

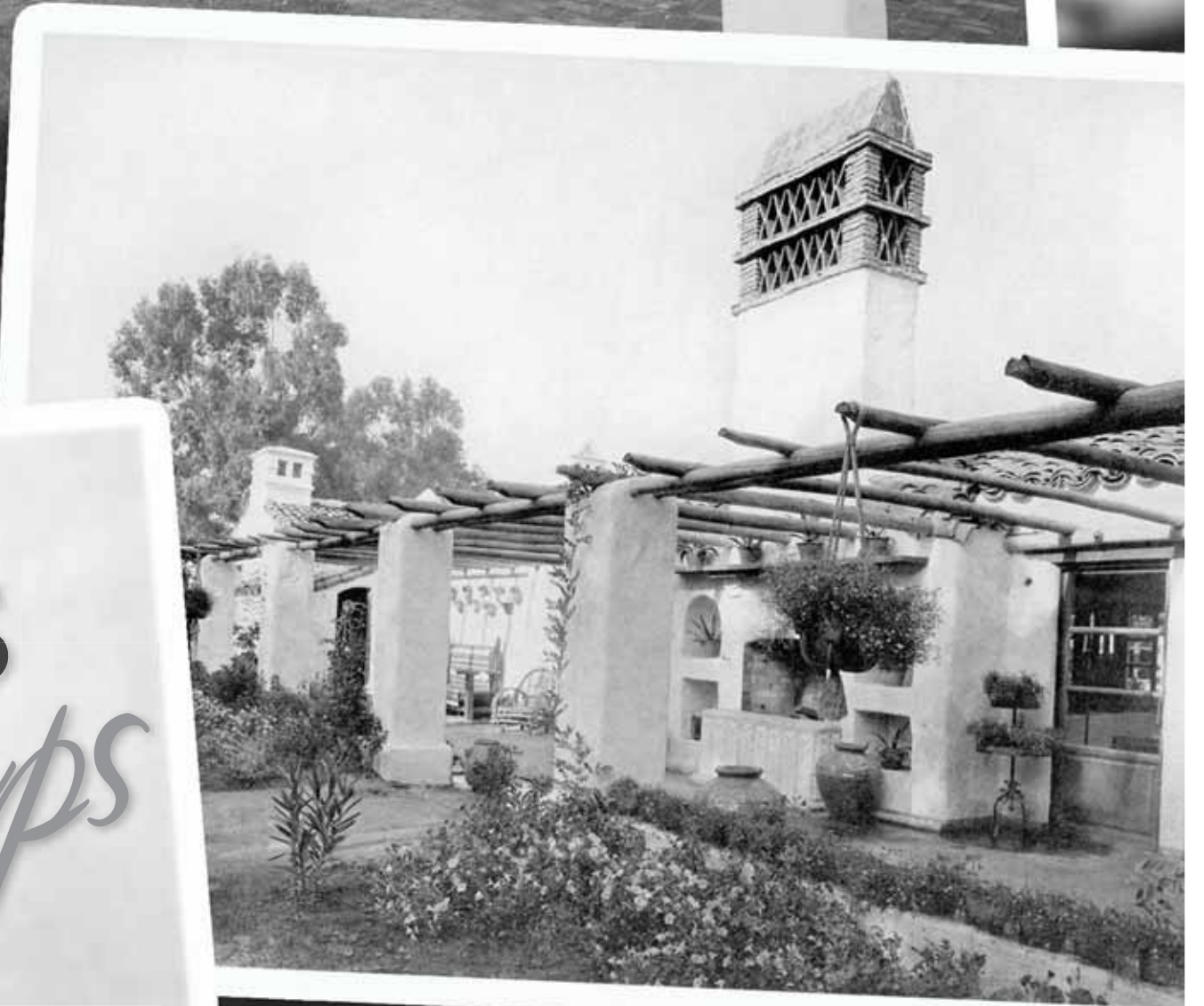
The Almanac

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

MARCH 18, 2015 | VOL. 50 NO. 28



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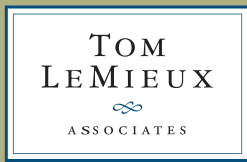
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Photo by Michiko Miner

Coaches **Charleston Pierce** and Hannah Rose Johnson surrounded by M-A students.

Coach readies M-A students for fashion show spotlight

Seniors will strut for three fashion show performances March 21.

By Sheri Baer of Menlo Park, Menlo-Atherton parent and fashion show volunteer.

For Menlo-Atherton High School students, Pride Hall is a stretch of maroon flooring lined with trophy cases, a jostling passageway to be maneuvered in under five minutes. When the passing bell rings, it's a packed, shoulder-bumping world away from the sleek fashion runways of Milan, Paris and London. Unless Charleston Pierce is back in town.

Over the course of several weeknights, this San Francisco-based coach, actor and former model converts the high school's central thoroughfare into a training ground for Model 101 workshops. His job: to make nearly 200 diverse high school seniors runway-ready for the school's upcoming annual fashion show.

"I'm able to relate to a lot of

the kids because my first fashion show was in high school, and it was definitely an experience I will never forget," Mr. Pierce said during a recent session. "I got a boost of confidence that I had never had before."

When the "M-AKING FASHION H15TORY"-themed show takes center stage Saturday, March 21, at Menlo-Atherton's Performing Arts Center, it will be Mr. Pierce's fourth go-round as the event's producer, model coach and choreographer.

With credits including 16 seasons of Macy's Passport modeling, national billboards, movies, print ads and more than 30 commercials, he acknowledges a school's annual PTA fundraiser isn't an obvious career step. However, he has close ties to M-A and embraced the opportunity to work with students.

"I come back because the job isn't really a job, it's part of my mission to inspire. I come to inspire and I get inspired by them," he said.

Flanked by his longtime colleague, Hannah Rose Johnson,

he quickly stokes the energy in the dimly lit hallway. With an agenda that includes model drills, walking and posing, the challenge is keeping dozens of students — be they lacrosse players, ceramic artists, extroverts or introverts — pumped up and engaged.

"What we do is really reassure them that everyone is a winner. We work on self confidence skills that make sense on the runway," he said. "That means that you're showing up on that stage with good posture, you're showing up with that winner smile, you're showing up being part of the team."

Senior Natalie Montoya admitted she was hesitant when she came out for the first workshop. "I wasn't really sure what to expect," she said. "I figured I'd be kind of shy and I wouldn't really want to do anything. But he just loves it so much that he gets everyone else into it."

At intermittent points throughout the workshop, blasts of music

See **FASHION SHOW**, page 6

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Local News

MENLO PARK | AHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY

Santa Cruz Ave. sidewalk plan approved

■ Sidewalks and buffered bike lanes will run from Hillview Middle School to downtown.

By **Joshua Alvarez**
Special to the Almanac

The Menlo Park City Council has approved a plan to install sidewalks along Santa Cruz Avenue between Olive Street at Hillview Middle School and Johnson Street at the Menlo Park Presbyterian Church and the beginning of the downtown area.

The council voted unanimously March 10 to install sidewalks and buffered bike lanes on both the north and south sides of Santa Cruz Avenue, which would eliminate parking on both sides. City staff will work on the design and come back to the council to refine components, such as the width of the sidewalk.

The council prefers a design that creates 6-foot wide sidewalks wherever feasible; keeps the 5-foot-wide bike lanes; creates a 2-foot-wide bike lane buffer zone; and conserves heritage trees, hedges, and permanent landscaping improvements.

The council asked the staff to explore maintaining parking on the south side of Santa Cruz Avenue between Fremont Park and Fremont Street or potentially Arbor Road. Church-goers often use the parking spaces to attend services at St. Raymond Catholic Church and Menlo Park Presbyterian Church.

