

The Almanac

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

AUGUST 21, 2020 | VOL. 55 NO. 40



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Lightning-sparked fires spread smoke over the Midpeninsula

As flames torch coastside forests, county declares state of emergency

By Kate Bradshaw, Julia Brown and Sue Dremann

With an estimated 10,000 acres burned and 1,000 San Mateo County residents evacuated as of Wednesday, a series of coastside blazes sparked by recent lightning strikes known as the CZU August Lightning Complex Fires were wreaking havoc and endangering lives.

At an emergency meeting held at noon Wednesday, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to approve a proclamation declaring a state of emergency within the county.

The declaration enables the county to seek reimbursement by the state and federal government and streamlines some emergency responses, according to the proclamation.

It's still too early to know if

any or how many structures have burned, said County Manager Mike Callagy. The fire was too intense and the smoke too thick for firefighters to get any damage estimates, he said, adding that he hoped to have more information available later on Wednesday, after The Almanac went to press. Check almanacnews.com for the latest information.

The fires had burned 10,000 acres and were 0% contained as of the most recent update available from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) at 2:14 p.m. on Aug. 19. The three largest fires were located in southern San Mateo County and were 3,000 acres each as of Wednesday morning, while two smaller fires were burning in Santa Cruz County, just south of the San Mateo County border.

See **FIRES**, page 10



Magali Gauthier

A smoky haze covered the Midpeninsula on Wednesday, the result of several lightning-sparked wildfires burning uncontrolled in San Mateo County.

Fearing 'election theft in progress,' Eshoo shows support for Postal Service

Palo Alto congresswoman plans 'yes' vote on bill that includes \$25B for cash-strapped agency

By Lloyd Lee

Ahead of a House session this Saturday, Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, D-Palo Alto, held a press conference on Tuesday morning in front of the downtown Palo Alto post office to address what she labeled as the Trump administration's attempt to "hijack" democracy by undermining the U.S. Postal Service.

With the general election less than three months away, Eshoo said that it was critical to support a service that's expected to receive an unprecedented number of mail-in ballots due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

"This fall, the Postal Service will have another task that is vital to our democracy: ensuring the timely delivery of millions of absentee ballots for the general

election," she said.

Eshoo will join fellow House representatives on Aug. 22 in Washington, D.C., to vote on the Delivering for America Act, which was introduced by Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney, D-New York, to maintain the standards and level of service the Postal Service had in place prior to the pandemic and halt any further changes. The bill would also provide \$25 billion in much-needed funding for the federal agency. Eshoo said she expects the bill to receive bipartisan support.

Letter carrier Vu Tran, James Free, CEO of the Campbell Veterans Memorial Foundation, and Lisa Ratner, vice president of Palo Alto League of Women Voters also joined Eshoo at the Aug. 18 press conference.

"I depend on the post office for my medication from the Veterans

Administration," Free said.

The Postal Service recently made headlines after Trump-appointed Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, who is a megadonor to the Republican Party and the president's campaign, began to introduce changes to the national Postal Service, including eliminating overtime for employees and removing mail-sorting machines from facilities across the country, which has caused delivery delays in some areas.

These changes have raised concerns that the Trump administration is attempting to cripple the agency ahead of the election as the president makes unfounded claims of voter fraud from mail-in ballots, as seen in a May 28 tweet. In another tweet on July 30, he suggested that the nation delay the election because of the alleged potential for mail-in voter

fraud and also recently told Fox Business that he wants to block funding for the Postal Service so it won't have the resources to process ballots in time for the November election.

"It's an election theft in progress," Eshoo said at the conference, also suggesting that DeJoy is trying to dismantle an agency he was appointed to lead in mid-June.

On Sunday, Eshoo submitted a letter to California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, calling for a criminal investigation of DeJoy to see if the postmaster general violated any state laws that protect constituents' right to vote by mail. Becerra announced on Twitter Tuesday morning that the state is suing Trump for his "attacks on the USPS," making this the 96th lawsuit against the president.

Just as the conference ended,

DeJoy released a statement that said to "avoid even the appearance of any impact on election mail," he will halt any changes to the Postal Service "until after the election is concluded." He pledged that "retail hours at post offices will not change; mail processing equipment and blue collection boxes will remain where they are; no mail processing facilities will be closed; and we reassert that overtime has, and will continue to be, approved as needed."

However, some, including Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Massachusetts, have said that DeJoy's statement does nothing to address the changes that were already made or the ongoing concerns about his possible conflict of interest.

DeJoy is expected to testify before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on Friday, Aug. 21. ▣

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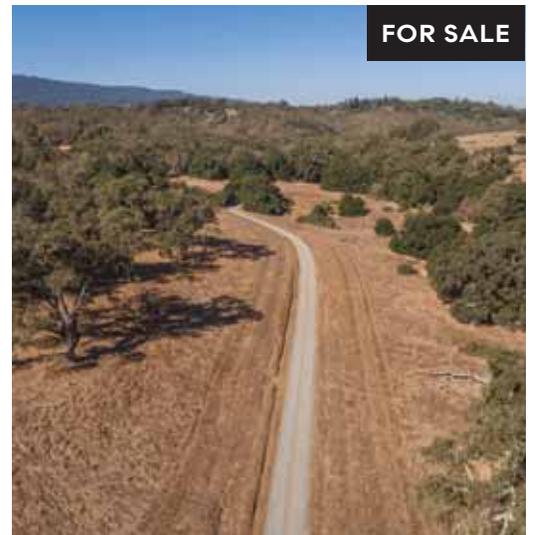
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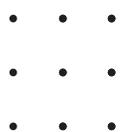
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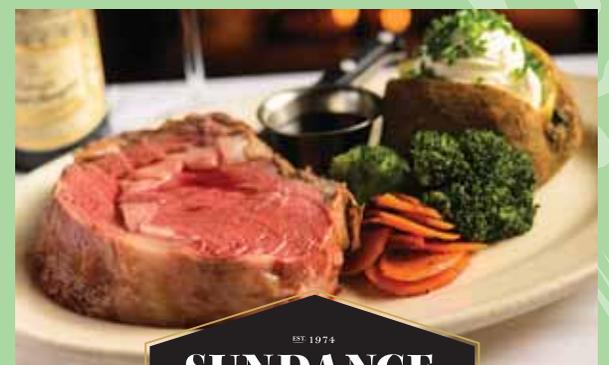
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Magali Gauthier

Connor Spackman, left, and **Danny Salinger-Brown** make final adjustments on a projector they've set up in a Menlo Park backyard on Aug. 16. With seed money from a cousin, the Woodside High School students launched a startup with COVID-19 safety in mind called BackyardFilms.

Woodside High teens create their own summer jobs with BackyardFilms

By **Tyler Callister**
Almanac Staff Writer

Two teens. Thousands of people in quarantine. One good business idea. That was the spark for BackyardFilms, a small business started up this summer by two enterprising teens at Woodside High School.

Their idea? Bring the movie theater to your backyard.

"BackyardFilms specializes in the outdoor movie experience, the perfect social distancing activity during these

uncertain times," the teens wrote in a Nextdoor post to announce their startup.

The teen entrepreneurs, seniors Connor Spackman and Danny Salinger-Brown, said that with movie theaters closed throughout the Peninsula due to the coronavirus pandemic, they decided to bring the movies straight to people's homes. Book them for a night, and they'll set up on your lawn with a 120-inch screen, a high-definition projector, surround sound speakers and a movie of your choice.

Popular picks this summer have been the Tom Hanks movie "Greyhound," Disney's recorded version of the Broadway musical "Hamilton" and the kid flick "Spies in Disguise."

So how's business for the young impresarios? Booming, according to Salinger-Brown. "We've had a gig almost every night this summer," he said. "It's awesome."

Since June, BackyardFilms has set up outdoor movies for

See **FILMS**, page 20

Pilot to curb cut-through traffic in the Willows becomes permanent

By **Kate Bradshaw**
Almanac Staff Writer

A pilot program to restrict cut-through traffic in Menlo Park's Willows neighborhood will become permanent, easing the crippling neighborhood traffic some residents faced.

The Menlo Park City Council voted unanimously Aug. 11 to make permanent a series of temporary turn restrictions on

residential streets in the Willows onto Willow Road near the U.S. 101 entrance during peak traffic hours.

It's been about two and a half years since the city of Menlo Park took action following a wave of petitions and public outcry from the Willows neighborhood. At the time, construction on a new configuration of the Willow Road/U.S. 101 interchange had caused major backups on the already congested

Willow Road, and traffic-avoidance apps like Waze had been directing commuters through the quiet residential streets of the Willows neighborhood. Residents, in turn, had their homes rendered near-inaccessible with traffic congestion for hours each weekday evening.

In response, the city launched a pilot project in December 2017, installing signs indicating no

See **TRAFFIC**, page 7

Coronavirus updates: San Mateo County's case total climbs past 7,300

By **Embarcadero Media staff**

More counties join state watchlist

San Mateo County reported 73 new cases of COVID-19 on Tuesday, bringing the county's total to 7,321. The death toll has stood at 127 since Monday. Fifty-seven people are hospitalized as of Tuesday.

