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Photo by Natalia Nazarova

Mia Wurster, a Menlo Park fifth-grader, loves to cook, whether it's dinner for her family, which she is preparing here, or in the MasterChef Junior competition premiering on Tuesday, Jan. 6.

Young kitchen whiz competes for MasterChef Junior title

By **Barbara Wood**
Almanac Staff Writer

Mia Wurster, an 11-year-old from Menlo Park, can hardly remember a time when she didn't cook — starting with easy dishes such as pancakes at the age of 2, and progressing to baking at around age 4. By 7 she was making family meals.

"My mom and dad don't really know how to cook," the Oak Knoll fifth-grader says, so she mostly taught herself by watching cooking videos, reading cookbooks, and watching shows such as Fox's "MasterChef." So it may come as no surprise that when Mia heard from her mother that auditions for "MasterChef Junior" were being held the next day in Los Angeles, Mia and her father jumped in the family car and headed for LA at 2 a.m.

"I love the show," Mia says. "I wanted to be on it."

During the multi-day audition Mia had to cook an egg to request, show off her knife skills

'I want to open a restaurant, but I'm not going to do it for a little while, because I'm going to be a brain surgeon when I grow up.'

MIA WURSTER

and answer lots of questions in one session and, in the next session, prepare a favorite dish of seared scallops with balsamic reduction and brussels sprouts for the judges in 30 minutes. Mia won a spot as one of 19 contestants for the 2015 season of the show, which premieres on Tuesday, Jan. 6, at 8 p.m.

"I really love to cook," Mia says. "It's so fun for me because you get to experiment."

Mia had to miss several weeks of school because the show was recorded in the "MasterChef" kitchens in Los Angeles, and she worked with a tutor during that time.

Contestants are eliminated each week of the show, and until each episode is aired no one is allowed to talk about it. The top contestant of the season wins \$100,000.

"The kitchen was one of my favorite parts of the show," Mia says. "It was like really cool." Even cooler, she says, was the "MasterChef" pantry, which was "full of amazing ingredients" such as plantains, kimchi, "weird cheeses," tomatillos, "animal parts" and "spices that I never heard of."

"It was really fun because I made all these friends and we became like a family so quickly," Mia says. "I didn't want to leave the experience."

Mia may have been up for some of the challenges thrown at the "MasterChef Junior" contestants because of challenges she faces in cooking for her family, which consists of dad Rick, mom Jill, 9-year-old sister Faith and 18-month-old brother Drew. Mia's family became glu-

See **JUNIOR CHEF**, page 11

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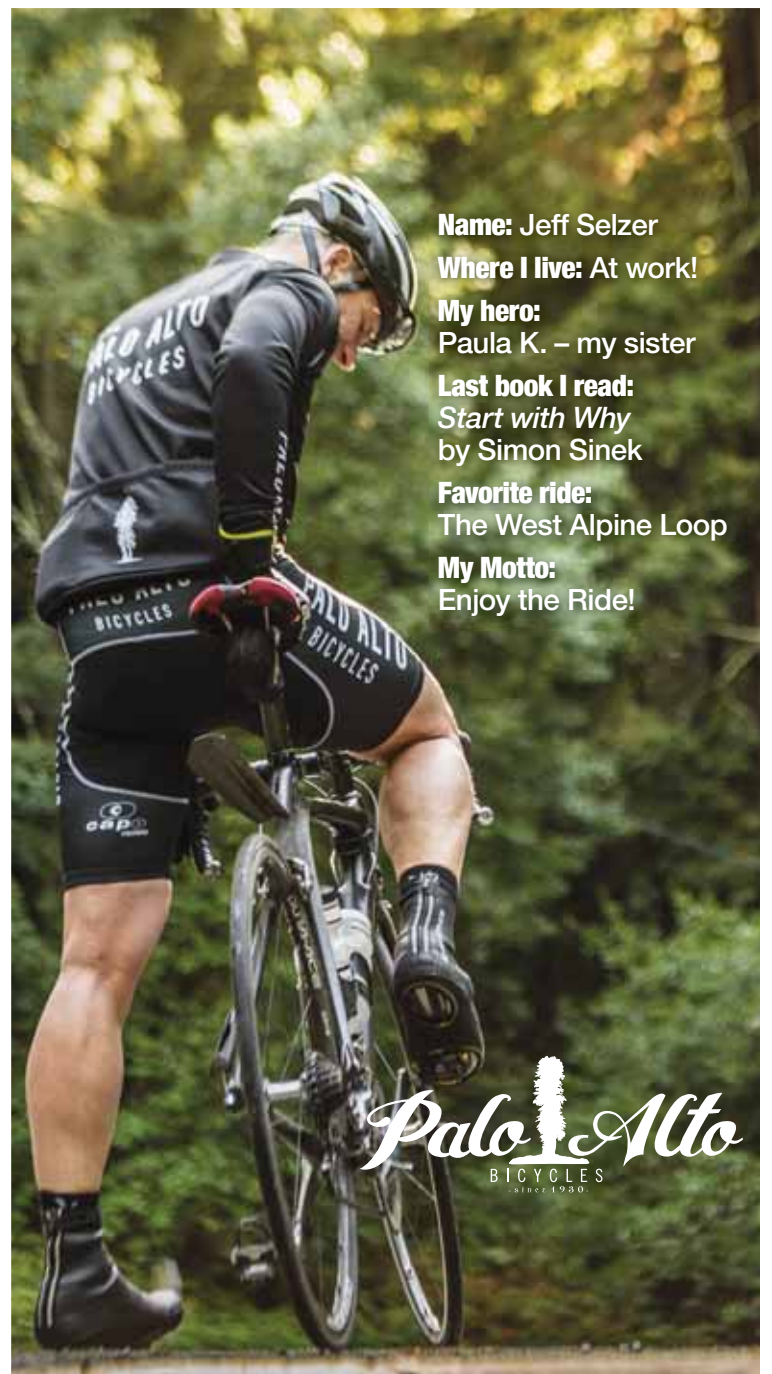
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Local News

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Field project will honor slain police officer

Atherton family heads effort to build athletic field in East Palo Alto

By **Barbara Wood**
Almanac Staff Writer

Frank Merrill says that if the new state-of-the-art athletic field now under construction in East Palo Alto can “keep one kid from joining a gang or becoming a gang-banger or going and shooting someone,” then it will be a success.

The Rich May Memorial Field honors East Palo Alto police officer Rich May, gunned down nine years ago, on Jan. 7, 2006, by Alberto Alvarez, a gang member who has been sentenced to death for the killing.

Mr. Merrill, who lives in Atherton with his wife Clarice, Officer May’s mother, has spent years leading the effort to raise money and get the permits and permissions necessary to build the field.

