacob: "I liked how it was a picture book but it was a chapter book with pictures." Jacob says the book taught him to "never give up."

■ Spencer: "I loved the book." The book taught him that "you don't succeed every single time." ■

Book fair at La Entrada School

BRIEFS

La Entrada Middle School will hold its annual used book fair from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday, Nov. 10, and Wednesday, Nov. 12. The school will be closed Nov. 11 for Veterans Day.

Book prices will range from \$1 to \$8 (cash and checks only).

Email monica.albers@gmail.com for more information.

New documentary by Woodside producer

Woodside documentary producer Steve Brown's latest film, "Occupy the Farm," is being released in Berkeley on Nov. 7 and then in New York and Pasadena, he said.

Directed by veteran filmmaker Todd Darling, "Occupy the Farm" is about hundreds of urban agriculture activists who objected to planned development at UC Berkeley's Gill Tract in the Berkeley/Albany area.

On Earth Day 2012, they swarmed and planted thousands of seedlings on the land before riot police arrived.

The film is being shown at UA Berkeley 7 from Nov. 7 to 13.

Mr. Brown is currently work-

ing on a grassroots campaign that largely relies on social media to increase the demand for more showings.

After completing his documentary, "Spark: A Burning Man Story," Mr. Brown founded Ignite Channel, described on the website as an "independent film studio and media site devoted to artists and innovators."

Go to occupythefarmfilm.com for more information.

Gala raises \$150K

Mission Hospice Auxiliary's fall gala, "Rock Around the Clock," held Oct. 11 at the Peninsula Golf & Country Club, netted \$150,000 for the development of San Mateo County's first hospice house. The house will provide a peaceful setting for patients whose end-of-life comfort can't be managed in their own homes.

Founded in 1979, Mission Hospice provides end-of-life care to patients and families, regardless of their ability to pay. It relies on donations to support its programs.

Thomas Edwards Kirkbride

September 18, 1931-October 28, 2014

Thomas Edwards Kirkbride died peacefully at home in the late evening of October 28, after a courageous year battling leukemia.

Born in Dover, New Hampshire, he was the only child of Joseph and Dee Kirkbride.

He graduated from Quincy (MASS) High School in 1949, and the University of New Hampshire in 1953, with an ROTC commission as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force in Germany. This was the beginning of his love for travel, and where he met his future wife, Anne, who was teaching in the U.S. Dependent Schools.

Tom remained in the Air Force Reserve for 24 years attaining the rank of Lt. Colonel. He and Anne traveled to many places, and he went solo to Cuba, Singapore, North Korea, Vietnam and Iran!

Tom worked for the California CPA Society for 23 years, later joining Rudolph and Sletten Construction Company for 13 years, creating their first training program.

He was an active volunteer for more than 50 years with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Marin County and again with St. Raymond Parish in Menlo Park.

In retirement (and before), he served frequently as President of the UNH Northern California Alumni Association. Because Tom loved music, he spent many hours helping at Stanford's Archives of Recorded Sound. He was also a great fan of De La Salle football!

Tom will be greatly missed by his wife, Anne; his children: Ellen Kaidanow (Joseph); Peter Kirkbride (Karen); and Christopher Kirkbride (Liza); and grandchildren: Danielle, Sarah, & Josh; Evan & Lauren; and Katie & Molly. A brother-in-law, James Quinn (Joyce); sister-in-law, Sister Mary Quinn, CSJ; nephew, Michael Quinn; and nieces, Marianne Thodas (Randy) & Monica Quinn also survive him. The family is grateful for the devoted care of Dr. Frank Koch and Dr. Juliet Kral.

A Funeral Mass will be celebrated 10:30 am Saturday, November 1, at St. Denis Catholic Church, 2250 Avy Avenue in Menlo Park. Committal will follow at Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery in Menlo Park.

Memorial contributions to Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, 11999 Chalon Road, Los Angeles, CA 90049; the University of New Hampshire Alumni Association, Durham, NH.; or to St. Denis Church, have been suggested by the family.

Please sign a guest book at www.crippenflynn.com



PAID OBITUARY



Today's local news and hot picks

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Catherine Patricia Gilligan Smyth

December 1, 1918-October 22, 2014

Catherine Patricia "Patsy" (Gilligan) Smyth died at the age of 95 in her Atherton home. The Matriarch of a large and devoted Irish Catholic family, she will be dearly missed by all who knew her.

Patsy was born in Salt Lake City, Utah to parents Ada M. (Kronner) Gilligan and George E. Gilligan, ranchers in Boulder, Wyoming. During the school year, Patsy lived in Salt Lake with her grandmother, Bridget (Griffin) Kronner, where she attended Judge Memorial Catholic High School, and St. Mary's of the Wasatch College. She completed her studies at Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles.

Patsy is preceded in death by her husband of 62 years, Edward M. "Ted" Smyth. They met in Salt Lake and were married on September 9, 1941 in the Cathedral of the Madeleine. Ted was a graduate of St. Mary's College, Moraga, and after their wedding they moved to San Francisco, later settling and raising their seven children in Atherton.

Patsy Smyth is survived by all seven of her children: Sheila Mary, Kathleen Anne (Art), Patricia Collette (Marv), Daniel Patrick (Anne), Maureen Agnes, Thomas Gilligan (Peggy) and Joseph Healy (Bea). Additionally, she is survived by fifteen grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren. Patsy and Ted loved spending time with their family at their home in Atherton and especially at their ranch in Wyoming.