The existing sidewalks along the St. Raymond property and on the south side between Johnson Street and Arbor Road would be improved to comply with standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The proposed 5-foot wide sidewalks were considered too

narrow by the council and some residents. Hillview students often walk to school in groups and parents would like their kids to be able to walk side by side. Parents also complained that they wouldn't be able to fit their stroller past a pedestrian.

City staff asked the council for guidance on whether added safety for bicyclists should take priority over saving heritage trees and other landscaping. Mayor Catherine Carlton said she considered it a false choice, noting nowhere would the bike lanes be narrower than their current width of 5 feet, which meets minimum safety requirements.

The proposed 2-foot buffer zone for the bike lane should be added wherever feasible but not at the expense of heritage trees, she said. Councilmen Peter Ohtaki and Richard Cline agreed, but councilwoman Kirsten Keith disagreed, though she ultimately relented.

The spirit of the convoluted resolution that passed was to provide as much flexibility as possible to the public works and planning staff in order to maintain character and safety on every block. "There is a uniqueness on every block," said Mr. Cline. "I would like to see some flexibility and some humanitarianism in the staff's decision process. I do think that every crosswalk on Santa Cruz should be lighted, as well."

Councilman Ray Mueller was unable to attend but was recognized in public comments for his efforts in meeting with residents. Mr. Mueller submitted a letter for the record urging



Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

Hillview Middle School students walk and bike along Santa Cruz Avenue toward downtown March 10.

passage of the preferred alternative. "It is time to move this project forward, we owe it to our residents and kids," he wrote.

The council also encouraged staff to begin discussions with PG&E about undergrounding utilities. The council would like design plans to assume compatibility with future undergrounding projects. "We don't want to waste money by installing the sidewalk, then having it torn up by PG&E," said Mayor Carlton.

Dozens of residents, including many with property on the affected area of Santa Cruz Avenue, attended the meeting and

provided public comment. While the majority of residents agreed that Santa Cruz Avenue should be made safer, particularly for the students of Hillview Middle School, they pointed out that the biggest hazard was the excessive speed of traffic. According to city staff, cars travel at an average speed of 37 mph on Santa Cruz Avenue. The council made note of that and expressed interest in lowering the speed limit.

Many residents proposed that the center turn lane be done away with, but Public Works Director Jesse Quirion cited a federal study that warned that

removing the turn lane would significantly increase the chances of accidents. The council agreed the center turn lane was a different matter that was not on the table for discussion.

In 2008, the City Council had voted to make installing sidewalks on Santa Cruz a priority, but the financial crisis effectively placed a moratorium on the project. "I was there in 2008," recalled Mr. Cline. "It was like serving a tour of duty. We had a window to accomplish this then, but then it closed. Moving on this as quickly as possible is critical." ■

Little opposition to Sheriff's Office idea to record license plate data

By **Dave Boyce**
Almanac Staff Writer

Eight residents and a few town officials gathered on March 10 at the Historic Schoolhouse in Portola Valley to discuss an idea advanced by the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office to set up license-plate-reading cameras in town.

It was the second of two forums to gauge community

sentiment on whether to mount three cameras at inconspicuous locations along Alpine, Portola and Arastradero roads. The cameras would photograph all vehicle traffic, day and night.

The cameras can help authorities identify burglars and thieves, deputies said.

In the two forums, opinion tilted toward installing the cameras.

The Town Council is likely

License plate data on all vehicle traffic would be stored on regional intelligence center servers.

to discuss the matter in April, Town Manager Nick Pegueros said. If the council were to approve their use, it's not clear

when cameras might go up.

The cameras send alerts to authorities within seconds of capturing plates of interest. When combined with images from neighboring communities, the cameras can track a suspect.

The photos can also show the make, model and color of a vehicle. When working cases, police sometimes work from partial plate numbers. A searchable database of images

can find plates that match those fragments, said Capt. Mike Sena, director of the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center in San Francisco.

Fusion centers

The intelligence center, also known as a fusion center, has a staff of over 70 employees from local, state and federal agencies

See **SHERIFF'S OFFICE**, page 6

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Neighbors complain of dust from piles of ballast rock

In 2008, Caltrain started storing ballast, or railroad rock, in piles next to the tracks and near Chilco Street in Menlo Park. There the rock has lingered, much to the chagrin of residents living nearby.

Ballast provides a bed for railroad tracks. Left to sit in piles, it provides a fine source of dust in the air, according to the neighbors.

A community meeting to discuss the problem is set for 6:30 p.m. Monday, March 23, at the Menlo Park Senior Center, located at 110 Terminal Ave.

Caltrain representatives, city officials and members of the community-led Belle Haven public safety action team are expected to attend.

Among the questions expected to be raised:

■ Who gave permission for the rocks to be stored there, and how long are the piles going to stay?

■ Can something be done to deal with this blight and still allow trains — as well as cyclists and pedestrians — to safely move through the area?

SHERIFF'S OFFICE

continued from page 5

that deal with emergency situations.

Bay Area participants include six county sheriffs' offices, the California Highway Patrol, the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Agency and the Department of Homeland Security.

Fusion centers share information related to terrorism, homeland security and law enforcement, Mr. Sena said in an email. "They provide invaluable expertise and situational awareness to inform decision making at all levels of government ... and assist law enforcement and homeland security partners in preventing and investigating crime and terrorism."

Access to fusion center databases is restricted to law enforcement officers; the center also provides training on civil liberties, civil rights and privacy, and on signs and precursors associated with criminal behavior and acts of terrorism, Mr. Sena said.

The cameras are potentially controversial. There are questions over how long to store the images and whether courts will deem them a public record, creating the possibility of data being posted online and revealing residents' travel patterns.

"We believe that (image storage)

ought to be measured in days and maybe weeks and not in years or months," said Jerry Schwarz of the Mid-Peninsula chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California.

Burglars operate regionally and solving cases takes time, Mr. Sena said. "(We need) that 12-month time frame to do that investigation," he said.

The hit rate — license plates of interest to law enforcement — is one or two per thousand images, Mr. Sena said. The database automatically deletes images of no interest after one year, he said.

High-speed cameras

The cameras are special-purpose instruments. In a squad car, a camera can capture the plates of a vehicle moving at high speed in the opposite direction. The cameras do not create readable pictures of vehicle occupants, Mr. Sena said.

The cameras sometimes mistake a zero for the letter O, or a street sign for a license plate. For this reason, the plate number in an image must be validated by a human being before searching for the registered owner via the Department of Motor Vehicles, Mr. Sena said.

Each stored image includes a record of who has seen it, information that would be provided to the Sheriff's Office, he said. ▀

FASHION SHOW

continued from page 3

fill the hallway. As classmates whoop and cheer, clusters of students strut forward, swiveling and posing, taking turns walking Pride Hall's simulated catwalk.

"Mostly, it's the posture, and when you're holding your pose, not to rush through it and definitely take your time with it," said senior Danny LaPorte. Adds classmate Henry Hilton: "Charleston is a character. He's an energetic guy and he just

brings the fun to the learning."

With performances set for 1 p.m., 4 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, March 21, M-A's seniors will have ample opportunity to showcase their skills. "You experience a great show, you experience how it feels for every artist in the world to do something great and have people applaud you," Mr. Pierce said. "When I see them come together as a family, as a team, as a unit, my job is done."

Go to tinyurl.com/fash321 to buy tickets online. Tickets may also be purchased at the door. ▀

Residents seek transfer to Menlo Park school district

By Barbara Wood
Almanac Staff Writer

Menlo Park residents who live on the north side of O'Connor Street, just about a block from where the Menlo Park City School District plans to build its new Upper Laurel School, have asked to have school district boundaries changed so children who live there could attend the school.