Officer May, a Marine veteran who had been a police officer for 16 years, was 38 when he was killed. He had three daughters, and lived with his wife Diana in Santa Maria, but often stayed with his family in Atherton.

While the Rich May Foundation has raised \$1.5 million for the field, Mr. Merrill is hoping for another \$200,000 to pay for night lighting, as well as \$600,000 to serve as an endowment to make sure the field is taken care of in the future.

“It’s an opportunity to remember a guy who tried to make a difference,” Mr. Merrill says, “to honor a cop for what he did and to remember what a difference he made, both in his professional life and in his non-professional life.”

Mr. Merrill, a veterinarian who grew up in Atherton, where his family has lived since 1870, says his stepson was “an extremely dedicated policeman” who also spent hours of his own time helping the East Palo Alto community. Officer May would often get home hours after his shift had ended, and only after his death did the Merrills find out that he had been volunteering to tutor students or help families in a tight spot, Mr. Merrill says. At Officer

‘It’s an opportunity to remember a guy who tried to make a difference.’

FRANK MERRILL



Photo by Natalia Nazarova

Frank Merrill of Atherton has spent years raising money and obtaining the necessary permissions and permits to build the Rich May Memorial Field in East Palo Alto, in honor of his stepson, an East Palo Alto police officer gunned down in the line of duty

May’s memorial, a homeless man said the officer had routinely moved the non-operating car the man had been sleeping in so it wouldn’t be towed, and finally found him a permanent parking spot.

“He was a very compassionate guy who was forceful and direct when he needed to be,” Mr. Merrill said.

He was also inspirational. Rich May’s sister, Amy Merrill, has just

graduated from the police academy at Allan Hancock College in Santa Maria, which Officer May also attended, Mr. Merrill says.

The high school regulation-sized artificial turf field will be suitable for soccer, rugby, football, running and field hockey year-round. With lights it will be open until 9:30 p.m. It will also have a picnic area, bathrooms, storage, an office and dedicated parking.

Menlo Park architect Sam Sinnott designed the field, memorial, gates and entryway at no charge.

Raising the funds for the field has not been the only challenge for Mr. Merrill and the May Foundation. The field, located on two acres off Bay Road, sits mostly on land donated by the Archdiocese of San Francisco,

See **RICH MAY**, page 11

Mandarin immersion charter school appeal hearing scheduled for Jan. 7

By **Barbara Wood**
Almanac Staff Writer

The public will have another chance to comment about the Mandarin immersion charter school proposed for the Menlo Park City School District when the San Mateo County Board of Education holds a public hearing on the school’s appeal on Wednesday, Jan. 7, in the San Mateo County Office of Education, 101 Twin Dolphin Drive in Redwood City, at 7 p.m. The Menlo Mandarin Immersion Charter School is appealing the district’s November decision to deny its petition to start a new charter school within the district.

After a presentation by the board’s attorney, Lead Deputy County Counsel Claire Cunningham, the board will hear a 20-minute presentation from

Menlo Mandarin Immersion Charter School followed by a 20-minute presentation by the school district. After questions from the board, members of the public will be allowed to speak for a maximum of two minutes each.

Comments may also be made to the board on the county office’s website, SMCOE.org.

The board has set aside time for discussion; but is not scheduled to vote on the appeal until its Feb. 4 meeting. That meeting is also scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. in the office of education.

If the county board does not approve the charter, a final appeal can be made to the state board of education. If either board approves the appeal, the school will be allowed to operate in the district, and the district could be required to provide

facilities for the school if it ends up with more than 80 students who live in the district.

On Nov. 12, the school district’s governing board unanimously denied the charter school’s petition to start a new Mandarin immersion school that would eventually have 450 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The board used as grounds for denial a 56-page report by the district’s leadership team and consultants pointing out a number of problems with the plan for the charter school, along with some supplemental findings not included in the report.

The appeal, filed Dec. 5, is a 688-page document containing a 51-page rebuttal to the district’s report.

See **MANDARIN**, page 8

What’s in a word? More than you might think

By **Sandy Brundage**
Almanac Staff Writer

Inevitably, as a city updates its zoning codes to allow types of development that change the status quo, residents will wonder what on earth the policymakers were thinking. The advantage, however, is that municipal agencies such as the city of Menlo Park, along with its council members and commissioners, carry out that thinking in full view of the public. Case in point: The creation of the “guiding principles” for the city’s ongoing general plan update.

Why does this matter? The general plan, with some components last revised in 1994, represents the city’s overall “constitution” for development. This update cycle will also include revamping what kind of projects can be built in the M2 industrial

district, which roughly spans the land wedged between the San Francisco Bay, University Avenue, Marsh Road and U.S. 101, out where Facebook, Menlo Gateway and a bevy of new housing projects are located.

PlaceWorks, the consultant awarded the \$1.65 million contract to manage the update, expects to finish it by mid-2016.

So while it may not have been the most scintillating debate, the Planning Commission and City Council in December did their thinking out loud to fine-tune those guiding principles to determine what the community’s priorities are in planning for the future.

Councilmen Ray Mueller and Rich Cline, during a Dec. 16 meeting, said that the feedback

See **WORD**, page 7



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What's in a word?

continued from page 5

they had received from residents was that “quality of life” was not emphasized enough in the draft principles.

“It’s implicit that we’re creating a high quality of life for people; that’s our intent,” Mr. Mueller observed, but “I think we should just spell it out.”

But where to spell it out? “Where will ‘high quality of life’ have the most impact without repeating it five times?” asked Mayor Cat Carlton. The consensus was that it belonged under the “healthy community” category.

Word-smithing is easier said than done. Mr. Mueller suggested adding, “Menlo Park neighborhoods are protected from unreasonable development and oppressive traffic,” which led to a consideration of

what “unreasonable” means. Mayor Carlton pointed out that recent months in Menlo Park have proven “that what one person considers reasonable is unreasonable to another.”

Using the phrase “minimizes traffic congestion” also presented a conundrum, given that any new development will add, rather than reduce, traf-

The city will host a general plan open house on Jan. 8 at the new Hamilton Avenue police substation.

fic, the council noted.

Two Belle Haven residents spoke during the meeting. The principles looked good, both said, although the interpretation may depend on where you live in the city. Oppressive and burdensome traffic is already the reality for Belle Haven,

said Vicky Robledo. She recommended that each council member attempt to get to that neighborhood during commute hours to fully appreciate the congestion.

The council voted 5-0 to adopt the principles, which were revised based on the discussion. Councilman Peter Ohtaki said to keep in mind that nothing precludes further revisions as the update proceeds. “We’re not done by any means.”