Santa Clara County reported 221 new cases of the coronavirus on Wednesday, bringing the total to 15,085. Three more people have died, raising the death toll to 216. There are 166 people hospitalized, 18 of which are new. Data from both counties are incomplete due to a problem with the state's reporting system for communicable diseases.

Though the statewide numbers on COVID-19 hospitalizations and positivity rates have decreased, five more counties landed on the state's monitoring list over the past few weeks.

Since July 25, Amador, Mendocino, Inyo, Calaveras and Sierra counties have been added to the list, which tracks transmission rates and hospitalizations within each county. As of Monday, 42 of California's 58 counties, including San Mateo and Santa Clara, were on the watchlist.

Santa Cruz County was removed from the list last Friday.

The overall rate of people testing positive for COVID-19 throughout the state, however, is decreasing. Now accounting for the backlog of positive cases, which initially caused the state to underreport COVID-19's impact, Newsom said the positivity rate between July 26 and Aug. 2 still decreased from 7.6% to 7.2%.

In the past two weeks, the average positivity rate was 6.5%.

COVID-19 hospitalizations decreased 21%, from 6,302 hospitalizations recorded on Aug. 3 to 4,975 hospitalizations on Sunday. Intensive-care unit admissions also decreased by 16%.

Comprehensive COVID-19 coverage

View interactive charts tracking the spread of the coronavirus in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties online at paloaltoonline.atavist.com/tracking-the-coronavirus. Find a comprehensive collection of coverage on the Midpeninsula's response to the new coronavirus by The Almanac and its sister publications, Palo Alto Online, and the Mountain View Voice, at tinyurl.com/c19-Almanac. ■

CalMatters and Bay City News Service contributed to this report.

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July 1 - July 31, 2020

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ACTIVE LISTING July: 78 (↑3%), June: 76

PENDING LISTING July: 43 (↑43%), June: 30

SOLD LISTING July: 30 (↓14%), June: 35

AVERAGE SALES PRICE July: \$2,901,077 (↓5%), June: \$3,069,338

AVERAGE SALES PRICE/SQ FT July: \$1,421 (↑10%), June: \$1,294

AVERAGE SOLD DAYS ON MARKET July: 10 (↑43%), June: 7

MONTHS OF INVENTORY July: 3.10 (↑63%), June: 1.90

SALE/LIST PRICE July: 101.90% (↑2%), June: 99.70%

30 YEAR MORTGAGE RATE July: 3.30% (↓4%), June: 3.42%

*Source: MLS Listings for Single Family Properties (Townhomes) | Clarion

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CRIME BRIEFS

Bicyclist struck, killed

A 61-year-old bicyclist was struck by a car and killed early last Friday morning on University Avenue in East Palo Alto, police Cmdr. Jeff Liu said Tuesday.

The bicyclist, Eric Clemons of Menlo Park, was struck by a car traveling west on University Avenue and Adams Drive at around 4:30 a.m. Aug. 14. Responding paramedics rendered aid but Clemons died at the scene, Liu said.

The driver, a 31-year-old man, stayed at the scene and cooperated with the initial investigation. The cause of the collision and specific details are still under investigation, Liu said.

Adams Drive is the entrance to the Menlo Business Park, an office complex that is near the well-traveled area of University Avenue, Bayfront Expressway and the Dumbarton Bridge.

— Sue Dremann

Fraud ring linked to jail inmates

More than 20 people, including multiple state and local inmates, are accused of netting more than \$150,000 in fraudulent coronavirus pandemic unemployment insurance, according to the San Mateo County District Attorney's Office.

A total of 13 current inmates at the Maguire Correctional Facility in Redwood City and the state prison system and eight people who were out of custody at the time are accused of the fraud scheme, according to Assistant District Attorney Sean Gallagher.

The case's defendants are accused of filing 16 fraudulent unemployment insurance claims with the California Economic Development Department, Gallagher said, resulting in a payout of more than \$150,000, a number that could increase as the investigation continues.

The district attorney's office and the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office have been investigating the alleged fraud "for well over a month," Gallagher said.

In addition to the 16 alleged fraudulent unemployment claims, the group also faces two counts of unlawful contact with a state prisoner.

The defendants accused of filing pandemic unemployment insurance claims were not eligible for pandemic insurance because they did not meet the requirement of being employed prior to the pandemic. All but one of the defendants allegedly named in the fraudulent claims were incarcerated before the pandemic began.

One of the defendants, who Gallagher did not name, is also alleged to have gone to Las Vegas and spent a significant amount of money. Other defendants could have been involved as well, he said.

All 21 defendants appeared in San Mateo County Superior Court Aug. 17 and are expected to be arraigned after all of them have retained a defense attorney or a public defender.

The list of defendants named in the fraud charges was: Jasonna Auzenne, 26; Emon Brown, Jr., 32; Marcel Chapman, 31; Tony Covington, 21; Taisia Fauolo III, 24; Jose Luis Garcia Barron, 34; Jason Jones, 33; Mike Kamko, 30; Zachary Edward Lewis, 30; Luis Mariscal, 35; Lionel McCoy, Jr., 27; Rommel Narvaez, 26; Ronnell Favor Narvaez, 23; Khejon Nelson, 22; Quincy Norton, Sr., 46; Freeman Owens III, 35; Miani Pon, 19; Shamesha Reese, 35; Reginald Sinegal, 36; Joseph Smith III, 31; and Edgar Vasquez, 19.

— Bay City News Service

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Woodside council election is uncontested

None of the candidates for Woodside Town Council appear to be facing challengers this fall. Barring any write-in candidates, the town will hold an uncontested election Nov. 3, for the four seats up this year. All candidates seeking to represent Districts, 1, 3, 5 and 7 are unopposed.

Incumbents Chris Shaw (District 3) and Mayor Ned Fluet (District 7) are both running for reelection. After Daniel Yost (District 1) and Tom Livermore (District 5) declined to run again, the town extended the filing deadline for their districts. At the Aug. 12 deadline, one candidate had filed to run for each seat: attorney Jenn Wall for District 1, and management consultant John Carvell for District 5.

Wall serves on the town Planning Commission and previously was a member of the Circulation Committee. Carvell is the vice chair of the Architectural and Site Review Board.

Las Lomas, Woodside school districts join schools starting online this fall

By Tyler Callister
Almanac Staff Writer

Another two local school districts will be opening with fully online programs when school starts. Las Lomas Elementary and Woodside school districts have both announced that their students will learn online from home for the first quarter of the fall semester.

Las Lomas made its announcement Aug. 5 at a school board meeting, saying that its students will learn virtually until at least Oct. 23, pending San Mateo County's removal from the state's coronavirus watchlist. San Mateo County must be off the list for 14 days before schools are allowed to open for in-person instruction.

The watchlist is a state-imposed list — announced by Gov. Gavin Newsom July 17 — that tracks counties based on benchmarks for reopening, including positive COVID-19 case rates, hospitalizations and capacity.

Las Lomas district officials said kindergarten through sixth grade students could potentially return to campus — if the district were to successfully apply for the California Department of Public Health's waiver program, which would allow students to attend school on-campus, but has a panoply of requirements and a lengthy application. Meanwhile, Las Lomas sixth through eighth graders will learn at home for the duration of the first quarter as there are no waivers possible for those grade levels.

For the Woodside School District, a statement said that all students will start virtual learning on Monday, Aug. 24, and continue



Magali Gauthier

The hallways at Woodside Elementary School will stay empty when school starts Aug. 24. It's one of the latest local districts to announce plans for distance learning this fall.

for nine weeks.

Las Lomas and Woodside join an array of local school districts — including Menlo Park City, Ravenswood City, Redwood City, and Sequoia Union High School districts — scrambling to keep up with shifting health orders, upset teachers and critical parents in the COVID-19 era.

While San Mateo County had evaded the state watchlist for some weeks, it landed on the list July 31, drawing criticism from the county's top health officer Dr. Scott Morrow, who blasted the county's placement on it. According to state health orders, even if schools manage to open their doors in the coming months, they will need to run students and teachers through regular health and temperature checks, enforce the wearing of face masks for grades three and up (and recommended for K-2), 6 feet of social distancing between students and teachers and between the students themselves.

In the event that school

campuses do open up before a long-awaited coronavirus vaccine or treatment arrives, schools may meet resistance from teachers unions. A poll conducted by the Sequoia District Teachers Association between June 23 and 26 found that approximately 46% of teachers said "no" when asked whether they would be comfortable returning to campus. And a July 25 letter sent from the Portola Valley Teachers Association to the district's school board suggested the union was unlikely to budge in its view that teachers should stay home — even before San Mateo County landed on the state's watchlist.

The strongest voices from parents, meanwhile, have implored districts to reopen campuses for in-person instruction in the fall, including over 900 public comments submitted at a June 10 Sequoia district school board meeting. ■

Email Tyler Callister at tcallister@almanacnews.com

TRAFFIC

continued from page 5

right turns from Chester, Durham and O'Keefe streets onto Willow Road between 3 and 7 p.m. on weekdays and prohibiting left turns from Woodland Avenue onto Baywood Avenue during the same times.

On Aug. 11, a majority of neighborhood residents who spoke in public comments favored maintaining the turn restrictions, saying they had made a huge difference in cutting down the number of vehicles that cut through the neighborhood. Others said that it took them much longer to access U.S. 101 and increased traffic on Gilbert Avenue as a result of the change.