Patsy had a special affection for the Religious of the Sacred Heart and was devoted to the Children of Mary. In lieu of flowers, Memorials may be made to:

The Society of the Sacred Heart
Oakwood Retirement Center
4120 Forest Park Avenue, St Louis, MO 63108

A Visitation will be Friday, Nov. 7, 6-9pm at Cusimano Mortuary, 96 El Camino Real, Mountain View. A rosary will be held at 7pm. A Mass of Christian Burial will be held November 8th, 2014 11:00 a.m. at the Church of the Nativity, 210 Oak Grove Ave, Menlo Park.



PAID OBITUARY

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WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?

All letters 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.

Town Square forum

Post your views on the Town Square forum at AlmanacNews.com

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 223-6528.

Viewpoint

IDEAS, THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS ABOUT LOCAL ISSUES

Surveillance question comes to Portola Valley

It's Portola Valley's turn to wrestle with the question of whether to allow permanent license plate-scanning cameras within the town as a crime-fighting tool, a topic that nearby cities have also debated in recent months. Judging by the Town Council's Oct. 22 discussion, the town is taking an appropriately cautious approach that will allow residents to have a strong role in determining how much surveillance is acceptable in their community.

The discussion was the result of a recent request by the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office, which provides law enforcement services to Portola Valley, to install two to three scanners along the town's roadways. These devices are increasingly being used across the country to keep track of the comings and goings of all vehicles, even those of law-abiding residents and visitors, and they're sounding the alarm for a number of civil libertarians and organizations including the American Civil Liberties Union.

The council heard a presentation by the director of the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center (NCRIC), which stores data scanned by the cameras and, according to the director, restricts access to that information to law enforcement personnel who commit to following established privacy policies, and who have a specific purpose for reviewing it.

The appeal of having such scanners in Portola Valley is certainly understandable. A wealthy community with homes that often are isolated in the hills or on large estates, the town has had its share of high-stakes burglaries. As Mayor Ann Wengert said, the town is an inviting target for thieves and burglars, particularly in a society in which economic disparity continues to increase.

But the four council members present that night did the right thing in asking thoughtful, pointed questions while discussing the pros and cons of the requested scanners, and in directing staff to schedule

public forums early next year to hear from residents before deciding whether to approve the Sheriff's Office request. In delaying those sessions until next year, after the holiday season, the council has ensured that more residents who want to participate will be able to.

Council members Craig Hughes and John Richards raised valuable points about possible downsides of permanent scanners, including the unresolved legal question of whether data harvested by these cameras are public records — accessible to anyone who requests it, thereby further infringing on the privacy of motorists who have broken no laws and who should feel free

to travel unobserved wherever they want to go. The question also arose over the length of time NCRIC stores the data, and although the agency's director noted that NCRIC aims for a one-year retention standard, some council members indicated that might be too long.

The Portola Valley council isn't the first to push back when law enforcement agencies have requested approval of the scanners. Earlier this year, the Menlo Park City Council approved the use of license plate cameras after months of public discussion, and on a 3-2 vote limited the data retention period to six months rather than the requested one year. And just last month, San Carlos out-and-out rejected the Sheriff's Office's request to buy two scanners for surveillance in that city, citing concerns over the potential use of the data and the length of time it would be stored.

In giving Portola Valley residents a chance to participate in the decision on whether to install scanners on local roadways, the council has acted responsibly. Now, it's the residents' turn to weigh the benefits against the potential ills of this type of electronic surveillance, and work with their elected leaders to come up with a reasonable plan for the town. ■

EDITORIAL

The opinion of The Almanac

LETTERS

Our readers write

Menlo Park needs to widen roads

Editor:

While driving around Menlo Park, I see that some of the "Yes on M" signs proclaim "Save Menlo from Gridlock."

Whether one supports M or not, the gridlock is already here and it's been here for years. Just try driving down Willow, or Marsh, or Ringwood, or Coleman, or Middlefield at rush hour. That's gridlock pure and simple.

The reality on the ground is that our roads are too narrow and have too little capacity for the volume of traffic on them.

With or without M, we have gridlock now, and the only way to fix it is to start widening roads. Willow is already a prime candidate, given that it's already wide enough and really just needs to be re-stripped. But the building can't stop there. We need four-lane main roads sooner than later.

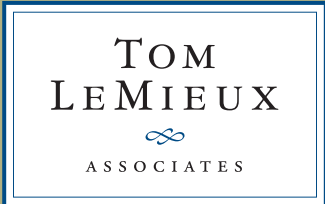
Brian Schar
Laurel Avenue, Menlo Park



Portola Valley Archives

Looking back

May Day festivals are typically celebratory and joyful, but this royal couple looks anything but cheery. John Orton and Nan McDonnell were king and queen of the 1904 May Day festival in Portola Valley, and they're standing at the gate that led to the school grounds in this photo published in "Life on the San Andreas Fault," a history of Portola Valley written by Nancy Lund and Pamela Gullard. John lived by the cypress grove on a trail to Windy Hill, and Nan was the daughter of the Ormondale Ranch foreman, according to the authors.



PENDING



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SOLD



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 baths; pool, spa, sport court; 1+ acres
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These reports summarize YTD real estate activity through the 3rd quarter of 2014, including sales that were not publicly listed. If you are considering buying or selling a home, this report provides crucial and timely market information.

To receive your copy and/or to discuss your real estate needs, please call or email anytime.

SOLD



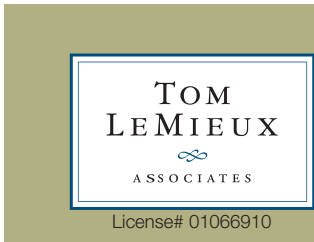
81 Adam Way, Atherton
 European-inspired; 5 bedrooms, 6 full baths,
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 OFFERED AT \$7,195,000

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 rooms, each with en suite bath, plus 2 half-baths
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For more information on these properties, please visit www.tomlemieux.com



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