There are plenty of opportunities for residents to weigh in. In the immediate future, on Thursday, Jan. 8, the city will host a general plan open house at the new police substation at 871 Hamilton Ave., starting at 6:30 p.m. Along with attending public workshops, meetings and submitting comments to the city, residents can also weigh in via an online “land use survey” for the M2 area to describe what they want to see. Go to tinyurl.com/ndgfmwdw to participate; the survey will be available until Jan. 18. ■

Menlo Park council approves these guiding principles

The general plan guiding principles approved by the council on Dec. 16 with a 5-0 vote:

Citywide Equity

Menlo Park neighborhoods are protected from unreasonable development and unreasonable cut-through traffic, share the benefits and impacts of local growth, and enjoy equal access to quality services, education, public open space, housing that complements local job opportunities with affordability that limits displacement of current residents, and convenient daily shopping such as grocery stores and pharmacies.

Healthy Community

Everyone in Menlo Park enjoys healthy living spaces, high quality of life, and can safely walk or bike to fresh food, medical services, employment, recreational facilities, and other daily destinations; land owners and occupants take pride in the appearance of property; Menlo Park achieves code compliance and prioritizes improvements that promote safety and healthy living; and the entire city is well-served by emergency services and community policing.

Competitive and Innovative Business Destination

Menlo Park embraces

emerging technologies, local intelligence, and entrepreneurship, and welcomes reasonable development without excessive traffic congestion that will grow and attract successful companies and innovators that generate local economic activity and tax revenue for the entire community.

Corporate Contribution

In exchange for added development potential, construction projects provide physical benefits in the adjacent neighborhood (such as Belle Haven for growth north of US 101), including jobs, housing, schools, libraries, neighborhood retail, childcare, public open space, high speed internet access, and transportation choices.

Youth Support and Education Excellence

Menlo Park children and young adults have equal access to excellent childcare, education, meaningful employment opportunities, and useful training, including internship opportunities at local companies.

Great Transportation Options

Menlo Park provides thoroughly-connected, safe and convenient transportation,

adequate emergency vehicle access, and multiple options for people traveling by foot, bicycle, shuttle, bus, car, and train, including daily service along the Dumbarton Rail Corridor.

Complete Neighborhoods and Commercial Corridors

Menlo Park neighborhoods are complete communities, featuring well integrated and designed development along vibrant commercial corridors with a live-work-play mix of community-focused businesses that conveniently serve adjacent neighborhoods while respecting their residential character.

Accessible Open Space and Recreation

Menlo Park provides safe and convenient access to an ample amount of local and regional parks and a range of public open space types, recreational facilities, trails, and enhancements to wetlands and the Bay.

Sustainable Environmental Planning

Menlo Park is a leader in efforts to address climate change, adapt to sea-level rise, protect natural and built resources, conserve energy, manage water, utilize renewable energy, and promote green building.

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Atherton woman creates healing journal for children

By Barbara Wood

Almanac Staff Writer

Sheri Sobrato Brisson knows what it's like to be young and sick.

The long-time Atherton resident was diagnosed with a type of brain cancer thought to be fatal when she was only 24.

Instead of dying after the six months she was told she had left, she recovered, and then changed the course of her life. She went back to school and studied marriage and family counseling and health counseling, earned a degree in psychology, and began working to help sick children and their families.

Now, using much of what she has learned in the years since her recovery, Ms. Sobrato Brisson has, with artist and writer Rose Offner, created "Digging Deep," a journal to help young people with serious health challenges.

The journal is designed for children ages 10 to 18, although Ms. Sobrato Brisson says that "it's for anybody dealing with health challenges in their lives."

Many hospitals and other organizations that work with sick children also carry the journal, and Ms. Sobrato Brisson is arranging to make it available at no cost to any child

who wants it.

Ms. Sobrato Brisson, 52, began working on the journal project when she was nearing the 25th anniversary of surviving her cancer. She teamed up with Rose Offner, an artist and author who had written books about journal writing.

For sick children, the journal is "a way not just to get rid of feelings, but actually to process them, to start to understand them," she says. It also allows the child to tell others what they need. "Most people don't know what they need and they don't know what they feel," she says.

"It becomes very empowering for kids to know they are in control of their own story," she says. "When you share, there's really a special power in that."

"Digging Deep" was released in October, but Ms. Sobrato Brisson and Ms. Offner have been sharing with children as they refined it.

One 16-year-old boy whose cancer returned three times told her, "You've given this to the right kid," Ms. Sobrato Brisson says. The boy sat down with the book, and "he didn't stop for two and a half hours. He was writing and writing and writing and writing and writing," she says. "It really showed me... that he was resonating with it."



Photo by Dean Gurr, courtesy Resonance House

Atherton's Sheri Sobrato Brisson, right, works with teens who are writing in the "Digging Deep" journal she developed using her experience as a cancer survivor.

Parents have also told her how much they appreciate the book. "Parents have said to me, 'Finally, something to heal my child's heart,'" she says. "They see how relevant it is — they get it."

The journal has a series of pages with questions to prompt writing. Half the artwork in the book is by children, with the other half by Ms. Offner.

"Digging Deep" tells children: "Feeling scared or angry when

we struggle with an illness is natural. But it's the anger and fear we don't express that can get stuck inside and further depress us. Putting our feelings into words and pictures helps to soothe us."

The book stresses the positive things writing can do: "When we write about a problem that's bothering us, taking the time to reflect and listen, something magical happens; the answers come from within." ■

■ INFORMATION

At DiggingDeep.org, those interested in sponsoring books for patients or organizations who work with children can make a donation, which can be directed to a specific organization. The book is available for purchase at Amazon.com or IPGBook.com and may also be requested for a sick child through the Digging Deep website.

Judge refuses to dismiss lawsuit against Facebook

Tech firm accused of reading private user messages to target ads.

By Sandy Brundage

Almanac Staff Writer

Facebook failed to demonstrate that scanning private user messages sent using the social media website qualifies as an "ordinary course of business practice" that would be exempt from wiretap laws, according to a federal court judge.

The lawsuit was filed as a class action complaint in December 2013 by three Facebook users, who alleged that private messages containing website addresses were covertly intercepted to mine information about users as well as to generate "Likes" for the linked website. The plaintiffs also alleged the collected information could then be used for targeted advertising or data aggregation.

The plaintiffs are asking for a minimum of \$10,000 for each Facebook user whose messages were scanned in such a way — with an estimated 1.2 billion users

worldwide, that could add up to a mammoth financial penalty.

Facebook, headquartered in Menlo Park, had filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit, which United States District Court Judge Phyllis Hamilton denied on Dec. 23.

"Facebook's unwillingness to offer any details regarding its targeted advertising practice prevents the court from being able to determine whether the specific practice challenged in this case should be considered 'ordinary,'" the judge wrote. "... An electronic communications service provider cannot simply adopt any revenue-generating practice and deem it 'ordinary' by its own subjective standard."

The judge noted that it's too early in the court proceedings to determine the merit of any claims against the social media company and that further evidence will have to be developed, particularly with regard to the technical details

of how the site handles messages, as the complaint moves forward.