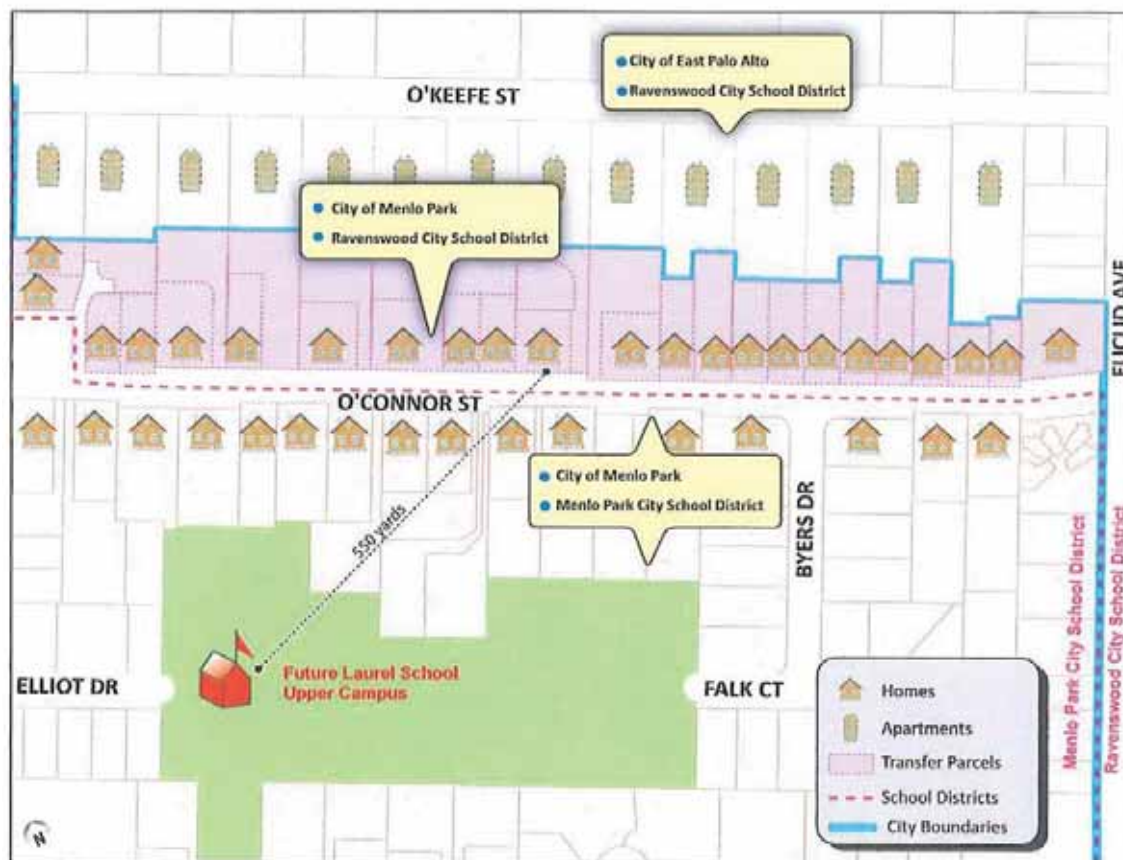
Unless their recent petition is successful, only the residents of the south side of the stretch of O'Connor, between Elliott Drive and Euclid Avenue, will be eligible to attend the new school.

The 31 homes on the north side of that section of the street are now in the Ravenswood City School District, with the district boundary running right down the middle of the road.

The petition, signed by 26 residents, was submitted to San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools Anne Campbell on Dec. 9. It says that when East Palo Alto was incorporated in 1983, that stretch of O'Connor was annexed into Menlo Park, where their neighbors already were, but the school district boundaries weren't changed.

The petition affects the properties from 235 to 295 O'Connor Street. The lead petitioners are Susan Stacy Keller, John Barksdale and Lansing Scriven.

The petition says the change will create "a cohesive community," restore "the O'Connor Street's school district lineage"



This map from the petition to change the school district serving the residents of the north side of O'Connor Street in Menlo Park shows the homes that would be affected.

and align "city, school district and natural boundaries."

"Our day to day lives are in Menlo Park," the petition says. "We are a group of residents that are highly involved in our community and we regularly participate in informal and organized events in our Wil-lows community."

The petition says it will not promote racial and ethnic segregation, one of the factors that

must be considered, because the residents in the area that would be transferred are diverse. The area has 49 percent white residents, 21 percent Asian residents and 16 percent Latino residents, the petition says.

The petition says the area currently has only one child attending Ravenswood district schools and that initially only one child would attend Menlo Park district schools if the change is

approved.

Changing school district boundaries is a convoluted process. According to Ahmad Sheikholeslami, the Menlo Park district's chief business and operations officer, who explained the process to the Menlo Park district's board at its March 10 meeting, the petition is first submitted to the county office of education.

If the petition meets the

minimum requirements, including the signatures of more than 25 percent of the registered voters in the area to be transferred, it goes to the County Committee on School District Organization, which happened on Feb. 23.

The committee then holds public hearings in the districts that would be affected by the boundary change. Those meetings are scheduled in the Menlo Park district on Monday, March 30, at 7 p.m. in the district TERC room, 181 Encinal Ave. in Atherton; and in the Ravenswood district on Monday, April 6, at 7 p.m., in the district office board room, 2120 Euclid Ave. in East Palo Alto.

The school boards of the affected districts can support, oppose, or remain neutral on the petition, Mr. Sheikholeslami said.

The Menlo Park board will discuss its stand on the petition at its April 14 meeting, he said.

Once the public hearings have been held, the county committee has 120 days to vote on the boundary change. The earliest it could be considered is at its May 4 meeting.

The committee's decision can be appealed to the state board of education.

If either district opposes or remains neutral about the transfer, but it is approved by the county committee, an election must be held involving only the properties that would be transferred, Mr. Sheikholeslami said. ▀

Menlo Park council likes what it sees of Menlo Gateway plan

By Joshua Alvarez
Special to the Almanac

Developer David Bohannon presented revamped plans for the Menlo Gateway development to the Menlo Park City Council on March 10, and the council members appeared to like what they saw.

"I want to make sure we can expedite the process," said Councilman Peter Ohtaki. "I would love to finally see it happen."

The updated plan includes an additional 20 hotel rooms (bringing the total to 250), a decrease in the size of the health and fitness facility, and a new architectural design for the office buildings. Mr. Bohannon introduced a new hotel partner, Ensemble Partners, and hotel brand, Marriott

Autograph Collection.

The total project involves constructing three office buildings — totaling 694,000 square feet — three parking garages and the hotel on 16 acres along Independence and Constitution drives, between Bayshore Freeway and Bayfront Expressway.

The changes are expected to result in slightly less traffic and additional tax revenue for the city than were projected for the earlier plan, and the project is expected to exceed the sustainability standards agreed upon in 2010, the developers said.

The city staff plans to conduct a detailed review of the revised project and consult the Planning Commission.

Council members expressed approval of the new plans, agreeing with Mr. Bohannon that they fall within the parameters of the original plans.

The council urged city staff to streamline the review process as much as possible.

"Every month we don't build this we lose \$300,000 in revenue for our schools," said Mayor Catherine Carlton. She also thanked the developers for the effort to exceed sustainability and environmental standards.

The developers predict the hotel will meet or exceed Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) Silver standards and that the office buildings will far exceed LEED Gold standards, possibly reaching Platinum.

In 2010, the council had approved the project. Voters later agreed with the council's decision: 64 percent approved the project by passing ballot Measure T.