A survey the city conducted



Magali Gauthier

At its worst, in late 2017, cut-through traffic in the Willows neighborhood kept residents from leaving their driveways during peak hours.

to gauge public opinion of the turn restrictions found that 80% favored the restrictions and 73% wanted them to

remain permanently. ■

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman



Market Value

Dear Monica: I want to sell my house but to make the economics work I need to get a certain amount, which may be a bit high for the current market. Any advice? Leon G.

Dear Leon: It is common to hear sellers and buyers say that in order to sell or buy a property they need a certain amount. This makes sense for them and goes to their motivation and their ability to purchase or sell.

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County launches expanded Wi-Fi program in high-need school districts

By **Kate Bradshaw**
Almanac Staff Writer

For local students who struggle to have reliable Internet and Wi-Fi at home, help may be on the way. San Mateo County announced Aug. 12 that it would be working with school districts throughout the county to get Wi-Fi access to students who need it.

The county's Board of Supervisors voted Aug. 4 to dedicate \$2.9 million toward the project using federal coronavirus relief funds.

"This pilot offers an exciting opportunity to support academic success for more San Mateo

County students. We look forward to working in partnership with the county to increase equitable access to digital connectivity," said San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools Nancy Magee in a statement.

The county will subsidize Comcast's "Internet Essentials" program for 14 months for qualified students in the Ravenswood City School District and La Honda-Pescadero Unified School District. It will also provide students portable mobile hotspots through the end of the school year through T-Mobile's "Empowered Education" program.

The pilot program will offer 650

students both the Comcast and T-Mobile services. The county is also working with other internet service providers to boost coverage in rural areas if there are gaps in coverage for those services' internet and Wi-Fi.

Starting in the fall, the county is also planning to expand its public Wi-Fi network in densely populated areas where Redwood City students and their families may lack internet connectivity to serve students in the Redwood City and Sequoia Union High school districts. To do so, the county intends to use wireless "remote deployment units" or mobile wireless hotspots on wheels that

can be parked anywhere.

These initiatives build on the county's existing efforts to expand internet access, which have generated more than 100 free public Wi-Fi facilities at parks, community centers and public spaces.

Kaizen Technology Partners is managing the pilot project and helping county officials figure out which internet access programs to offer where. A number of other public and private stakeholders joined forces to support the project as part of a "Digital Inclusion" coalition, including property owners Eden Housing, Sand Hill Property Company and Woodland Park Communities, and Kaizen

Technology Partners, Strategy of Things, SmartWave Technologies, Aruba, Comcast and T-Mobile.

"As a Vietnamese immigrant who values continuous education, closing the digital divide gap is just the start to breaking the economic divide that exists in this country," said Kaizen Technology Partners CEO Dao Jensen in the press statement.

Through the end of the year, Comcast is also offering its Xfinity Wi-Fi hotspot network in outdoor and public locations to anyone for free. ▀

Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com

New restrooms being installed at Windy Hill as officials grapple with parking

By **Julia Brown**
Almanac Assistant Editor

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District is expected to begin building new restrooms at Windy Hill Open Space Preserve in Portola Valley next week, according to town officials.

Construction will last about four weeks. The parking area and trail access will remain open during the work, but the parking lot will close for a single day. Portable bathrooms are

available for public use.

Town officials also recognized that community members have expressed concern about parking issues around Windy Hill, an issue that has become "more acute" this year, according to a town email. Members of the town's Bicycle, Pedestrian and Traffic Safety (BPTS) Committee regularly patrol Portola, Willowbrook and Alpine roads and leave flyers on cars that have parked illegally or in the shoulder, according to an Aug. 5 email from Town Manager Jeremy Dennis

and committee chair Ed Holland. But cars parked on the shoulder cannot be cited unless signs are posted saying it's illegal to park there.

"The town has limited parking space on Alpine Road at Willowbrook, while on Willowbrook the curb on the southeastern end is painted red," the email states. "Otherwise, as a public street, parking is allowed on Willowbrook on both sides of the road."

There are approximately 45 to 50 parking spots in the Windy

Hill lot, according to Dennis. The town believes the shelter-in-place orders and limits on travel due to COVID-19 have led to increased visitation at the preserve.

"There are two distinct parking issues: One is related to Portola Road near the main entrance to Windy Hill, the second is primarily on Willowbrook and portions of upper Alpine Road at that entrance point to Windy Hill," Dennis said. "So the set of potential solutions and conversations for each of those areas looks a little different."

Dennis added that the town has been in touch with the open space district to discuss potential solutions to the parking issues, and that the BPTS Committee will reach out to more residents to hear their thoughts.

The BPTS Committee is expected to begin discussions on this topic in the fall and asks that anyone with suggestions contact the committee at traffic@portolavalley.net. ▀

Email Julia Brown at jbrown@almanacnews.com

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

continued from page 6

Look for profiles of the candidates and ongoing coverage of other Midpeninsula races in upcoming issues of The Almanac.

Folger stable virtual tour

The Folger Estate stable in Woodside is more than an unusually beautiful building for boarding horses. As the centerpiece of a historic district at Wunderlich

Park, the stable is also symbolic in many ways of some of the people and businesses that shaped Woodside into the community it is today. The San Mateo County Historical Association is offering a glimpse

at that local history with an online tour of the Folger Estate Stable Historic District at 10 a.m. on Saturday, Aug. 22.

The heir to the Folgers Coffee Company built the estate and stable around the turn of the 20th century. In exploring the history of the main stable, carriage house, the blacksmith barn, dairy house and the stone walls built by Chinese laborers, the tour delves into the property's agricultural uses, the growth of the Folgers Coffee Company and how the use of horses for transport helped shape the area. The tour also discusses the architectural legacy of the overall Folger Estate.

The century-old stable was restored about a decade ago and still offers boarding for horses.

The stable tour is part of the historical association's virtual Victorian Days Walking Tour series covering various towns and neighborhoods in San Mateo County.

For more information and to access the tour, visit historysmc.org.

—Heather Zimmerman

information, Atherton Police said in a statement Aug. 13.

Such field data operations were temporarily stopped due to COVID-19 stay-at-home orders, but the Census Bureau will now will be making contact with residents in efforts to complete their 2020 census questionnaires. The operations will run from now until Sept. 30.

Police said that Census Bureau field staff can be identified by their Census photo identification.

Census field staff will operate between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. and will have "an official bag and Census Bureau-issued electronic device, such as a laptop or smartphone, bearing the Census Bureau logo," according to the Census Bureau.

"If you become suspicious of someone claiming to be a Census Field Staff member, please call the Atherton Police Department so we can help to determine whether the person is a legitimate census employee," Atherton police said.

—Tyler Callister



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 HOME AND HEART

FIRES

continued from page 1

Go to fire.ca.gov/incidents for the latest updates.

Fire officials ordered evacuations in parts of Santa Cruz and San Mateo counties. Mandatory evacuations in San Mateo County as of Wednesday included the South Skyline Boulevard area near state Highway 9; Russian Ridge Open Space Reserve Area; Middleton Tract Area; Portola Redwoods State Park and the Portola Heights community area; Loma Mar and Dearborn Park area; Pescadero Creek County Park area; Butano community area; and the Butano State Park area, including the Barranca Knolls community, according to Cal Fire. While about 1,000 people had been evacuated from San Mateo County, there were between 20,000 and 25,000 people who had been evacuated over the county border in Santa Cruz

County, Callagy said.

The town of Los Altos Hills issued a message to residents on Wednesday that a fire in the Santa Cruz Mountains was burning in a southeast direction into Boulder Creek and toward Ben Lomond. The fire was located at the Highway 9 and Bear Creek Road intersection in Santa Cruz County, about 3.5 miles from the Santa Clara County border. An increase in winds could push the fire toward the community of Ben Lomond, Scotts Valley and the Santa Clara County line, the town noted.

The Santa Clara County Fire Department coordinates with Cal Fire, the county EOC, local law enforcement and fire partners, and the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services. The county fire department on Wednesday was preparing to issue evacuation orders through the EOC if the fire crossed into Santa Clara County. The complex fires were

threatening 6,000 structures as of Wednesday. The blazes also threaten about \$1.5 billion in timber assets, according to San Mateo County documents.

No civilians had been injured as of Aug. 19, but three first responders suffered injuries, according to Cal Fire.

Because of the number of other fires happening in California, the force fighting the CZU August Lightning Complex Fires is primarily local, with firefighters on 48-hour shifts, Callagy said.

Supervisor Don Horsley, whose district includes the areas threatened by fire, talked about some of the emergency response efforts. Cal Fire helped to shut down local parks under threat and evacuate visitors. The county has also helped to evacuate hundreds of animals that live on threatened land.

Pescadero High School is being used as an evacuation center. But with the COVID-19 pandemic, the county is working to provide shelter to some displaced households in coastside hotels. About 100 people had so far been provided these accommodations, according to Callagy.

A number of roads were closed in San Mateo County: Pescadero Creek Road between Alpine and Cloverdale roads, Cloverdale Road between Pescadero Creek Road and Gazos Creek, Alpine Road between Pescadero Creek Road and Skyline Boulevard, Whitehouse Canyon Road at Highway 1, and Portola Heights Road at Skyline Boulevard.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District has issued Spare the Air alerts through Sunday, Aug. 23, because of smoke from wildfires throughout the region that has created unhealthy air pollution. The Peninsula, Santa Clara Valley and Livermore Valley are expected to see the heaviest impacts from the smoke pollution, but impacts are possible throughout the Bay Area, according to the air district.