Facebook said it stopped scanning private message contents to generate "Likes" by October 2012, while still analyzing for viruses, spam and other features that could damage the "integrity of the site," according to court documents.

In its motion for dismissal, Facebook argued that all users agree to its terms of service, which disclose that the company gets data about them whenever they use the site.

Furthermore, the company said, its data use policy discloses that it will "use the information we receive about you in connection with the services and features we provide to you and other users like your friends, our partners, the advertisers that purchase ads on the site, and the developers that build the games, applications, and websites you use."

It also challenged the lawsuit's contention that the "Likes" constituted a means of generating targeted advertising revenue, calling that incorrect.

A Facebook spokesperson told the Almanac that the lawsuit was without merit and will be defended vigorously. ■

MANDARIN

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The San Mateo County Office of Education has posted the appeal, a timeline for action, and a form for making online comments to the county school board on its website, SMCOE.org.

Many district parents and teachers had protested the charter school proposal, and a public hearing and the board meeting at which the petition was considered were both packed with supporters and opponents.

The petition to start the charter school was presented to the district on Sept. 12. Under state law, the district had only 60 days to consider the petition, a 218-page document with an additional 118 pages of appendices.

The county and state boards are allowed to consider new information when judging the charter petition, according to the section of the state education code

governing charter schools. However, the original petition may not be changed, except to reflect the county or the state as the chartering agency.

The charter school petition says the school would open in the fall of 2015 with two classes each of kindergarten and first grade and a total of 100 students. One grade level would be added each year. The backers have asked the district for 10,000 square feet of classrooms and other facilities for 2015, saying the school would serve at least 80 students from the district. The district has turned down the facilities request, but charter backers said they believe they qualify for the facilities.

The charter school must be approved by May 7 this year to preserve a \$375,000 grant for start-up costs from the federal Public Charter Schools Grant Program, via the Charter Schools Division of the California Department of Education. ■

County judges downgrade felony cases for 369 since mid-December

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

Since voters passed state Proposition 47 on Nov. 4 and reclassified certain theft and drug offenses as misdemeanors with no option to be upgraded to felonies, the San Mateo County District Attorney's Office has had to assign an assistant DA to the task of handling petitions from inmates and former inmates seeking reclassification of their offenses.

As of Dec. 17, the Superior Court had approved 369 requests to have these kinds of felonies reclassified, and released 148 inmates from incarceration, Chief Deputy District Attorney Karen Guidotti said. Petitions have come from offenders who have either served their sentences, are awaiting trial or incarceration, or are currently incarcerated.

Asked whether the released inmates had been in county jail or state prison, Ms. Guidotti said that prosecutors have not been tracking that information.

A key to Proposition 47 is

losses that involve \$950 or less. If a crime meets that threshold and the crime is theft, forgery, receipt of stolen property, or writing checks or money orders from accounts with insufficient funds, Proposition 47 requires that prosecutors charge the crime strictly as a misdemeanor.

The threat of a felony charge was a tool in negotiating with such offenders to turn their lives around, Sheriff Greg Munks said. A felony conviction usually sends someone to state prison, which is much harsher than serving time in jail and tends to make life very difficult after release. It's much harder to find and keep a job, and several rights can be curtailed, including the right to vote, access to public benefits and being eligible for student loans.

Such sanctions do not accompany a misdemeanor conviction. The maximum sentence is a year in county jail, and in San Mateo County, it's not uncommon for well-behaved offenders to serve six months and be out on the street again, Mr. Munks said.

"I don't think that initiatives are a good way to make law or

reforms or deal with complex systems and problems," he said. "They don't benefit from the collaborative thoughtful process that occurs when you make laws the right way, through the legislative process."

"People who are with gangs and feel trapped in a gang need a pathway out," Mr. Munks said. "I'm not suggesting that (tough options) are the only thing that turns people's lives around. They can see friends die and the light could go on. There are lots of different ways, including (drug treatment programs). They do work for many people, (people) who go into the program for six months and do the hard work that goes with it. They need structure."

Criminals will now be bolder and less motivated, he said. "A lot of the drug treatment programs are going to dry up," he said. "People are not going to have that incentive to participate. ... They won't hit rock bottom (and our ability to throw the book at somebody is diminished.)"

Marc Mauer, executive director of The Sentencing Project in

Washington, D.C., doesn't buy that argument. What's behind it, he said, is a prosecutorial concern that Proposition 47 will lower felony conviction rates.

Ms. Guidotti said she gets the point of Proposition 47, that incarcerating violent criminals is preferable to inflicting the harshness of prison on drug and property crime offenders. But offenders for the crimes covered by Proposition 47 tend not to be first-time offenders, she said. "A lot of them are charged with felonies because they have a long history of crime," she said.

Mr. Munks gave \$8,500 in the fall of 2014 to the campaign against Proposition 47. Records for the November 2014 election show it passed by a majority of nearly 60 percent across the state, and by 70 percent in San Mateo County.

Major newspapers endorsed the proposition, including the San Jose Mercury News, the San Francisco Chronicle and the Los Angeles Times. All but three of the state's 58 district attorneys opposed it, one of the three being Jeff Rosen of Santa Clara County, according to the Mercury News.

Three-year window

Proposition 47 establishes a route for offenders to obtain a lower charge, but it's a limited-

time offer. People in post-trial judicial processes or who are now serving time have three years to request a new sentence. Those who have completed their sentences also have three years to request having their offenses reclassified.

Judges in San Mateo County have rejected 47 petitions as ineligible, so far, for one of three reasons, Ms. Guidotti said: The crime was not among those addressed by Proposition 47, the offender had also been convicted of a sex crime, or the amounts involved exceeded \$950 — the threshold beyond which petty theft becomes grand theft.

The DA could see thousands of petitions by the time the three-year window closes, she said. Some cases could be decades old. In each case, the task will involve determining whether the crime qualifies, which will include finding the police report to determine whether the monetary values involved are below the \$950 threshold. It's going to take a lot of time, she said.

"We'll work with it. We'll do our best to keep the community safe," Ms. Guidotti said. "The real challenge of Proposition 47 is that it's completely wide open retroactively."

See **PROP 47**, page 12

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Policies, procedures firming up for fire district's drone

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

If you're flying a remote-control plastic helicopter, even one with four rotors, one thing you probably want to avoid is flying too close to a fire on the ground. Heat rises, and fierce heat, such as that from a flaming house or tree, probably rises fiercely.

Words to live by perhaps for the six drone pilot-and-observer teams to be trained for the Menlo Park Fire Protection District. The district is moving closer to buying a four-rotor camera-equipped drone, a plan first reported by the Almanac in October.