"I'm excited to see (the) project

come forward now," Mr. Ohtaki said. "I'm impressed with the vision for the hotel. The differences relative to the plan approved by voters are minimal. We are talking about a 20-unit increase for the hotel but a decrease in the fitness center, so there's overall a net decrease of 9,000 square feet."

City staff will verify what impact the complex would have on traffic. Mr. Ohtaki said that while the increase in hotel capacity would invite more traffic, the decrease in the fitness space will help offset the increase.

"I'm also very excited to see this come forward," Councilwoman Kirsten Keith said. "I know it has been a long time. I'm looking forward to the bicycle facilities. That's great to see because more and more people are asking for this. People want

to see more pedestrian and bike options. I also think it's great to have the large ballroom and conference space because we don't have that and people have to go elsewhere."

Councilman Rich Cline did not express an opinion on the updates, but asked Mr. Bohannon and his team if any decisions have been made about the use of bird-safe windows, transit options, and the type of hotel service. The developers said they had not yet made any formal decisions, but promised to keep the council updated.

The council directed city staff to present a consent item for the March 24 council meeting that would authorize the staff to begin working with the Planning Commission without further council input.

Councilman Ray Mueller was absent. ▀

Martinez named to high school board

By Dave Boyce
Almanac Staff Writer

Laura Martinez is 30 years old, has been mayor of East Palo Alto twice, and was in her second term on the City Council there. No longer. The governing board of the Sequoia Union High School District chose her from among five candidates to take a vacant seat on the board. So she's resigning from the council.

After five candidate interviews, the Sequoia board appointed Ms. Martinez in a first-round unanimous vote during its March 11 meeting.

The first member of her family to graduate from a four-year college, she will serve the nine months remaining in the term of Menlo Park resident Olivia Martinez, who retired earlier this month. The seat is up for election in November.

Laura Martinez works for Aspire Public Schools as the after-school program director and coordinator of the family college resource center. She is a graduate of Palo Alto High School, speaks Spanish, and has a bachelor's degree in sociology and Spanish from Whittier College.

As a City Council member, she

sat on San Mateo County community panels overseeing commuting, library operations and emergency services. She is a member of the committee organizing the annual celebration of Cinco de Mayo in East Palo Alto.

Ms. Martinez said her key priorities on the school board will be closing the student achievement gap, college and career readiness, and professional development of teachers.

In her interview with the board, she stressed the importance of a variety of extra-curricular activities so that students can learn about who they really are and what they want to do. Programs in robotics, athletics, business, music and art are important in allowing students to develop their talents, she said.

Every student should be encouraged to go to college, but the school district should be understanding if a student wants something else, she said. "I think it's our job to support them if they choose that, to provide

options so that they can find their passion so they can be successful," she said.

The other candidates were Georgia Solkov Jack, a resident of Redwood City and an associate director of stewardship at Stanford University's Office of Development; Ellen Mouchawar, an Atherton attorney (inactive) and active volunteer in the Ravenswood City Elementary School District; Jay Siegel, a former member of the Las Lomas Elementary School District board; and Isaiah Vi, a Menlo Park resident, information technology analyst and former member of the JobTrain board of directors.

Board President Allen Weiner summed up his decision before calling for a vote: "When we talk about how to move kids up, trying to make kids believe who come from families where nobody has ever gone to college, to persuade them college is an option for you, that you can succeed in high school, that you can succeed in college, when we're having discussions about how we're going to do that, I think our discussions will be enriched by somebody who comes from that background themselves." ▣



Photo by Dave Boyce
Laura Martinez

Caltrans delays, but won't stop, spraying

By Barbara Wood
Almanac Staff Writer

For the second week in a row, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) at the last minute on March 10 postponed spraying herbicides along Highway 84 west of Skyline Boulevard, due to weather.

Caltrans spokeswoman Gidget Navarro said Caltrans will now spray on March 17 and 24, both Tuesdays, between Skyline Boulevard and Stage Road, about one mile east of Highway 1, on the westbound side of 84 (also known as La Honda Road), with no spraying between Hildebrand and Pescadero roads.

Ms. Navarro also issued a statement March 10, saying Caltrans will not give up herbicide spraying in San Mateo County, as residents had requested.

In 2012, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors banned broadcast

spraying of herbicides everywhere in the county except at its two airports. But Caltrans has continued to spray in the county, despite the fact that it has stopped spraying in other counties when asked to do so.

Local residents, who have formed a group called "Protect Our Watershed," say they fear the herbicide spraying will pollute water sources and harm the health of residents and others who use the roads, such as cyclists.

According to Ms. Navarro's statement, Caltrans has evaluated mowing as an alternative to spraying and determined it is not safe. The statement says the highway has limited sight distance around curves and mowing equipment cannot safely be dropped off and loaded.

"Mowing along Route 84 could take four to six weeks to complete, if it were safe

See CALTRANS, page 14

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Menlo's Iberia restaurant may move to Belmont next year

By Sandy Brundage
Almanac Staff Writer

It's off to a new, out-of-town home for Iberia, the popular Spanish restaurant at 1026 Alma St. in Menlo Park.

Owner and chef Jose Luis Relinque said he's in the process of finalizing the paperwork to buy a property at 740 El Camino Real in Belmont.

Iberia's last day of operation in Menlo Park will be Dec. 31. Mr. Relinque said he had initially looked for a new spot in Menlo Park after finding out last summer that a new development would leave the restaurant and adjacent businesses homeless.

"But the market is really terrible. If you purchase an existing business, or purchase nothing more than garbage, the costs are sky-high," he said.

Iberia had been located in the Ladera Country Shopper in Portola Valley for 16 years before moving to Menlo Park in 2000. The next year, Mr. Relinque and his wife and Iberia co-owner, Jessica, opened Rock of Gibraltar next door, which offers lunch items and gourmet take-out foods. That store will not be reopened at the new location, although the restaurant will probably add a "to go" lunch menu, he said.

The Belmont property currently houses a coffee shop. Mr. Relinque said he'll have to gut the space. He plans on wrapping up the application and permit

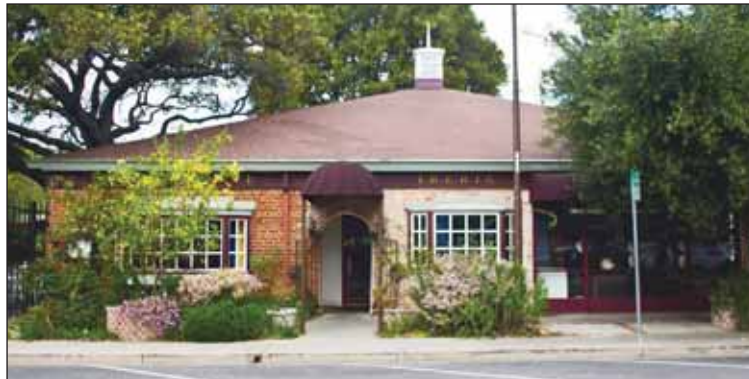


Photo by Magali Gauthier/The Almanac

Iberia restaurant's current home in Menlo Park will be demolished and a three-story office structure built there.

processes and getting other necessities done by the end of the year.

The new restaurant, which will focus on tapas and paella, will have the same name and phone number, according to the owner, but will be more casual, with "the same vibe that it has now — comfortable, relaxing ... the two things really necessary to enjoy the meal."

Iberia will also keep the same staff. "My employees, which are the most important part of the equation, will still be able to get there. Most of them live in Redwood City," Mr. Relinque said, and laughed. "That's more important than (keeping) the same clientele."

Office building

Local developer Lane Partners is proposing to build a 25,156-square-foot, three-story office building at 1020 Alma

St. on top of a two-level underground garage, according to documents filed with the city.