The air district is

recommending that Bay Area residents stay inside if possible with windows and doors closed until smoke levels subside. Also, burning wood and other solid fuel is banned while the order is in effect, according to the air district.

Go to is.gd/airqualityupdate to get the latest air quality measurements by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

As of the county supervisors' meeting at noon on Aug. 19, county officials were still in the process of setting up a hotline to provide up-to-date, bilingual information for the public. They planned to expand the information provided on the county's crisis hotline at 211.

Low relative humidities and high temperatures, combined with limited resources, have fueled the fires, which started last weekend after an unusual and intense lightning storm hit the region.

Woodside, Portola Valley go on alert

Despite the thick smoke, the wind patterns Wednesday indicated that the fire wasn't heading toward Portola Valley and Woodside.

Woodside Fire Protection District Chief Rob Lindner said Wednesday afternoon that, based on wind direction forecasts and current activity, he wasn't anticipating a need for evacuations within the fire district.

"We're not anticipating any need for evacuations based on short-term and long-term weather forecasts, but if that changes we need to make sure everyone is prepared," Lindner said.

Lindner grew up in San Mateo County and believes the complex fires are the largest fires on record here. He said the district for years has held wildfire seminars and conveyed to residents that "it's going to happen and you need to be prepared."

"Given that it's so close to us, it's time to be prepared," Lindner said. "It's time to think it can

happen at any moment."

Woodside Town Manager Kevin Bryant told The Almanac in an email Wednesday that the town has activated its ham radio and Red Cross radio at Town Hall to keep other lines of communication open, and that the town is "strongly encouraging all residents to make sure they are enrolled in SMC Alert to receive the most up to date emergency information."

Bryant said that the town is coordinating with the fire district and San Mateo County Sheriff's Office about any possible future evacuations.

Portola Valley Mayor Jeff Aalfs said Wednesday that "people are definitely nervous."

"I don't think anyone is panicking, but they're clearly worried," he said. "People in town got some notices telling them nearby areas were evacuated so that was disconcerting."

The best resources for up-to-date information, Aalfs said, include Cal Fire's Twitter account, at twitter.com/CALFIRECZU, SMC alerts and town communications. Aalfs also touted Zonehaven, an online tool that allows people to see if their zone is being evacuated and which exit routes they can safely use. The platform was going to be used more broadly starting next month, but it's functional now. Visit smco.community.zonehaven.com to use the site.

With fire season well underway, Aalfs said the neighboring blazes serve as a reminder that residents should keep go bags ready in case a fire ever does lead to evacuations.

"Hopefully this is a wake-up call and not anything more than that, but it's time to take fire season seriously," he said. ▣

Almanac Assistant Editor Heather Zimmerman contributed to this report. Email Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com, Julia Brown at jbrown@almanacnews.com and Sue Dremann at sdremann@paweekly.com

Smoke from wildfires outside of Santa Clara County blankets Palo Alto, as seen from Page Mill Road and Foothill Expressway, on Aug. 19.

Charmian Kolar Hilleary

1924 - 2020

Charmian died peacefully on August 9th at The Sequoias Portola Valley, where she lived since 1997. She was 96 years old. She was born and spent her childhood in Portland, Oregon, the older daughter of Edward and Delight Kolar. Looking back on her life, she often acknowledged that she had a wonderful life. Always a bright person, as a child she read and retained the entire 20 volume Book of Knowledge Encyclopedia. One of the highlights of her youth was traveling throughout Europe for six months with her grandparents in 1937. Some of Charmian's fondest memories were of Camp Fire and childhood summers spent at Camp Namanu on the Sandy River in Oregon.



Dear to her heart was Stanford University where she was Student Body Vice President and an active member of Cap and Gown. Stanford is also where she met her cherished husband Lang (deceased 2016) with whom she had a loving marriage of nearly 70 years. They had four children whom they raised in Menlo Park and Atherton and where Charmian was an active volunteer and participant in community life, as well as a long time member of Menlo Country Club.

Charmian and Lang traveled widely and often, visiting all seven continents. They particularly enjoyed their decades long tradition of spending February in Hawaii.

Charmian had numerous dear and loyal friends of many years. Two diverse and enduring memories of Charmian are her tremendous interest in politics and current events and the joy she took walking her beloved Golden Retrievers.

Charmian is survived by her four children: Anne (Larry) Gordon, Tom (Deb) Hilleary, David (Debbie) Hilleary and Robert Hilleary, six grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Family and friends will deeply miss this intelligent, elegant, gracious, wise woman who had a warm smile for all.

She will forever live in our loving memories.

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Online

Seven candidates vying for two seats on the Ravenswood school board

By Elena Kadvany

Seven candidates have pulled papers, to date, in the Ravenswood City School District Board of Education race, including one incumbent and six newcomers.

The terms of trustees Sharifa Wilson and Marielena Gaona Mendoza are ending in November. Wilson confirmed she is not running for reelection after 12 years on the board, while Gaona Mendoza plans to run for a second term.

Wilson said “it’s time for some new blood” on the school board and that she hopes to see more young people run for local office in East Palo Alto.

“It’s time for the younger people to step up and serve in public office in this community. East Palo Alto (has) had a long tradition of community engagement and community involvement,” Wilson said. “I want to make sure that that continues to happen.”

Bronwyn Alexander

Bronwyn Alexander left her longtime job at Belle Haven Elementary School in Menlo Park last year so she could run for a school board seat in this election.

Alexander, a teacher since 1992, has worked in Ravenswood since the early 2000s, first as a teacher, then an instructional coach in science, math and reading. The administrative role provided her with a taste of having influence over more than just one classroom of students each year, and her concerns about how the district was operating at the time motivated her to make a bid for school board, she said in an interview. In 2018, she was among the teachers, parents and community members who rallied against renewing the contract of former Superintendent Gloria Hernandez-Goff.

“I didn’t like the way it seemed that students and teachers seemed to be the last thing on the school board’s mind, not the first. I decided I wanted to have more influence,” Alexander said.

Alexander now works as a language and literacy specialist in the San Mateo-Foster City School District.

She’s running on a slate with Joel Rivera, a construction labor manager and husband of a Ravenswood teacher. The Ravenswood teachers union has endorsed both of them.

Alexander said the K-8 district, now under a new superintendent, has made progress in improving communication and transparency. But she wants to see improvement in other areas,

including teacher retention, equity and environmental sustainability.

If elected, she said she’d prioritize increasing teacher pay to reduce turnover. At Belle Haven, she said she once heard a student tell a new teacher, “Why do I have to remember your name? You won’t be here next year anyway.”

“Teachers in Ravenswood do a serious amount of work outside their contract hours, and we’re one of the lowest compensated districts in the area still,” she said. Increasing stability among teachers also helps build relationships and connections with students and families, she said.

One of Ravenswood’s most pressing issues is years of sharply declining enrollment and a corresponding decline in state funding. Alexander said she would push for bringing more students into Ravenswood by communicating about the improvements the district has made in recent years, like makerspaces at all of the schools and a dual-immersion program.

“Too many Ravenswood students are attending the Tinsley program, which I am adamantly against, and too many of our students are choosing to go to charter schools or to private schools in the area,” she said. “We need every single Ravenswood student to start attending Ravenswood schools again.”

Whoever is elected to the board in November will be doing so at a time of great uncertainty for schools in the age of COVID-19, with local districts starting the school year completely online and no sure timeline for when they will be able to reopen.

Alexander said the board must stay on top of maintaining connections between students, families and teachers as well as addressing inequities in students’ home environments, from technology to simply having a quiet space to learn.

“I think the most important thing is to make sure that the kids continue to learn, that we don’t end up with a year and half of summer slide because our students especially can’t afford that,” she said. “It has to be coming from the top down how to make sure that our students continue to learn.”

Jenny Varghese Bloom

Jenny Varghese Bloom, a college admissions counselor at Insight Education, said she wanted to run for school board because she offers “another experienced and dynamic voice.” It’s also a personal choice: Her daughter is a Ravenswood kindergartener and her son attends the district’s preschool.

“East Palo Alto is our community and our children have always been in care and education here. I believe that my perspective and ability to connect with others will complement the existing board,” she wrote in an email.

Varghese Bloom, who grew up in Texas, has worked as a college student mentor, community college assistant instructor, legal assistant and college counselor. She holds a bachelor’s degree in human development family sciences with a focus on child development from the University of Texas at Austin and a master’s degree in early childhood education from Loyola Marymount University.

At Insight Education, she helps high schoolers and their parents navigate the college admissions process.

“I bring to the table my experience across an expanse of fields within education which can inform and help discern best practices moving forward,” she said.

Varghese Bloom said her priorities include focusing on better preparing Ravenswood students for high school — an area she knows well through her work as a college counselor — and listening to input from parents, students and teachers.

The greatest challenge facing the K-8 district, from her perspective, is financial.

“I know that it has been a building season for the board with reassessing budgets and making sure that resources are allocated well to fund schools and teachers. I think that is something that will continue to be a challenge in Ravenswood,” she said.