Fire Chief Harold Schapelhouman and Division Chief Frank Fraone recently reported to the fire district board of directors on the implications for the district in obtaining and using this device for airborne observation of a fire or a search-and-rescue operation. Here are some highlights of the report:

■ Pilot training will include how to observe a fire from a safe distance, avoiding thermal

updrafts and potentially damaging smoke, Mr. Schapelhouman said. The district will start out with a loaner equipped with a thermal-image camera. The vendor is partnering with the Menlo Park district, and the district is finding itself a leader in pioneering the use of drones in fighting fires, he said.

■ The drone will be equipped with GPS and can be set up to not exceed its altitude limits and to avoid established perimeters of airports large and small.

■ Use of drones by public agencies and civilians is overseen by the Federal Aviation Administration. Detailed FAA regulations on drone use are not yet ready for publication, but the district expects to get the permissions it needs to use it sometime in 2015, Mr. Schapelhouman said.

■ Drones are, by their nature, surveillance tools, and their use by the Menlo Park district appears to be reflective of that. Each flight will have a log that records who approved the flight, the names of the pilot and observer, and the location of all photos and videos captured during the flight.

■ Most images will be public records and available for viewing if requested through state Public Records Act procedures. As a reference, the district cited the 22-page "Recommendations for Government Use of Drone Aircraft," published by the American Civil Liberties Union in 2011. For more on this comprehensive look at military and

Most images captured by the drone will be public records and available for viewing if requested through state Public Records Act procedures.

civilian uses and attempted uses of drones in the United States, go to tinyurl.com/ACLU888.

The district is considering the DJI Phantom 2 Vision+ Quad-Copter Drone, a squarish assembly about 14 inches corner to corner and weighing about 2.5 pounds. Four arms extend

from the core at the compass points, with a rotor sitting upright on the end of each arm. Photos show them with white bodies and white rotors, but the district will be applying its own distinctive paint scheme.

On the scene, the drone's images will be downloaded to firefighters' tablet computers and/or smart phones. While the drone can stay airborne for just 25 minutes, the key is the first 10 to 20 minutes, a period in which many fires are knocked down, Chief Schapelhouman said.

Exceptions to access

Drones are much cheaper to operate than planes and helicopters, so once word gets out, the district may find its new tool in demand by other public agencies. If another agency asks to borrow it for an emergency situation, district policy will require that the drone be operated by a Menlo Park district pilot-and-observer team, Mr. Schapelhouman said.

There are cases in which law enforcement might restrict access to the images — for example, if the drone were

called to an active shooting or hostage situation. "Sometimes, they can challenge that (policy) or even stop it," he said.

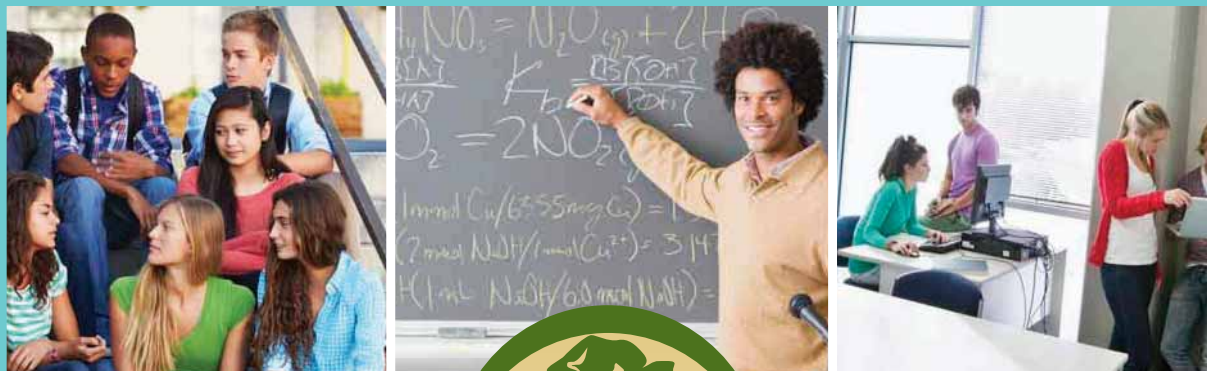
While the district is cooperative with law enforcement, there are limits, he said. The drone will not be available for anything not within the firefighting/paramedic realm, such as observing a drug transaction, he said, adding, "They're going to need to find a different way." Besides, he said, a 25-minute hover time may not be useful for police work.

The Menlo Park district has said no to law enforcement before. The district has keys to many buildings, including apartment buildings, and on occasion, police have asked for them. With few exceptions, they're refused, Chief Schapelhouman said. "We see how it could change or taint our reputation in the community," he said. "We're kind of the non-punitive entity."

If a drone were to overfly a patch of marijuana, however, the police would be told, he said. "It's not as if we're going to turn a blind eye to blatant criminal activity." ■

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Drawing courtesy of Sinnott and Company

Architect Sam Sinnott of Menlo Park designed the field and memorial at no charge.

RICH MAY
continued from page 5

but in order for it to be regulation-sized, it also required land owned by the Ravenswood School District. The agreement negotiated with the district allows school use of the field during school hours and on some additional days for special events, Mr. Merrill said.

During the trial of Mr. May's killer, a social psychologist testified in Mr. Alvarez's defense that he had grown up in a community that lacked athletic opportunities.

"I took that as an affront," Mr. Merrill says. "I vowed at that point that I was not going to allow that to be the case any

further," he says. "I didn't want this to be an excuse that any kid could use."

Mr. Merrill said he hopes the new field "will be a game changer." It will be, he says, "equal to or better than" the fields that East Palo Alto residents used to have to travel to nearby communities to play on.

Donations can be made through the foundation's website, RichMayFoundation.org, or by mailing them to 64 Moulton Drive, Atherton, 94027.

The foundation is also seeking sponsors for engraved pavers that will be used at the field's entrance. Go to: tinyurl.com/MayField-07 to order a brick. ■

JUNIOR CHEF

continued from page 3

ten-free a few years ago because her sister and a few other family members are healthier without gluten in their diet. Her dad is a vegetarian.

"I didn't like what my mom was cooking so I decided to take over," Mia says. Now her mother shops for ingredients and cleans up for Mia.

Among her cooking inspirations is Menlo Park's Flea Street Cafe, Mia says. "I really like the chefs at Flea Street and I got to meet them" recently, she says. She also loves Jesse Cool's cookbook "Simply Organic."

Chef Ina Garten is another inspiration, and Mia is also enjoying "Yummy Supper — 100 Fresh, Luscious & Honest Recipes From a (gluten-free) Omnivore" that she received for Christmas, she says.

What's next for Mia?

"I'm really happy I did the show, because it was fun to be a TV star for a little bit," she says. But she probably will not have time for more TV in her future.