Construction will require demolishing existing businesses from 1010 Alma St. to 1026 Alma St. That includes Los Salonez and Cindy Nails Spa II, as well as Iberia.

Designed by BAR Architects, the new office complex would preserve two heritage oak trees, and add six new trees and other landscaping to create public and private courtyards.

The 0.6-acre parcel is within the boundaries of the downtown/El Camino Real specific plan, and the developer may negotiate for public benefits in exchange for exceeding the base level of density allowed on the site.

Lane Partners did not respond to a request for comment. The Planning Commission will hold a study session on the project at a future date. ■

Officials to meet on rail crossing dangers

Council members Rich Cline and Kirsten Keith will hold a rail subcommittee meeting Wednesday, March 18, to discuss making railroad crossings safer in light of the fatal accident at Ravenswood Avenue on Feb. 23.

Topics on the agenda include near-term changes to the Ravenswood Avenue crossing to improve safety, and the scope of a design study of grade separation options at that location. In a grade separation, the road is separated from the rail line by elevating or lowering the roadway or the tracks.

The meeting starts at 6 p.m. in the council chambers at the Civic Center at 701 Laurel St.

Results from city's land-use survey

You clicked, you voted, and now you can talk about how it turned out: The Belle Haven

■ MENLO BRIEFS

neighborhood will host a general plan open house on Thursday, March 19, with a focus on discussing the results of the preferred land use options survey.

The general plan provides the city's overall "constitution" for development, and this update cycle will take a close look at the M2 industrial district, which is roughly bordered by the San Francisco Bay, University Avenue, Marsh Road and U.S. 101.

Basic public services seemed popular, based on the survey results. Community members indicated they would like to see a grocery store, pharmacy and maybe a second train station in the M2 zone, and building heights of two to six stories, with retail at ground level.

The meeting starts at 7 p.m. at the Belle Haven police substation, located at 871 Hamilton Ave.

Stonehenge by the Bay?

Dubbing it "Stonehenge by the Bay," the city of Menlo Park announced the installation of a collection of 53 rock sculptures at Bedwell-Bayfront Park.

The sculptures were created as a "stone poem" by Menlo Park artist Susan Dunlap, and are found along a 3/4-mile park trail. The rocks are grouped into clusters, each representing a phrase in the four-stanza poem, according to the city.

New jewelry store

Ceci Wong has landed at 611 Santa Cruz Ave., according to the city of Menlo Park. The high-end jewelry store belongs to Cecilia Wong, who also owns Lustre in San Jose.

Leon Edwin Wentz

(1937 – 2015)

Leon E. Wentz, 77, of Menlo Park, passed away peacefully surrounded by family on February 28 at Sequoia Hospital in Redwood City.

A devoted husband, father and man of integrity, Leon had a terrific sense of humor, big heart and was extremely generous.

Born at Stanford Hospital the same day the Golden Gate Bridge opened, Leon grew up in Palo Alto and graduated from Palo Alto High in 1955. A standout four-sport athlete at Paly, Leon attended University of Colorado, Boulder on a football scholarship. After serving his country in the U.S. Navy, he graduated from UCLA in 1960 with a degree in Business/Construction Management.

Leon married the late Jeanie Townley in 1960 and was married for 29 years until her passing in 1989. Leon married Cathy Salmon in 1990 and the two would have celebrated their 25th anniversary in November.

In a 55-year career as a commercial builder, Leon's passion for construction started at an early age and he worked at his craft until his passing. While in his 20's, Leon's first big project was building a section of the California Aqueduct in Tracy in the 1960's. Leon started L.E. Wentz Company in 1974 and eventually became one of the biggest commercial builders on the West Coast with hundreds of notable projects that included the Opus One Winery in Oakdale and the Ritz Carlton in Half Moon Bay.

In 1990, Leon founded the Jeanie A. Wentz Cancer Foundation at UCLA and established state of the art research facilities at the Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center. It was there that Dr. Dennis Slamon and his team made great strides in research and development of Herceptin, a widely used breast cancer treatment for women with the Her2+ gene.

Leon was president of the UCLA Foundation for two years and donated endless hours to numerous philanthropic programs at UCLA, including Board of Visitors, Chancellors Associates, School of Medicine, and Arts and Architecture Visual Arts committee.

At the age of 46, Leon took up the game of golf. Whether it was with family, friends or by himself, he loved to play. In 1995, Leon set a goal to play Golf Magazine's World's Top 100 Courses. After eight years and countless miles around the globe, he completed his quest at age 65 by playing at Augusta National days after the 2003 Masters tournament. Leon wrote a book about his journey, titled, "Pebble Beach to Augusta".

Leon was always willing to learn and explore new challenges. In his 60's, he attended evening classes studying Japanese and Chinese Mandarin. He was not fluent, but enjoyed speaking his new languages.

Leon's final weeks were spent in the loving care of doctors, nurses and family in the Intensive Care Unit at Sequoia Hospital. The Wentz family wishes to thank those at Sequoia for their care and comfort to Leon.

Leon was preceded in death by his beloved wife Jeanie, parents Mariette and Leon, and brother Robert.

Leon is survived by his beloved wife Cathy, sons Brad (Darci) and Craig, daughter Julie, grandchildren Taylor, Zack and Ryan, brother Richard (Carol), nephew Trent (Tami), niece Lynley (Rob) and several cousins.

A private service was held on March 5 at Alta Mesa Cemetery in Palo Alto.

Donations may be made to your favorite charity or to the "Z" Fund, in honor of Leon's grandson, Zack. The Reeve-Irvine Research Center (Z Fund for CST Research), Attn: Tania Jope, University of California-Irvine, 2107 Gillespie Bldg. Irvine, CA 92697-4292.



1 Portola Green Circle, Portola Valley Offered at \$3,988,000

Enchanting European Storybook Home

Surrender to the fairytale charm of this 4 bedroom, 4.5 bath home of 4,654 sq. ft. (per appraisal) on a lot of 18,295 sq. ft. (per appraisal). An additional 19,200 sq. ft. of exclusive-use land surrounds the grounds. A three-car garage, an expansive motor court, and verdant natural landscaping accent the distinguished Tudor-style residence. Over 40 custom stained-glass windows line the interior, which features a turret dining room with a 23-foot ceiling, a state-of-the-art home theater, and a two-story game room. Topped with an A-frame ceiling, the rustic island kitchen includes a wood-burning fireplace, stainless-steel appliances, and a breakfast nook. A rear gallery opens to the paved terrace hosting a hot tub with slate surround and an outdoor speaker system, while the master suite provides a dazzling bathroom with a steam shower and a jetted tub. Granting easy access to Interstate 280 and just moments from Roberts Market, the home is within walking distance of Woodside Priory and also nearby Ormondale Elementary (API 923) and Corte Madera School (API 937) (buyer to verify eligibility).

For video tour & more photos, please visit:
www.1PortolaGreen.com



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CalBRE #01342140



Michael Repka
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115 Eleanor Drive, Woodside Offered at \$5,988,000

Custom Estate Draped in Luxury

Luxuriate in the quiet splendor of this exquisite 5 bedroom, 4.5 bath home of 3,935 sq. ft. (per county) with a 1,060 sq. ft. walk-out lower level (per plans) on a lot of 1.12 acres (per county). Recessed lighting, and French white oak floors enhance the interior. The two-story great room offers a fireplace and a mezzanine with bookshelves. The breathtaking gourmet kitchen brandishes a massive island, marble countertops, two sinks, intricate cabinetry, and a walk-in pantry. Posh appliances consist of concealed Thermador refrigerator and freezer units and a Wolf double-oven with a French top. The upstairs master suite offers a private balcony, dramatic ceilings, and a sumptuous bathroom with a free-standing tub. Additional features include a home office, a detached three-car garage, automatic gates, terraced gardens, and sensational bay views. Moments from Menlo Country Club and Woodside Plaza, the home is nearby Las Lomitas Elementary (API 943) and La Entrada Middle (API 963), and is walking distance from Woodside High.