With two schools closing in the fall and students at the merged campuses starting the new year remotely, building “a sense of community and support” among families will also be crucial to focus on this year, she added. She wants the district to continue hosting virtual town halls at least once a month to keep parents informed and connected.

Zeb Feldman

Zeb Feldman said he wants to bring his expertise as a labor contract negotiator to the Ravenswood City School District. He currently represents managers, administrators and supervisors who belong to the Santa Clara County Employees Management Association Operating Engineers Local 3.

He said he was approached by friends, mentors and “local politicians” to run for a seat on the school board.

“Professionally and personally I’m accustomed to stitching together diverse coalitions and finding a common cause. There’s been some acrimony and controversy in Ravenswood recently. I’m really looking to bring some professionalism, budget research and expertise and contact negotiations understanding” to the board, he said in an interview.

Feldman, who has lived in East Palo Alto for 11 years, attended public schools in Menlo Park and graduated from Menlo-Atherton High School. Looking back, he said he’s struck by the funding disparities between a Basic Aid district like Menlo Park and Ravenswood, which relies heavily on state funding rather than local property taxes. He said he wants to look into obtaining a “Basic Aid equivalent designation” for Ravenswood and offered that as an example of why he thinks people asked him to run for office: “They’ve seen me bring a fresh view and creative solutions to previously intractable problems.”

One of the biggest challenges facing Ravenswood, he said, is hiring and retaining quality employees, including both teachers and staff such as janitors, guidance counselors and bus drivers.

“I think we can only do that by being more competitive in terms of our pay compensation and of course that means we have to have the economics to back that up,” he said, suggesting that the district tap local “patrons” such as Facebook, Google and Stanford University to help bridge funding gaps. He also sees opportunities to partner with more affluent neighboring districts for “mutual” fundraising.

“I’m really looking for innovative

ways to keep our property taxes more localized and to partner with fundraisers,” he said.

Feldman described himself as an expert in public proceedings — well-versed in California’s open-meeting law, the Brown Act, and Robert’s Rules of Order, a set of parliamentary rules for meeting conduct — as well as in reading budgets, negotiating contracts and navigating management-labor relations.

“I think that is a needed perspective,” he said. “I’m really just hoping to bring technical expertise on those items to the table and then understand the needs and desires of the community and the students as well as staff.”

Marielena Gaona Mendoza

Marielena Gaona Mendoza, first elected in 2016, said the district has improved under new leadership “but we are not there yet.”

“I want to continue to advocate for a better education for our students so parents are not forced to take their children to other school districts, charters, or private schools in order to have access to excellent education and a safe learning environment,” she said.

Gaona Mendoza works as a special education teacher in the Redwood City School District. She has served during a tumultuous time in Ravenswood, including a budget deficit, the forced resignation of Hernandez-Goff, the departure of other top administrators, the closing of two elementary schools and the eventual, permanent hiring of Superintendent Gina Sudaria.

Gaona Mendoza said she was most proud of increasing

See **RAVENSWOOD**, page 16

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Michael Repka, DRE #01854880 | 650.900.7000 | michael@deleonrealty.com

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Listed by Michael Repka of the DeLeon Team, the #1 Team in Palo Alto.

Data from BrokerMetrics® based on MLS sales from January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2019, in Palo Alto, residential properties, with no off-MLS sales included in the rankings.

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RAVENSWOOD

continued from page 13

accessibility as a board member and a “strong commitment to the values of transparency and fiscal responsibility in government and listening to community concerns which resulted in the departure of (the) previous superintendent.”

Gaona Mendoza cast the sole dissenting vote against renewing Hernandez-Goff’s contract in 2018, and the next year voted to place her on paid leave.

Gaona Mendoza said she also advocated for special education students, including changing the way they were being restrained in classrooms, and worked to address safety issues at Ravenswood’s new comprehensive middle school, including hiring more custodians, yard duties personnel and an extra vice principal to respond to student fights, the pulling of fire alarms and students skipping classes.

Gaona Mendoza’s top campaign priorities include equity and the digital divide, including mandating technology training for teachers and offering technology help to parents to increase students’ success with distance learning.

“Most of our parents hold one or two jobs in order to make (ends) met and have no time or the means to provide support or supervision to their children during at-home learning. Therefore, we need to provide them with technology training and provide a safe and supportive place where students can be supervised and get support with their school assignment. This is a must if we want to narrow the academic achievement (gap),” Gaona Mendoza said.

Gaona Mendoza was the top vote-getter in 2016, winning 36.3% of the vote.

Julian Alberto Garcia

Julian Garcia, a graduate and former employee of the Ravenswood City School District, is making a second bid for a seat on the school board. He ran in 2016 on a slate with parent Nicole Sbragia. His campaign slogan was “leading from the grassroots,” an alternative to the then leadership status quo in Ravenswood.

He did not respond to an interview request for this article.

Mele K. Latu

Growing up in East Palo Alto and Redwood City, Mele K. Latu said she “always knew that I wanted to help people, I just didn’t know how or in what capacity.” Her bid for school board is an extension of that early desire, she said.

Latu attended Clifford School in Redwood City and graduated from Menlo-Atherton High School in 2009. After attending college in Miami, she traveled abroad for a year and then returned to work in East Palo Alto. For four years, she worked for One East Palo Alto on the nonprofit’s behavior health advisory group ambassador team, which advocates for and supports mental health in the community including through a project that worked to provide culturally competent crisis support to middle school students who experience trauma as a result of violent crime in East Palo Alto.

In that role, she worked directly with students at Ronald McNair

Academy, Cesar Chavez Academy and the Ravenswood Middle School.

Latu, who is Pacific Islander, said students often told her “it’s rare that we see someone from East Palo Alto that works here and doesn’t work as a security guard or a janitor.”

“They felt like there was a connection,” she said. “For them to see someone who looks like them, who talks like them, who lives down the street from them to be able to do what I’ve been able to do was inspiring to them.”

Latu now works as a community collaboration manager for the Emerson Collective, the social change organization founded by Laurene Powell Jobs. She works at the organization’s Bloomhouse site in East Palo Alto, which is “part of the long-term vision for Emerson Collective to partner with the local community in creating the future of the East Palo Alto waterfront,” its website reads. (Bloomhouse is physically closed due to the coronavirus shutdown but still providing virtual services.)

If elected, Latu said she would focus on creating “togetherness” in a district that’s gone through leadership transitions, financial upheaval and is threatened by outside forces of gentrification and housing affordability. She pointed to her “network and rapport within the community” as a source for building stronger relationships in the district.

Similarly, she said she’s committed to being an accessible official who prioritizes communication. She said the district should be developing a COVID-19 version of its long-term strategic plan. “What is education going to look like post-COVID and how are we going to be able to maneuver that? It’s not just about planning for this year but the following year and the year after that,” she said.

Latu also advocated for incorporating more East Palo Alto history — including how the city was incorporated and its deep-rooted legacy of activism and community engagement — into Ravenswood curriculum to combat negative stereotypes of the community. This kind of curriculum would “show our young people that East Palo Alto is more than the stigma” often affiliated with the city,” she said.

Joel Rivera

Joel Rivera became a U.S. citizen so he could run for a seat on the Ravenswood school board this fall.

Rivera immigrated to the United States from Mexico as a young child, was raised in San Francisco and moved in 2000 to East Palo Alto, his wife’s hometown. He wanted to run in the 2016



Courtesy Noel Young

Lightning strikes

During a lightning storm in the early hours of Aug. 16, a bolt of lightning struck a redwood tree towering around 80 feet high on the property of Noel Young, a Willows neighborhood resident who lives on Concord Drive. The lightning strike, which hit around 5:15 a.m., was very loud and caused the tree to explode, damaging the roof, patio and patio furniture, Young said.

school board but was a U.S. resident, not yet a citizen, at the time, so he couldn’t run. This year, he became a citizen.

Rivera has worked for 20 years in the construction industry, including as a foreman, assistant superintendent and superintendent. He currently works as a labor manager for Nibbi Brothers General Contractors in San Francisco.

He said he was motivated to run by watching the amount of time and effort his wife, Jesusita Rivera, a fifth-grade teacher at Costaño Elementary School, puts into her job outside of school hours and requirements. He recalled watching her stay up late one night to write grants to fund a field trip, wondering why there weren’t established systems in place to address a funding need that in many districts would be a given.

“It brought me back to my construction background. When we have needs, we go to people who specialize in (them). We won’t bog down folks that are better skilled at certain areas,” he said. “It frustrated me. That’s not fair.”

Rivera’s two children attend the Menlo Park City School District through the Voluntary Transfer Program, or Tinsley program.

“Some of the sad truths of our neighborhoods is that our kids grow up a little too fast, a lot too fast sometimes,” he said of their

decision to not send their children to Ravenswood schools.

Rivera said he wants to fight the very trend his own children are a part of: the increasing number of students who live in East Palo Alto or east Menlo Park but don’t attend district schools there.

If elected, he said he would focus on increasing engagement among working parents so that it’s the “default, not an exception.”

“It’s not the norm in our area for parents to participate on a regular basis. They can’t — long hours, two jobs, multiple people working and a lot of them are intimidated by the language barrier,” Rivera said. “That’s one of my goals — to have it feel regular, comfortable.”