"I want to open a restaurant, but I'm not going to do it for a little while, because I'm going to be a brain surgeon when I grow up," Mia says. She knows that being a brain surgeon will be hard, Mia says, so only after she's comfortable with that career will she open her restaurant, she says.

In the meantime, in addition to being in the fifth-grade class of Heidi Veneman at Oak Knoll, Mia is a competitive swimmer, with freestyle her favorite stroke. She also plays basketball and volleyball, rows crew and plans to start lacrosse soon.

For those who can't get enough of Mia's cooking on "MasterChef Junior," she has posted several cooking videos on her Facebook page, Mia Junior Chef. ■

■ **POLICE CALLS**

This information is based on reports from 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.

MENLO PARK

Residential burglaries:

■ Someone broke a sliding glass door at the back of a house on Theresa Court, entered the house and stole a flat-screen TV and \$500 cash. Estimated loss: \$1,150. Dec. 30.

■ A bike was stolen from a locked storage locker on Crane Street. No estimate of loss. Jan. 2.

■ Someone cut a padlock to a locked gate at a construction site on Yale Road. No report of losses. Dec. 29.

Thefts:

■ Two chairs and a stroller were stolen from the front porch of a home on Hedge Road. Estimated loss: \$600. Dec. 29.

■ Someone stole an Apple iPad that had been left unattended on a bench. Estimated loss: \$550. Dec. 29.

■ Someone stole an unattended cellphone from a desk in the public library on Alma Street. Estimated loss: \$300. Dec. 31.

■ A package containing a backpack was stolen from the front porch of a home on Menalto Avenue. Estimated loss: \$75. Dec. 29.

Stolen vehicle: A 14-year-old drove off without permission in a car that had been parked on Carlton Avenue. The car was subsequently located and returned. Dec. 31.



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Before



After

Hill introduces 'ignition interlocks' bill for DUI offenders

By Sue Dremann

Palo Alto Weekly

First-time DUI offenders would be required to install "ignition interlock devices" in their cars that will test their breath for alcohol before starting the car, if a new bill introduced by state Sen. Jerry Hill passes in Sacramento.

Sen. Hill, flanked by representatives from Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD) and nearly a dozen law enforcement officials from cities in San Mateo County and the San Mateo and Santa Clara county sheriffs, introduced the bill (Senate Bill 61) on Dec. 29 during a press conference at Redwood City's Courthouse Square.

The bill would mandate a five-year pilot program that requires installation of the ignition interlock on DUI offenders' vehicles for six months for the first offense, with an escalating period for each subsequent conviction. Drivers would not lose their licenses while using the device, which Sen. Hill said has been a major stumbling block to the state's current voluntary program. Under current California law, only about 20 percent of people who have a choice

of installing the device or driving on a restricted license opt for the device, he said.

Reducing recidivism is key to reducing DUI-related fatalities and injury, he said. Legally impaired drivers involved in fatal crashes were eight times more likely to have a prior driving-while-impaired conviction than drivers involved in fatalities who had not been drinking, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

And the casualties are daunting: In the past 30 years, more than 50,000 Californians have been killed by drunk drivers and more than 1 million have been injured, Sen. Hill said. Repeat DUI offenders account for about a third of annual DUI convictions.

Sen. Hill said it pains him that a preventable cause of injury and death is not being fully addressed. Conservative estimates show that a first-time convicted offender has driven drunk at least 80 times prior to being arrested, he said.

"California needs to do a better job of reducing deaths and injuries from drunk drivers," Sen. Hill said. "We must take action to prevent more drunk drivers." The bill is a bipartisan effort, he

added.

Ignition interlocks have reduced repeat drunk-driving offenses by 67 percent, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. A 1999-2002 study funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that in New Mexico, which has the nation's highest rate of per capita ignition interlock installations, DUI re-arrest rates were 66 percent lower for people using the device than rates for those without ignition interlock devices.

A second New Mexico study found recidivism was reduced by 75 percent, and alcohol-related crashes declined 31 percent between 2002 and 2007, according to Impact DWI statistics.

Currently, 24 states have laws requiring all first-time offenders to use ignition interlocks. In states that require the devices, ignition interlocks have reduced DUI fatalities by more than 35 percent; in Oregon, the reduction is more than 42 percent, Sen. Hill said.

In California, a pilot program is underway in Alameda, Los Angeles, Sacramento and Tulare counties. The device, which looks like a walkie-talkie with a plastic tube on top (drivers must blow

into the tube), blocks the car's ignition from starting if it detects a blood-alcohol level exceeding a pre-set limit. The driver is periodically prompted to pull over and blow into the device again to help prevent gaming the system, Sen. Hill said.

Drivers must pay about \$100 to \$150 for the device, plus a \$50 monthly maintenance fee. The manufacturer will provide the devices at no cost to people who cannot afford them, he said.

Tony Chin, technical supervisor for manufacturer Smart Start, said the device logs whether alcohol is present, its amount and the duration. Drivers in the program must return the device for service every 30 days and to have the data downloaded. When warranted, technicians can employ cameras and GPS to instantaneously download the information.

Sen. Hill said that all drivers convicted of a DUI would be required to install the devices in their vehicles for six months. Second-time offenders would use the devices for one year; with a two-year requirement for third-time offenders and three years for those with four or more DUI convictions.

Tom Gallagher, assistant San Mateo County sheriff, said he fully supports the bill. "Each year we make about 300 DUI arrests; we've had 315 so far this year. I definitely believe it will make San Mateo County a safer place," he said.

Nina Walker, representing MADD in San Diego, spoke to the very real tragedy caused by DUI drivers and the group's support for the bill.

"It's time for California to do the right thing. My life was changed when my 22-year-old daughter, Ginger, was killed in a DUI crash. Ginger left behind a 3-year-old son, which my husband and I are now raising," she said. ▣

PROP 47

continued from page 9

Mr. Mauer of The Sentencing Project said he expects Proposition 47 petitions to surge initially and then drop off after a few months.

"I think it was a very smart proposition that should be beneficial for the state overall," he added. "This group of offenses should not result in state prison incarceration. It's a bad approach to public safety." ▣

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Woodside council should reject 'art cave' project

By Nancy Reyering

The Woodside Town Council should overturn the recent Planning Commission decision to approve a lot line adjustment (reported Dec. 4 in the Almanac) for an "art cave" project. The decision, made by the narrowest possible margin, and against the recommendations of the town's planning director and the ASRB, opens the way to allow construction of a 400-foot-long, 11,000-square-foot building immediately adjacent to Whiskey Hill Road, a designated scenic corridor. Construction of the proposed cave will require excavating into a steep hillside with 35-plus percent slopes, within a geologically sensitive area (Canada fault), and beneath mature oak trees.

This proposal is purportedly an above-ground beekeeping and honey-collection operation, while the entry structures to the cave would be considered "accessory structures." But the stated above-ground use is irrelevant: The cave could be re-purposed for any number of underground uses. The major impact of this project is due to the subterranean structures, which are enormous in scope.