For video tour & more photos, please visit:
www.115Eleanor.com



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Peninsula Easter Services



CHRIST CHURCH

The Episcopal Parish of Portola Valley & Woodside

Saturday April 4: Children's Eucharist @ 4 p.m.

Sunday April 5: Sung Eucharist @ 8 a.m. & 10 a.m.

815 Portola Road, Portola Valley; tel. (650) 851-0224
www.ccpvw.org www.facebook.com/ccpvw Egg hunts on both days!

Celebrate the Resurrection



Sunday April 5

9:15 am Light Brunch and Egg Hunt

10:00 am Family Worship

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 (650) 323 8544 • www.firstbaptist.com

Holy Week & Easter

St. Bede's

Episcopal Church
 2650 Sand Hill Rd, Menlo Park
www.stbedesmenlopark.org

Maundy Thursday, April 2
 7:30pm Communion, foot washing

Good Friday, April 3
 noon & 7:30pm Liturgy

Holy Saturday, April 4
 7:30pm Great Vigil of Easter

Easter Sunday, April 5
 8:00am & 10:15am
 Communion w/organ, trumpet, choir
 11:30am Egg hunt, Brunch buffet
 Nursery available 10-11:30am



Join Us For Easter

Easter Sunday, April 5

6:30 am in the Memorial Garden

8:30 am* & 10:30 am* in Church with Festival Choir

*Indicates child care available

330 Ravenswood Ave., Menlo Park (650) 326-2083
www.trinitymenlopark.org

Peninsula Easter Services is a resource for ongoing religious services and special events.

To inquire about or to reserve space in Peninsula Easter Services, please

contact Blanca Yoc at 223-6596
 or email byoc@pawekly.com



HOLY WEEK at FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH

600 Homer Avenue, Palo Alto 650-322-4669 www.flcpa.org

Pastors Katherine Marshall and Bernt Hillesland



PALM/PASSION SUNDAY, March 29

8:30 & 10:30 am Procession with Palms, Holy Communion

MAUNDY THURSDAY, April 2

6:00 pm Light Supper and Worship

GOOD FRIDAY, April 3

12:00 noon Service 7:30 pm Procession of the Cross

EASTER VIGIL, April 4

8:00 pm Fire, Word, Renewal of Baptism, Bread, and Wine

EASTER CELEBRATION, April 5

9:00 am Easter Breakfast and Easter Egg Hunt
 10:30 am Festival Holy Communion

Bring your family, invite your friends!

Easter

Saturday, April 4
 5pm* & 6:30pm

Sunday, April 5
 8, 9:30* & 11am*

MENLO PARK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
 950 Santa Cruz Avenue | mppc.org

* Children's Ministry for infants - 5th grade



ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH PALO ALTO

- ❖ 6:15pm Maundy Thursday — April 2
Monastic Supper & Liturgy of the Word followed by Holy Eucharist & Stripping of the Altar
- ❖ Noon to 2:00pm Good Friday — April 3
A service focused on "The Adversaries and Companions of Jesus"
- ❖ 2:00 to 3:00pm Devotional Labyrinth Meditation
- ❖ 7:30 to 8:30pm Tenebrae: The Office of Shadows
- ❖ 5:30am Easter — April 5
Easter Vigil, Eucharist & Baptism
- ❖ 8:00 to 9:30am Festive Breakfast & Family Easter Activities
- ❖ 10:00am Festive Holy Eucharist

600 Colorado Ave, P.A. (650) 326-3800
www.saint-marks.com

Woodside Village Church

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

March 29, Palm Sunday – Worship at 9:30 A.M.

April 2, Maundy Thursday – 6:30 P.M. Passover meal

April 3, Good Friday – 7:00 P.M. in the sanctuary, choir and readers present *Wondrous Love* by Lloyd Larson

April 5, Easter Worship at 9:30 A.M.

Reverend Ama Zenya, Pastor
 Reverend Dorothy Straks, Minister of Music

Woodside Village Church
 3154 Woodside Road, Woodside 650.851.1587 www.wvchurch.org



Atherton to ink deal with architect

By Barbara Wood
Almanac Staff Writer

WRNS Studios, the architectural firm that designed the master plan and energy-efficient library for Sacred Heart Schools in Atherton, has been chosen to design Atherton's new civic center complex.

Atherton's City Council is scheduled to approve an initial contract with WRNS when it

meets Wednesday night, March 18, at 7 p.m., in the town's council chambers at 94 Ashfield Road.

The town plans to pay the firm \$3.2 million for services through the construction of the complex. The contract proposal before the council is for \$379,480 and covers the first two phases of the design only, including changes to the master plan and conceptual design of the complex.

Also on the March 18 agenda:

■ A master plan for Holbrook-Palmer Park.

■ Final adoption of the town's state-required housing element, which says how the town will provide its share of the regional housing need.

■ A contract that will allow the town to begin work on projects identified in the bicycle and pedestrian master plan the council gave final approval to in November. ■

Atherton to bid for financial services contract

By Barbara Wood
Almanac Staff Writer

Atherton's City Council voted March 4 to allow the town to compete for a contract to provide financial and accounting services for the South Bayside Waste Management Authority, which oversees garbage collection and recycling services for Atherton, Menlo Park and other cities.

The vote was 3-1, with Mayor Rick DeGolia absent, and Councilwoman Elizabeth Lewis strongly opposed. Staff members said the job would require hiring a part-time person, but would be

a profit-maker for the town.

"If this is going to be a cost for the town, we're not going to submit a proposal," said City Manager George Rodericks, "but if it's a money generator for the town, then I would suspect it would be kind of a no-brainer ... even if it's \$30,000 or \$40,000."

Ms. Lewis said she believes the additional work would dilute the focus of an already-busy town staff. "We have just so many projects on our plate — why would we want to take on one additional body of work that is not really in our core focus of what we do?" she asked.

Councilman Bill Widmer is

chair of the waste management board. Ms. Lewis said there might be a perception that Mr. Widmer has a conflict of interest by serving as chair of the waste management board while his town competes for a contract.

Mr. Rodericks said there would be no conflict since Mr. Widmer will recuse himself from voting on the contract when it comes before the authority, and attorneys for Atherton and the authority have said there is no conflict, he noted.

Council members Mike Lempres and Cary Wiest voted with Mr. Widmer. ■

Woodside won't join suit against FCC for now

By Barbara Wood
Almanac Staff Writer

Woodside's Town Council has decided, at least for now, to not join a national lawsuit against the Federal Communications Commission. The suit challenges new FCC regulations that govern requests to install telecommunication facilities, such as cellphone towers and antennas.

Council members voted unanimously March 10 to put the matter on hold, but made sure the town's attorney is looking into updating Woodside's rules to match the new regulations.

In other actions, the council:

■ Approved a contract with San Mateo County to provide animal control services via the Peninsula Humane Society for the next five years. Town Manager Kevin Bryant said the extension will give the county time to build its own animal shelter. Once the new facility is completed, there will be more options for providing animal control services, he said.

■ Gave final approval to the housing element of its general plan. The state requires that the housing element be updated every eight years. To meet its assigned "fair share" of new housing for the region, Woodside will use accessory living units, such as guest cottages, and rezoning part of Canada College for new multi-family housing.