Rivera, as both a parent and the spouse of a teacher, witnessed firsthand the challenges of distance learning when schools closed in the spring. For his children, it was a state of “survival,” he said.

But when it comes to reopening schools, health and safety should come first, he said.

“We’re asking for really negative results if we try to have kids go back before it’s safe to do so, even with the challenges of remote teaching,” he said. ■

Email Elena Kadvanly at ekadvanly@pawebweekly.com

Public Notices

995 Fictitious Name Statement

VANADA ROAD COACHING & CONSULTING
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
File No.: 284679

The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:

Vanada Road Coaching & Consulting, located at 75 El Vanada Road, Redwood City, CA 94062, San Mateo County.

Registered owner(s):

MARY M. SCHMIDT

75 El Vanada Road

Redwood City, CA 94062

This business is conducted by: An Individual.

The registrant commenced to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on July 1, 2020 (N/A).

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on July 14, 2020.

(ALM July 31; Aug. 7, 14, 21, 2020)

THE ALMANAC

ALMANACNEWS.COM

FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT

File No.: 284753

The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:

1.) The Almanac, 2.) Almanacnews.com,

located at 3525 Alameda De Las Pulgas,

Menlo Park, CA 94025, San Mateo County.

Registered owner(s):

EMBARCADERO MEDIA

450 Cambridge Ave.

Palo Alto, CA 94306

California

This business is conducted by: A Corporation.

The registrant commenced to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 02/15/2009.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on July 22, 2020.

(ALM July 31; Aug. 7, 14, 21, 2020)

CITY ARBORIST

FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT

File No.: 284865

The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:

City Arborist, located at 2282 Sharon Road,

Menlo Park, CA 94025; Mailing Address: 325

Sharon Park Dr. #646, Menlo Park, CA 94025,

San Mateo County.

Registered owner(s):

HENRY ARDALAN

2282 Sharon Road

Menlo Park, CA 94025

AZAR DALE

2282 Sharon Road

Menlo Park, CA 94025

This business is conducted by: Married

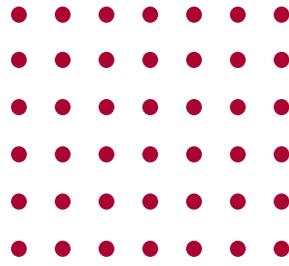
Couple.

The registrant commenced to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above 4/10/1997.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on August 5, 2020.

(ALM Aug. 21, 28; Sep. 4, 11, 2020)

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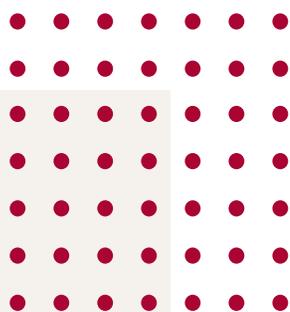
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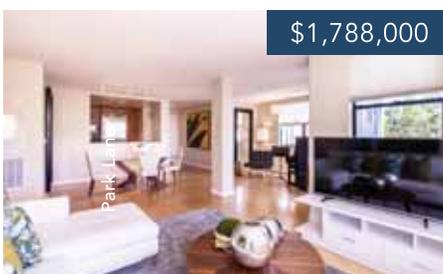
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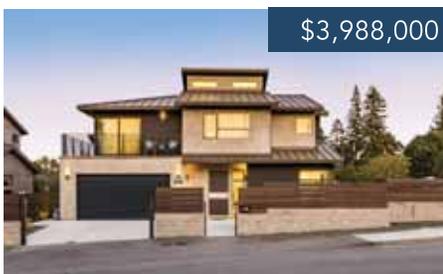
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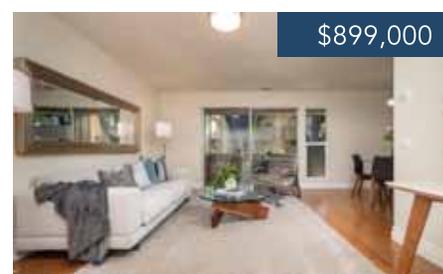
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FILMS

continued from page 5

children's birthday parties, family movie nights and neighbors just wanting to have some fun while stuck at home. The boys serve homes in Menlo Park, Atherton, Woodside, Redwood City, San Carlos, Palo Alto, Los Altos and Portola Valley.

Spackman and Salinger-Brown, who are both 17, created BackyardFilms on a dare. They had just emerged from a long, strange spring semester taking classes online after the coronavirus forced school campuses to close. As summer began, things didn't look much better: Many local businesses were closed and the prospect of a summer job was out.

That's when Spackman's older cousin, a local business-savvy professional, came to the boys with a challenge.

"He said if that we came up with a great business idea, he would put together the money to help us start it," Salinger-Brown said.

Later, the boys were at a friend's house watching a movie from a projector on the wall, and the idea hit them. "We realized that we could bring this to other people's houses," Salinger-Brown said.

Customer response has been

strong, the boys said — including some who even said that getting together with friends for an outdoor film helped their mental health.

Atherton resident Clary Risikas hired BackyardFilms several times this summer, with her family enjoying classics like "Father of the Bride" and "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" on the lawn. She said the outdoor film was a perfect way to get friends and family together while still maintaining social distance.

"I think the boys are wonderful," she said. "I actually had my grandkids over to watch them, hoping they would be inspired."

Another customer, Palo Alto resident Rebecca Stolpa, said she was impressed by the challenge the boys had taken on. "I think it's an excellent way for kids to experience what a small business goes through," she said.

Besides entertaining families, Spackman and Salinger-Brown have made awareness of the coronavirus pandemic key to their business, with a website promising that COVID-19 safety "is our #1 priority." The boys clean and disinfect the movie projection equipment between uses, and they're sure to wear masks and gloves when visiting customers' homes.

Word about the teens' business has spread quickly



Magali Gauthier

A group of teenagers, spread out according to social distance rules in a Menlo Park backyard, watch a "Pirates of the Caribbean" movie set up by BackyardFilms on Aug. 16.

— first, through Nextdoor, then through some old-fashioned flyers dropped off in neighbors' mailboxes, then, most crucially, through word of mouth.

"The main way we got customers was by doing a job, then they spread it to their friends, and they spread it to their friends," Salinger-Brown said.

With BackyardFilms' successful run this summer, they have no intention of stopping. While school started this week, Spackman said that with school sports

postponed and classes fully online, they're taking advantage of the more flexible schedule. "We're not under the same time crunch that we'd normally be under," he said.

Both boys are active at Woodside High School, playing varsity basketball and lacrosse. Salinger-Brown said he is unsure what he wants to do as a career someday, while Spackman said he plans to study engineering in college.

But would they ever want to

become full-time entrepreneurs? "Yeah, possibly," Salinger-Brown said. "This experience has shown me that it's a nice thing to have your own business because you have control over it. It's a lot of independence."

As for Spackman, he said, "I would definitely be open to starting a new business ... As long as I have another good idea." ▣

Email Tyler Callister at tcallister@almanacnews.com

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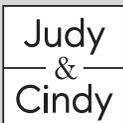
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'We believe we can do better': Kepler's Books CEO calls for more statewide COVID-19 restrictions

By Praveen Madan

GUEST OPINION

Dear Gov. Newsom, Thank you for your leadership during the current pandemic in California.

As we enter the sixth month since California's initial shutdown, we have to face the reality that we are running out of time. I believe this is the moment for moonshot thinking. We need to come together like our lives depend on it — because they do.

So I am writing to urge you to do everything possible to further reduce the spread of coronavirus in our great state, including keeping current restrictions in place for as long as needed and implementing further restrictions. This might sound counterintuitive coming from the owner of a small retail business

in the Bay Area that's been heavily impacted by the crisis. But, in fact, I believe that the current moment calls for putting our community's well-being ahead of our short-term individual interests. I am convinced that we can handle another lockdown, but we won't survive a prolonged crisis that drags on for months or years.

Our staff and many members of our community feel strongly that we need to do more to contain the spread of coronavirus, and that the leadership of this effort needs to come from the state level. The time has passed for counties to get this job done by making their own decisions at the local level. The infection

is too widespread, counties have been struggling to contain it, there is too much mobility, and as a result counties and communities are no longer isolated and siloed. Therefore, we ask that the state of California play a stronger hand and be more direct in mandating what counties and cities should be doing to contain the pandemic.

We believe we can do better than accepting that we have to continue living with the current levels of infection until a vaccine arrives. We can do much better! And we need you to lead from the state level and help all Californians come together to contain this pandemic to a far greater level.

Governor, you are the leader of the fifth largest economy in the world with an annual economic

output greater than France, Canada, or Russia. The Fortune 500 list is studded with companies based in California. Thanks to Silicon Valley, California has become synonymous with innovation and technology. Individuals and companies will rise to the challenge and support you, but you have to do everything it takes to contain this pandemic until it's negligible in scope.

You have the power to close our borders, order curfews, call in the National Guard, borrow large sums of money, build partnerships with companies and other states: There is so much more you can do from the state level. Let's do what needs to be done and put a hard brake to contain this damn virus. We need your resolve, your creative leadership,

and strict enforcement.