Importantly, this proposal was submitted after the adoption of the state award-winning 2012 General Plan, and is therefore subject to its policies. The General Plan contains specific goals to revise ordinances on grading and basement development, and includes policies that the commission should have heeded, including "Minimizing Grading," "Respect for Natural Land Forms," and "Pattern of Land Uses."

The Planning Commission's decision sets an unfortunate precedent that would allow building an underground structure that far exceeds the size of any allowed above-ground buildings. It is clear that such a structure is not in compliance with the General Plan or the Residential Design Guidelines. In addition, the project is envi-

sioned on steep slopes where constraints are especially important. Excavating beneath a 35 percent slope within a locally designated scenic corridor and within a geologically sensitive area is neither prudent nor good public policy. Excavation for this project involves approximately 6,400 cubic yards of dirt haul. This would require 1,000 to 1,600 dump truck trips, depending on the size of the truck. On-site cut-and-fill would require transporting thousands of tons of subsurface soil across environmentally sensitive land and bring further destruction above grade.

This recent decision by the Planning Commission could forever alter far more than one hillside: It threatens to pre-empt consideration of updated ordinances by the Town Council, and set a precedent that could render discussion of this issue by the council moot.

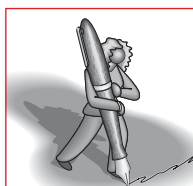
Woodside's new General Plan seeks to correct omissions of existing ordinances, written when residential projects of this scope and magnitude were not envisioned. The Planning Commission's decision is in direct conflict with the General Plan and undermines community values and quality of life, and opens the way for similar environmentally unconscious projects.

It is clear that the town of Woodside needs better regulations, and the council should expedite that process.

The first step should be for the Town Council to overturn the Planning Commission's decision, and enact a "time out" until the Municipal Code can be updated.

Details of the planning staff and ASRB's deliberations and recommendations regarding the lot line adjustment and the project as a whole can be found at tinyurl.com/wsproject07.

Nancy Reyering is a Woodside resident and an active volunteer in the town.



GUEST
OPINION

LETTERS

Our readers write

Expanding the discussion about acts of violence

Editor:

Across the nation, there are peaceful protests prompted by grand jury inactions in New York and Missouri. Predictably, some rioters took advantage of these protests to conduct acts of violence.

It should be noted that the majority of the protests were not violent, yet the rioting seems to be the preferred focus of critics. These critics deliberately distract attention from, and deny, legitimate and substantive reasons for the protests.

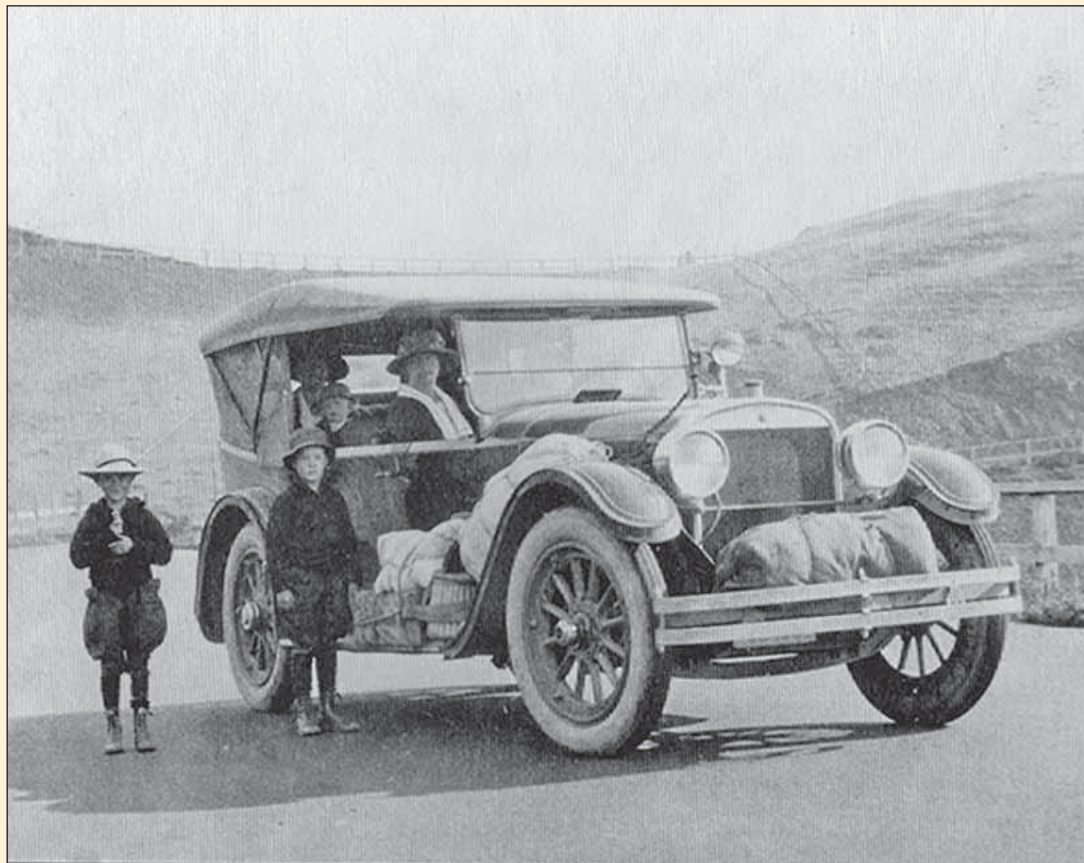
Let it be clear, given their ultimate impact on individuals and families:

- Prosecutorial and judicial misconduct are acts of violence.

- Racial profiling is an act of violence, to include racial inequities in arrests, indictments, and sentencing.

- Denying or curtailing affordable health care are acts of violence.

- Abandoning K-12 public



Courtesy Merrill family archives

Looking back

Charles Jr. and Nancy Merrill, whose parents Charles and Phyllis were an early Atherton "power couple," stand beside the 1920 Winton squareface "V" on a 1922 journey to Independence Lake. The photo is included in the Atherton history book "Under the Oaks" by Pamela Gullard and Nancy Lund.

Continued on next page

Put blood donation on resolution list for 2015

By Loren Magana

I know what you're thinking: The holidays are almost over and in 2015 you want to lose 10 pounds or possibly quit smoking. Or maybe you are looking to support a charitable cause. Good will can come in many forms, but people often forget about the one form of giving that can have an immediate and direct impact on another person's life, the priceless gift of blood.

This year, Stanford Blood Center (SBC) is asking that you please include becoming a blood donor to your New Year's resolution list.

Most people have no idea how much need there is for blood. Every two seconds in the U.S. someone needs blood and just one donation can save up to three lives. However, of the 60 percent of Americans eligible to donate blood, less than 5 percent actually do, and in the Bay Area, only 3 percent donate.