■ Reappointed Architectural and Site Review Board members Nick Triantos and Bruce Carlsmith to two-year terms. Board member Thalia Lubin was interviewed and reappointed at an earlier meeting, and the board has one additional vacancy. ■

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Atherton to hold disaster-prep event

It's emergency preparedness made easy — Atherton has planned a "Get Ready Atherton" event for Thursday, March 26, in Holbrook-Palmer Park to give residents "one-stop shopping" for information, supplies and answers to their questions.

The event officially begins at 6 p.m., but the California Highway Patrol will land a helicopter on the park's baseball field at Holbrook-Palmer Park at 5:30 p.m.

Brad Aagaard from the U.S. Geological Survey will discuss the San Andreas fault and explain where Atherton's most vulnerable areas are.

Other guests include the Atherton Disaster and Preparedness Team (ADAPT), disaster prep representatives from each of 16 Atherton neighborhoods, representatives from Atherton town government and staff, the Menlo Park Fire Protection



Photo by Magali Gauthier/The Almanac

Residents attending the "Get Ready Atherton" event on March 26 will each receive a tote bag with emergency preparedness supplies and information, as well as raffle tickets for more supplies, such as this emergency backpack.

District, CalWater, PG&E, Red Cross, CHP, California Earthquake Authority, Peterson Power Systems and USGS.

Emergency supplies will be available for purchase from ACE Hardware, Redwood Trading Post, Big 5, Pharmaca, Earth

Shakes and Wise Company.

Those attending will receive a free "Get Ready Atherton" tote bag with emergency supplies and raffle tickets for more emergency supplies.

Dinner will be available for purchase from a food truck.



Joann and Samuel Meredith, joined in 2014

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CALTRANS

continued from page 8

to do so," the statement says.

But those who study the toxicity of chemicals used as herbicides warn that those Caltrans plans to use have dangers.

Patty Clary, executive director of Californians for Alternatives to Toxics, says the herbicide Milestone has the active ingredient aminopyralid. "This chemical made headlines when — after compost caused stunting and maiming of crops — it was found to persist at toxic levels in compost containing grass or manure from areas where it is applied," Ms. Clary said.

The label "requires 'restricted entry' for 12 hours," she said.

The herbicide EsplAnade 200 SC has the active ingredient of indaziflam, she said. The label says it is "classified as a high potential for reaching surface water via runoff for several months or more after application," Ms. Clary said. "It is toxic to fish and aquatic invertebrates. Is harmful if absorbed through skin or inhaled."

The third herbicide, Matrix SG, has the active ingredient rimsulfuron, Ms. Clary said. "It is a potential groundwater contaminant," she said.

For now, the only defense local residents have against the spraying, is to post "No Spray" signs. Ms. Navarro said properties with "No Spray" signs will not be sprayed, and no spraying will take place in the towns of La Honda or San Gregario.

Ms. Navarro said herbicide spraying takes place only once a year. Residents say it has occurred several times a year in the past. ▣



621 Hillcrest Way, Emerald Hills Offered at \$2,398,000

Custom Villa with Astounding Views

A world of Mediterranean luxury awaits within this 3 bedroom, 2.5 bathroom home of over 3,000 sq. ft. (per county) on a lot of six adjacent parcels totaling 1.36 acres (per county). Opulent amenities include radiant floor heating, dual-pane windows, and ceilings over ten feet. Solid walnut floors, custom tiles, and marble surfaces trim the palatial interior. The dazzling chef's kitchen provides a walk-in pantry, two sinks, a grand island, and opens onto the sprawling family room featuring a fireplace and a banquette. Stainless-steel GE Monogram appliances include a wine cooler, a glass-door refrigerator, and a double-oven range. A private balcony, his and her closets, and a shimmering bathroom with a walk-in shower and a soaking tub finish the master suite. The home also presents formal living and dining rooms, a two-car garage, and staggering bay vistas visible from almost every room. Nearby Interstate 280 and Edgewood Park and Natural Preserve, the home is also close to Roy Cloud School and Woodside High.

For video tour & more photos, please visit:
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Michael Repka
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Woodside's Floyd Carley, honored for D-Day action

Floyd L. Carley, business executive and outdoorsman, died March 7 at the age of 93. He had lived in Woodside since 1958.

He was born in Enid, Oklahoma. His family moved soon after to Long Island, New York.

After graduating from Columbia University in 1943, he joined the U.S. Navy and was accepted to midshipman's school in Chicago. As a lieutenant junior grade, he was a radar officer about the U.S.S. Satterlee, which defended the Army Rangers scaling Point Du Hoc on D-Day. In 2010 he was awarded the Chevalier Legion of Honor medal for his service to France during the war.

After the war, he obtained his MBA from Harvard University. He then relocated to San Francisco, where he met and married Margaret Marion Munson in 1951.

In 1954 Mr. Carley and a partner launched Guardian Packaging Corp., a company specializing in flexible packaging. The company grew to include



Floyd Carley

two factories in the United States, one in Spain, and a part interest in two plants in India. The business was sold to American Can Corp. in 1987.

An avid bird watcher, golfer, tennis player, fly fisherman, skier and backpacker, Mr. Carley was also a nationally ranked amateur runner and qualified for the Boston Marathon twice in his 60s. He shared his interests with his children, convincing all four to run a marathon with him, family members say.

Mr. Carley was a board member of the California State Parks Foundation, Filoli Center, Psoriasis Institute and the Menlo Country Club.

He is survived by his children, Peter Carley, Jeanne Carley, Linda Carley Rosen, and Tom Carley; sister Arlette Leitzell; three grandchildren; and one great-grandchild. His wife, Margaret, preceded him in death in 1963.

Go to tinyurl.com/carley609 to see a 2011 story: "Floyd Carley to be honored for D-Day action."

OBITUARY

Obituaries are based on information provided by the family.

■ 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:

■ A resident of Carlton Avenue reported the theft of jewels and a firearm by someone who broke into the house through a door on the second floor. Estimated loss: \$9,300. March 9.

■ A burglar entered a house on O'Connor Street through an upstairs window and stole four electric bass guitars, two watches and two laptop computers. Estimated loss: \$7,300. March 12.

■ Someone entered a house on Ravenswood Avenue, perhaps using a key hidden outside, and stole a laptop computer. Estimated loss: \$1,000. March 9.

■ A thief entered a house in the 1100 block of Willow Road by means unknown and stole an Apple iPad from the living room couch. Estimated loss: \$399. March 12.

■ A locked bicycle was stolen from a locked storage area at an apartment on Noel Drive. Estimated loss: \$300. March 5.

■ Someone appears to have entered a house on Menalto Avenue through an unlocked sliding glass door at the back of the house. Despite the burglar alarm sounding, the burglar appears to have gone into the master bedroom and attempted to steal jewelry. No estimate of losses. March 12.

■ An unlocked bike was stolen from a secured parking area under an apartment complex on Roble Avenue. No estimate of loss: March 5.

Commercial burglaries:

■ A burglar entered the premises of Chemgenex Pharmaceuticals Inc. on Haven Avenue, but it's not clear if anything was stolen. March 9.

■ Someone stole six laptop computers from Reach Federal Credit Union, located on Haven Avenue in the same building as Chemgenex Pharmaceuticals. Estimated loss: \$4,090. March 9.

■ **Robbery:** Police arrested and booked into jail Alexander Casarez, 19, of Redwood City on robbery charges. Police say a man entered the 7-Eleven

convenience store on Oak Grove Avenue at about 2:40 a. m., threatened the clerk with a baseball bat and took merchandise from the store shelves. But the clerk disarmed the man and detained him inside the store until police arrived. March 12.

Auto burglaries:

■ A vehicle parked on Byers Drive was found with a side window smashed. Someone stole a briefcase with a laptop computer inside. Estimated loss: \$1,800. March 5.