We know there will be sacrifices involved — there already have been — but the job isn't done yet. We know what we are asking will cause short-term pain, but it's worth it to forestall more long-term damage. We know your job is no easier because you have the power to make big decisions, but we urge you to make this decision because it's in the best interest for the greatest number, including those who are most vulnerable to the ongoing devastation of a prolonged pandemic.

Praveen Madan is CEO of Kepler's Books in Menlo Park. A more detailed version of this letter includes 10 reasons for demanding urgent containment measures and can be found online at tinyurl.com/keplersguestopinion.

Independent Study Program shows distance learning can work

By Evan O'Reilly

GUEST OPINION

Like many, I read the headlines and heard the grumblings about distance learning last spring. The Wall Street Journal proclaimed "The Results are in for Distance Learning: It Didn't Work." Many students, parents, and educators echoed this sentiment. However, I would like to offer a different perspective: With the right preparation, distance learning can work well for students and teachers.

I am entering my 11th year as a full-time teacher and starting my fifth year in the Independent Study Program in the Sequoia Union High School District. For those who may not know, independent studies takes many forms around the state, but almost always involves serving students

who find attending school daily extremely difficult, if not impossible. Students are provided curriculum (textbooks, handouts, online learning programs, etc.) and are expected to complete much of it independently, with only occasional check-ins with their teacher.

When California declared a shelter in place, every student in California essentially became an independent studies student overnight.

I know firsthand how rewarding and rigorous students can find independent studies. I also know what a steep learning curve it is for educators. Things as seemingly simple as taking attendance or how a student asks a question

in the middle of an assignment require new rules and processes in distance learning. Likewise, things as complex and essential as what we want students to learn and how we teach them require a new understanding.

That said, for many of the Sequoia district's Independent Study Program students, the transition to distance learning was seamless because we had already created the norms, expectations, and curriculum. When I asked students to reflect on their experience with our program in June, none even mentioned the transition to distance learning. Instead, they focused on the freedom and opportunities the program provided. But don't just take my word for it: A graduating senior wrote, "(it) worked really well for me because it was completely

on my time. I had so much more control over what I was learning, when I was learning, and where I was learning." Another graduate said, "Independent studies worked for me because as someone who has anxiety, I often procrastinated and over-thought my school work, but ISP gave me the time that I needed to complete my tasks without stress."

What happened in the spring was a grand experiment: Can teachers and students switch to distance learning at the drop of a hat? Many have already weighed in that the results were not ideal.

So what will be different in the fall? Teachers and students have had time to prepare. On a Facebook page for teachers, I have seen tips on creating Bitmoji classrooms — cartoon-like virtual classrooms that serve as a warm

welcome and resource for students — and the trading of documents regarding student norms and expectations for Zoom. There have also been professional development opportunities run by the San Mateo County Office of Education. SUHSD teachers engaged in distance learning professional development last week.

As I have talked with teachers and participated in professional development over the summer, I have heard new confidence among a growing number of teachers. Yes, the spring was not ideal; however, I think this fall will prove the mettle and professionalism of many educators around California.

Evan O'Reilly is an Independent Study Program teacher in the Sequoia Union High School District.

LETTERS

Our readers write

Peter Carpenter endorsement

I'd like to strongly endorse Peter Carpenter's candidacy for the Menlo Park Fire Protection District board. I know Peter as a fine, upstanding member of the Menlo Park community and as an active

volunteer with Park Forest Plus Prepare. A simple look at his biography makes clear that he has extensive experience with public issues, including years with the fire board. Such citizen experience is exactly what we need for an important public agency. We value Peter's contributions as a neighbor, (and) you will value his addition to the fire board.

*Fred Rose
Forest Lane, Menlo Park*

Question for District 3 candidates

I am concerned about traffic patterns in central Menlo Park. My little street of Hoover Street is a cut-through path during commute hours. Speeding cars make it dangerous for bicyclists and pedestrians. How can we make traffic flow in a safer manner? Would it be possible to make Hoover a one-way street from Oak Grove to Valparaiso Avenue? I

have spoken to the fire Station 6 and they told me it would not hinder their access.

The intersection at Oak Grove Avenue and Laurel Street is also very dangerous. There seems to be great confusion on the usage of the bike lane. The bike lane seems to double as a right-turn lane (even in the solid green part). I have witnessed many near misses when a bicyclist is in the lane and a car turns right or when a car is making a right

turn and another car cuts into the bike lane to also make a right turn. I realize that the traffic laws are confusing, however, this situation is dangerous.

*Sandra Bardas
Hoover Street, Menlo Park*

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Artscene

PEOPLE AND PERFORMANCES IN ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Local choral groups keep harmonies alive while staying safely apart

By Janet Silver Ghent

Like tiny images on a sheet of postage stamps, 130-plus boys in navy shirts join voices in the upbeat “We Are the Day.” To the untrained eye, the boys in Ragazzi, an award-winning Redwood City-based choral group, look and sound as if they’re singing together, as they have done for years. But each boy, ages 6 to 18, is recording alone, singing at home with earbuds or headsets, hearing only himself and his cues. While this particular choral piece, which begins with the words “We are the eyes gleaming with wonder,” expresses hope and joy, it grew out of a devastating pandemic that forced chorales overnight to change the way they operate. A chorus is a group that sings together. COVID-19 made that impossible, giving choir directors a difficult choice: adapt or disband.

“The biggest challenge that we face is having something that we love to do that brings a lot of purpose to our existences (be) dangerous,” said Jennah Delp Somers, co-founder and co-artistic director of iSing Silicon Valley, which brings together 300 girls from first to 12th grade in five different choirs. “We went through a mourning period.” In-person rehearsals: canceled. A choral trip to the UK: canceled. A spring concert before an audience of a thousand at Mission Santa Clara: also canceled. The release of the choir’s debut album, “Here I Stand,” “was a fantastic way to end an otherwise disastrous year,” Delp Somers said.

Because a choral performance or even a rehearsal is a “super-spreading event” for COVID-19, choirs had to change how they operate. Instead of singing Mendelssohn’s entire “Elijah” oratorio before live audiences, the Los Altos-based Schola Cantorum produced “Virtually Elijah,” featuring soloists singing at home, pianists playing at home, and the entire chorus virtually joining voices in the glorious “He, Watching Over Israel.”

When choral rehearsals shut down abruptly in mid-March, choral directors with little or no technical training suddenly Zoomed into electronic media. Within four days of the shutdown, Ragazzi’s conductors took up the challenge of keeping their choirs alive. They created audio

and videotapes to conduct singers they could neither see nor hear, at first relying on parents and volunteers with sound and video skills to transform individual recordings into a choral performance.

“Along the way we produced three virtual choirs,” said executive and artistic director Kent Jue. Among them are a dozen graduating seniors performing “Shenandoah” as their swan song, and a group of 24 singing the rhythmic “Count On Me.”

“None of this was a plan. It sort of just developed,” Jue said. “Once we learned we would have to cancel our season and be remote, we needed a project for the boys to focus on. We came up with these virtual choirs, which, I have to admit I was not a fan of at the beginning because there’s so much work on the back end and so much work on the front end.”

At the front end, the logistics involve creating instructions, collecting recordings and fielding questions. With boys as young as 6, that means parental involvement. Ragazzi estimates that phase takes about 15 hours, not counting individual singing time. For the nearly 140 separate voice recordings that went into “We Are the Day,” audio and video editing, all done in-house, took another 30 hours.

Of course, it would be simpler if choral members could sing and record simultaneously on apps like Zoom, but the sound from the home of a conductor or an accompanist does not reach 140 other homes, or even half-dozen, simultaneously. Delays of a few tenths of a second from one place to another would result in choral cacophony. That’s why choir members must push their mute buttons during group rehearsals.

Making the transition from live to virtual is no easy undertaking. While Los Angeles conductor-composer Eric Whitacre combined 17,500 voices from all over the world in his “Sing Gently,” local conductors are working on a more modest scale. Some are focusing on coaching individuals, which they don’t have the opportunity to do during regular rehearsals, when the focus is on the group. By working on their own, the singers are improving.

“I’m confident that when we come out of this, and are able to rehearse in person again, we will be stronger and better,” Jue said.



Courtesy Janet Silver Ghent

Over 130 singers in the Ragazzi Boys Choir perform “We Are the Day” online

Delp Somers agreed. “The kids are becoming really individually savvy and responsible for learning notes and pitches,” she said. “Things that they might have relied on others for in the classroom setting, they’re now individually accountable in a new way. We were surprised to see so much individual growth in such a short amount of time.”

‘The biggest challenge that we face is having something that we love to do that brings a lot of purpose to our existences (be) dangerous.’

JENNAH DELP SOMERS, CO-FOUNDER AND CO-ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF ISING SILICON VALLEY

Hope is what keeps these chorales in harmony, even amid disappointment. In March, when Ragazzi first soprano Liam Lowitz first heard that COVID-19 would force choirs to shut down, “I started crying,” he said. Lowitz, 12, a seventh-grader at North Star Academy in Redwood City, said he “loves singing with my friends,” and not being able to sing together was unthinkable.

But tears dissipated when Ragazzi began meeting on Zoom. And when he heard the finished virtual piece of “Count on Me,” in which he has a cameo solo, “something inside of me just lit up. I think it’s really cool that we’re able to do this.”