Stanford Blood Center, one of the main suppliers of blood to the Bay Area, reports that over the holidays the blood inventory is often reduced due to illness, vacations and holidays; however, the demand for blood products stays steady.

In addition, due to school closures, an important source of blood derived from high school blood drives is temporarily unavailable, leaving centers with critically low inventory.

"January is a particularly challenging period for us here at SBC as we come out of the holidays and must meet the continued needs of local patients," according to Regina Driscoll, director of donor services at Stanford Blood Center.

Consider that every day in the U.S., approximately 39,000 units of blood are required in

hospitals and emergency rooms but only 38,000 donations are received, which frequently leaves most facilities a mere two days away from running out.

Unfortunately, one never knows when it might be their turn to be the recipient of a life-saving procedure that requires blood donation.

Imagine how you would feel if it was your family member who required blood and his or her blood type was in short supply. That's why it's so important to give.

All blood types are needed and the entire process takes only about an hour. Potential donors should be in good health, with no cold or flu symptoms. They must eat well and drink fluids prior to donation and present photo identification at the time of donation.

Afraid of needles? Many people share the same fear but still find they can give blood. Most first-time donors say the initial quick pinch pales in comparison to the feeling of accomplishment they get at the end of a successful donation!

Don't want to go alone? Try donating together as a family and create a new tradition. Start a trend and make 2015 the year you finally roll up your sleeve to give by including blood donation on the top of your resolution list. Happy New Year!

SBC has three convenient donation centers in Mountain View, Palo Alto and Menlo Park, and hosts several mobile blood drives throughout the Bay Area. For more information or to schedule an appointment, visit bloodcenter.stanford.edu or call 1-888-723-7831.

Loren Magana is the communications and public affairs specialist at the Stanford Blood Center.



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Ruth Mary Utzinger

Ruth Mary Utzinger, a long time resident of Menlo Park, who enriched all who knew her and will be remembered for the magic that she was (and is), passed away peacefully on Tuesday, December 23, 2014. She is survived by her loving children Lynn Balzhiser of Folsom, Karl Utzinger of Los Angeles, Mark Utzinger of Laguna Beach, Cathy Pfeiffer of London, UK, and brother-in-law, David Utzinger of Phoenix, Arizona, as well as grandchildren, Greg, Lacey, Harry, and nieces. Private services will be held. For those who feel inclined, a contribution to their favorite charity in the name of Ruth Utzinger is supported. Spangler Mortuary, Menlo Park assisting the family 650-323-6500.

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-Suzanne, Palo Alto



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LETTERS

Our readers write

Continued from previous page

schools is an act of violence.

■ Economic inequity, to include denying an adequate minimum wage, is an act of violence.

■ Unconstitutionally restricting voting rights are acts of violence.

■ Reducing and eliminating aid, food, clothing and shelter to the poor are acts of violence.

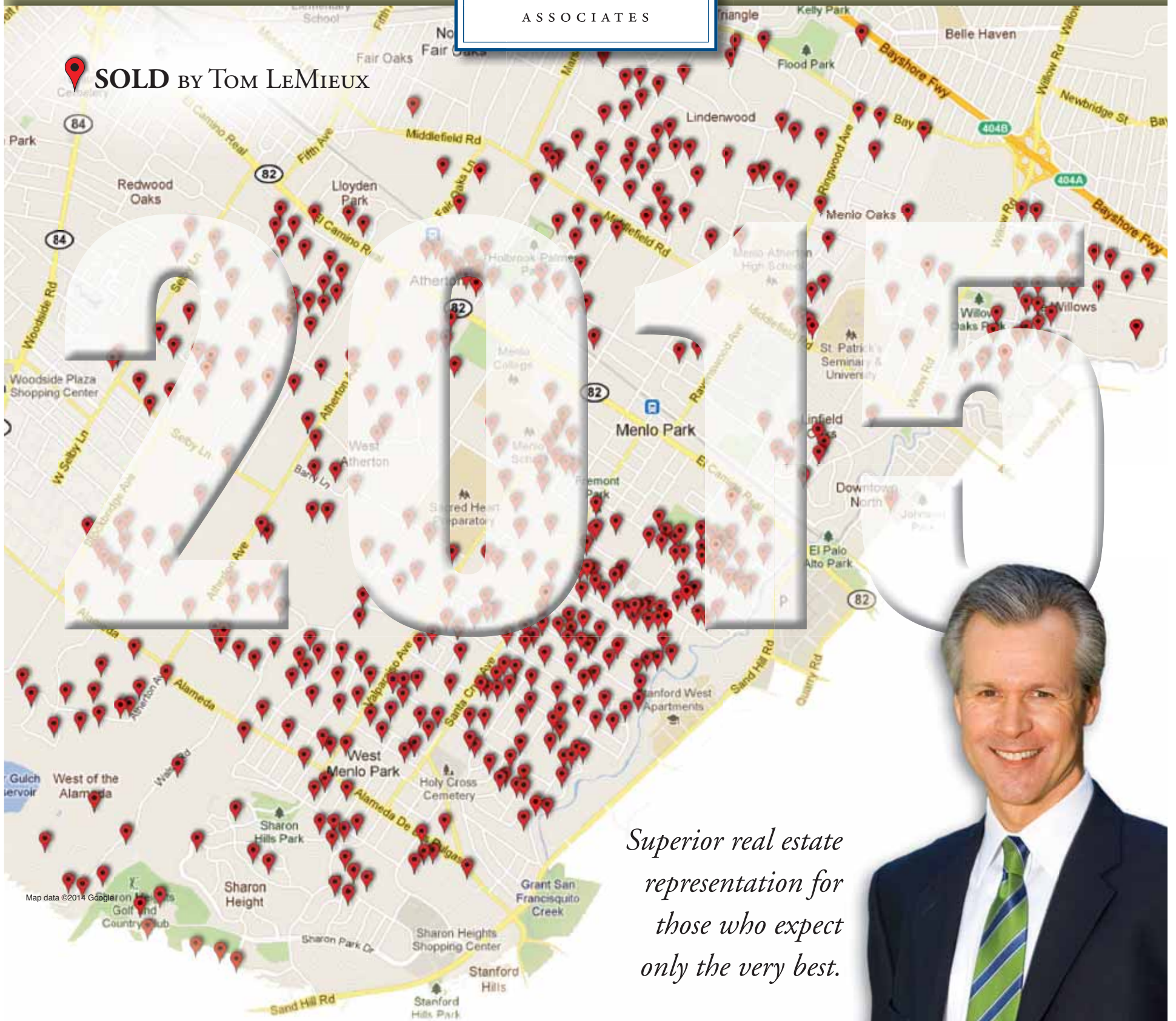
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