■ Someone smashed the driver's side window of a vehicle parked on Coleman Avenue and stole nine rolls of quarters from a pocket on the driver's door. March 11.

Thefts:

■ A thief stole a bicycle from an open garage on Oak Grove Avenue. Estimated loss: \$2,500. March 9.

■ A camera was stolen from Mike's Camera on Santa Cruz Avenue. Estimated loss: \$800. March 5.

■ Someone stole a locked bicycle and a bicycle lock from an apartment complex parking area on East Creek Drive. Estimated loss: \$740. March 5.

■ A bike was stolen from an apartment complex carport on Mills Street. Estimated loss: \$500. March 5.

■ A thief stole a Bluetooth speaker contained in a package on the front porch of a house in the 200 block of Willow Road. Estimated loss: \$450. March 12.

■ Someone stole a bike from the front porch of a house on Hollyburne Avenue. Estimated loss: \$300. March 9.

■ A thief got away with groceries that had been delivered to the front porch of a house on Bay Road. Estimated loss: \$70. March 5.

■ A man entered the Safeway supermarket at 525 El Camino Real and walked out with alcoholic beverages, including one can of beer. Police arrested the man in the parking lot and recovered the beverages. March 12.

■ A man in a truck stole a bicycle from a bike rack in the 500 block of El Camino Real, but the bike's owner confronted the man and removed the bike from the back of the truck. The man drove off without the bike. March 6.

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HUGH CORNISH

650.566.5353

hcornish@cbnorcal.com

CalBRE# 00912143



TIM KERNS

650.430.4052

tim@timkerns.com

CalBRE# 01800770



Join Us to Celebrate the Opening of Our Model Suites at Kensington Place

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Published every Wednesday at
3525 Alameda De Las Pulgas,
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Newsroom: (650) 223-6525
Newsroom Fax: (650) 223-7525

Advertising: (650) 854-2626
Advertising Fax: (650) 223-7570

Email news and photos with captions to:
Editor@AlmanacNews.com

Email letters to:
letters@AlmanacNews.com

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Viewpoint

IDEAS, THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS ABOUT LOCAL ISSUES

New leadership needed at Filoli

Unanswered questions about controversial decisions affecting some 1,500 volunteers at the historic Filoli estate continue to keep the ground fertile for anger, confusion and pain among those volunteers — both those who remain and the hundreds who unhappily severed ties with the nonprofit earlier this month. And sadly, the leaders of the cherished Woodside institution are in hiding. They seem to not understand that in a situation such as this, silence is not golden. It is destructive.

From the time in mid-February that the Almanac began looking into the turmoil prompted by the introduction of an ill-advised, first-ever volunteer agreement, executive director Cynthia D'Agosta has refused to talk to us. According to numerous volunteers who tried to get explanations about why the agreement was imposed and about some of the poorly written provisions, Ms. D'Agosta and other Filoli leaders were unwilling to answer their questions as well. The agreement contained several provisions that hundreds of volunteers found objectionable; some consulted with their attorneys, who advised them not to sign.

When it became clear that the situation was turning into a very public volunteer revolt, the Filoli governing board met to discuss the matter; afterward, board president Toni Barrack emailed volunteers, informing them that they could opt out of the most objectionable clause, but that the board “fully supports” Ms. D'Agosta. Although some volunteers who had earlier balked at signing the agreement scratched out the clause and signed at that point, many noted in dismay the stony tone of the message, and the lack of a convincing conciliatory message. Also, governing board member Heidi Brown spoke with the Almanac for a Feb. 25 article, but

many questions were left unanswered, and Ms. D'Agosta continued to ignore requests for comment.

Finally, on March 2 — the day after the mass exodus of volunteers who refused to sign the agreement — a public statement was issued. But the statement came from the offices of Kamer Consulting Group, an Oakland-based public relations firm specializing in crisis management. It quoted Ms. D'Agosta, who claimed that “inaccurate or incomplete media reports” portrayed an “exaggerated” level of division within the Filoli community. She stated that Filoli “has experienced no significant loss of volunteers,” and promised to put in place “an outreach campaign to our members and media organizations to clear up any confusion” early media reports allegedly caused.

Despite this commitment to an “outreach campaign,” as of March 16, the Almanac remains stunned by the silence. But we have questions. For example, if there had indeed been inaccurate reporting, what were the inaccuracies? And how can the press be faulted for “incomplete media reports” when the Filoli leaders refuse to talk?

Volunteers have expressed their dismay over the spending of funds on a public relations firm to help Filoli out of a crisis of its own leaders' making, and we share that dismay. We have questions about this as well: How much has been spent on this public relations effort? And more importantly, has the consultant advised leaders to continue their strategy of silence?

We support the call by many volunteers for new leadership at Filoli. Too much damage has been done by the lack of respect for volunteers, and the refusal to communicate with them and the community at large. ▀

EDITORIAL

The opinion of The Almanac

Recalling a moment of panic on the train tracks

By Gordon Lewin

A car is stuck on the train tracks. Inside is a mother with two young children. An express train barrels past a suburban train station. That evening, a father comes home to an empty house.

Menlo Park in 2016? I certainly hope not. Yet, that accident did happen in Highland Park, Illinois, my childhood hometown. I was in middle school at the time. A teacher lectured us on the dangers of train crossings; how express trains can't stop quickly. My mother showed me a picture in our community newspaper of the crumpled station wagon in a ditch.

Frankly, I didn't give much thought to it until three years later, when my driver's education teacher directed me to that same train crossing and then told me to stop the car. He pointed out where the crumpled station wagon had landed and warned me to never drive over train tracks unless I could see that I had room on the other side.

That made an impression. From then on, I was always a bit cautious near train tracks; I had never been stuck on tracks. Until two years ago at Ravenswood Avenue,

It's a familiar story. A line of cars is moving slowly but smoothly toward Alma. Then, a pedestrian begins crossing the street near the library. Cars come to an abrupt halt. Sometimes a car is stuck on the tracks.

This time, it was my car. I couldn't believe. Then, the crossing gates began coming down. I had an adrenaline rush. Do I jump out? I noticed a train slowly leaving the station. I was lucky. I doubted the conductor would play “chicken” with me, but the traffic began to move before I had to find out.

Afterwards, I was upset with myself. How could this happen to me? I have always been so cautious. I remembered the picture my mother showed me of the crumpled station wagon. If this could happen to me, it could happen to anyone. And it did.

What makes the Ravenswood crossing so dangerous is not the geometrics but the surprises. No one expects cars to stop so suddenly. And it happens frequently because there is so much activity in both directions. We all know not to stop on train tracks. It is the surprises that we are not anticipating.

Perhaps electronic signs warning that

“Cars stop suddenly — don't get caught on tracks” would help. Perhaps a stop sign at Alma westbound would serve the same function as metering lights at freeway on-ramps.

Yet, Ravenswood is not the only scene of tragic train accidents. They have happened in Palo Alto and around the country. Perhaps this is a problem that Silicon Valley could help solve.

Google and others are developing “driverless” cars. “Accident avoidance” technology is being added to automobiles today. Perhaps someone could invent “motionless car” detectors that could give timely warning to an approaching train when a car is stuck on the tracks.

Grade separation may come someday to Menlo Park and better technology to the country. In the meantime, I'm slowing before a train crossing until I see room for my car on the other side — even when traffic is moving.

Yet, as I drive down Ravenswood Avenue, that particular train crossing will always be associated with sadness for the young child who lost a mother so needlessly.

Gordon Lewin is a longtime Menlo Park resident, and a former member of the Sequoia Union High School District and Menlo Park City School District governing boards.



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