For the Palo Alto-based Aurora Singers, Tuesday get-togethers on Zoom are reunions, drawing in former choir members living in Canada, Vermont, Colorado and New Jersey who join the group in sing-alongs, share news and participate in virtual choir pieces, recording their parts at home.

Instead of performing at senior residences, these days Aurora invites the residents to join them in Zoom sing-alongs, with songs ranging from folk to rock to Broadway. Although these events are not rehearsals, said founder-conductor Dawn Reyen, “our regular online gatherings allow us to maintain our strong sense of community, as well as maintaining good vocal habits, so that when we can resume in-person rehearsals, we will be ready to jump right back in.”

HaShirim, a Jewish community choir also based in Palo Alto, does hold virtual rehearsals on Zoom. When conductor Billie Banderma introduces new pieces, pianist Angela Cheng plays the individual choral parts as well as the accompaniment.

“Everybody sings a part they’re not used to, so that nobody is idle during rehearsal,” Banderma said. Then when the singers learn their own parts, they sing along to a professional choir’s recording, “giving them the experience of what it’s like to sing as a choir.” At the end of the rehearsal, the singers join in on pieces they know by heart, like “Old Devil Moon.”

“We miss getting together,” said Banderma. “As long as there is some joy of singing

together with other people, that’s what makes choral singing so infectious.”

When Emerich had a flood underneath her Cupertino townhouse that forced her to evacuate for a week, she was distraught. She has been isolating since March, and has asthma and other immunity issues that put her at high risk. “The idea of staying for a week in a hotel was very scary to me,” she said.

Emerich mentioned her concern during a rehearsal. Fellow soprano Ellen Beaudet offered her guest room, a separate bathroom and use of her backyard. Beaudet also prepared dinner, which they ate outside, socially distanced.

Said Beaudet: “I love that HaShirim is a community! It’s wonderful to be able to help one another.”

For links to videos of performances mentioned in this story, go to almanacnews.com/arts and click on the online version of this story. ■

Email Janet Silver Ghent at ghentwriter@gmail.com

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Food & Drink

Restaurant roundup:

MacArthur Park **restarts** takeout, Italian eatery **ends** dine-in service and chefs **leave** Maum

By Elena Kadvany

A longtime Palo Alto restaurant has reopened for takeout after initially planning to shut down until 2021, while an Italian eatery has ended dine-in service for the foreseeable future and the chefs of Maum have departed.

MacArthur Park

After an “overwhelming response” from customers who were dismayed at the news earlier this month that MacArthur Park would be shuttering until 2021, the longtime Palo Alto restaurant reopened for takeout only, said spokesperson Michael Davis.

“Our loyal customers were asking us to please keep curbside delivery and to go open,” he wrote in an email. “It’s so heartwarming to have seen all the support we have had over the years so for now we will carry

on with this until we can open our in-dining again, when this pandemic is better controlled.”

MacArthur Park had announced that Aug. 8, would be its last day of business until next year, citing “challenging economics” and the health and safety of customers and staff. Davis said the last two days of business, MacArthur Park’s outdoor patio was “packed.” They decided a few days later to bring back takeout.

The to-go menu includes several salads, tri-tip, baby back pork ribs, barbecued and fried chicken, a burger and kids’ dishes.

The 27 University Ave. restaurant, which opened in 1981, is serving food to go Tuesday-Saturday from 4-8 p.m., via curbside pickup or delivery.

Maum

Two months after pivoting to a retail operation and a year after



Ben Hacker

Palo Alto Italian restaurant Vina Enoteca has closed for dine-in service but will continue its online classes and wine club.

winning their first Michelin star, the co-chefs of Maum in Palo Alto, Meichih and Michael Kim, decided to “part ways” with the Korean fine-dining restaurant.

“Maum was a labor of love, 7 years in the making. Maum was the creation of patience, dedication, perseverance, and passion. And most importantly, Maum was the people: our generous partners, dedicated team, local purveyors, supportive friends and family, and of course, our wonderful guests and patrons,” they wrote in Instagram posts. “We are proud of the elevated Korean cuisine we brought to Silicon Valley.”

Meichih said she didn’t have any further comment. They’re “closing the books on this chapter and thinking of what’s next,” she wrote in an email.

The restaurant’s weekly newsletter, sent out Aug. 16, said that “we have been forced to go in a different direction to try and achieve sustainability under these unpredictable circumstances. With this change, we will be parting ways with Chefs Michael & Meichih Kim.”

Charles Chen, a consultant with Maum, said in an interview that the decision was a financial one as the long-term future of the University Avenue business remains uncertain.

This marks another major, pandemic-forced change for Maum, which is owned by venture capitalist Brian Koo and his wife Grace. The restaurant shut down in March, briefly reopened for takeout in May and

‘We encourage those that can to support your local favorite restaurants.’

MEICHIH AND MICHAEL KIM
OF MAUM

then shifted to selling Korean cooking essentials, meal kits, specialty food items and produce from its private farm in Los Altos Hills.

Maum was born as a high-end private dining space before opening to the public in 2018. Less than a year later, the Kims won their first Michelin star.

Chen said they didn’t consider offering outdoor dining because they felt there was no way to replicate the Maum experience of an intricate Korean tasting menu served at a 16-seat communal table.

The transition from fine-dining into retail is challenging both operationally and financially, he said. Restaurateurs are learning on the fly how to package and produce items and how much volume is needed to be sustainable.

Maum will sell the rest of some housemade Korean items that had already been prepared, Chen said, as well as imported goods from Korea and Japan.

But moving forward, the space will focus on selling baked goods and confections, operating as an “incubator” for local bakers.

This includes Chen himself. Maum was one of the first pick-up locations for his now wildly popular Japanese-inspired Basque cheesecakes, as well as handmade soba noodles and tofu from Soba Ichi in Oakland.

Maum recently added naturally leavened bagels from Midnite Bagel, a pop-up started in San Francisco by Nick Beitcher, the former head bread baker at Tartine Bakery. Maum will offer three flavors — plain, cinnamon raisin and a buckwheat and black sesame.

Chen is in talks with Peninsula baker John Shelsta of Love for Butter and San Francisco pastry chef Angela Pinkerton, who launched a roving pie pop-up during the shutdown.

On Instagram, the Kims wrote that they’re not sure what they’ll do next professionally.

“As the restaurant and hospitality industry continues to suffer, we encourage those that can to support your local favorite restaurants — they are the lifeblood of our communities and foster meaningful memories,” they wrote.

Vino Enoteca

Saturday night marked the last dinner service at Vina Enoteca in Palo Alto for the foreseeable future.

Rocco Scordella, who with his wife Shannon opened the Italian



Veronica Weber

MacArthur Park has reopened for takeout after an “overwhelming response” from customers when the restaurant announced its plans to close until 2021.

restaurant on the edge of the Stanford University campus in 2016, decided it's time to rethink the concept of running a 200-seat, full-service restaurant in the age of COVID-19.

"We built a restaurant to hold events, rehearsal dinners, weddings, a place to celebrate and have a party!! But things have obviously changed and that space is obsolete looking forward," they wrote in an Instagram post on Aug. 14. "We need to rethink how that vision can still exist but in a new and safer way. This decision does not come easy but it's a necessary one to preserve our business."

Scordella is still figuring out what "Vina 2.0" will look like, but he knows he wants to create a business model that can thrive amid the new realities of pandemic dining, and that's more equitable for its employees. When Vina Enoteca reopens for dine-in service, he plans to share tips equally between front and back of house staff.

"It's time to change the whole restaurant in the sense of what we're doing and how we pay people," he said. "I think the restaurant business needed a wake-up call."

The pandemic has underscored long-standing pressures and inequities in the restaurant



Veronica Weber

Chefs Michael and Meichih Kim are parting ways with Maum in Palo Alto.

industry, with many industry leaders calling for legislative relief and systemic change.

Scordella, a native of Italy, described the United States' tipping system as "antiquated." He pointed to Menlo Park's Flea St. Cafe as a local example of doing that successfully. During the pandemic, the restaurant shifted to sharing tips between the front and back of house — "to reboot what was a broken system of unequal pay and gratuity distribution," owner Jesse Cool

said. All hourly employees make minimum wage and receive the same amount from tips according to the number of hours they work.

Vina Enoteca was among the first local restaurants to close temporarily in mid-March, shortly before being required to do so. It reopened slowly, first with takeout a few days a week and then in June for outdoor dining. The owners also worked to "reinvent" the restaurant by creating new offerings, from



Ben Hacker

Vina Enoteca, shown in pre-pandemic times, ended dinner service "for the foreseeable future" on Saturday.

Zoom wine tastings and pasta-making classes to meal kits and frozen pizzas. Early in the shutdown, they created a meals donation program to feed health care workers and keep staff employed.

The online classes, as well as Vina Enoteca's wine club, will continue. Scordella also hopes to sell more frozen items as well as host small, socially distanced wine dinners at the restaurant.

Scordella said the decision to temporarily end dine-in service

was wrenching, particularly for the employees who are losing their jobs.

There's been a few times when he's looked around the empty dining room, and "it kind of hits you," he said. "You cry it out and you keep thinking positive."

Scordella's first, more casual restaurant, Tootsie's at the Stanford Barn in Palo Alto, will remain open. ■

Email Elena Kadvany at ekadvany@paweekly.com

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