

# The Almanac

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

MARCH 5, 2021 | VOL. 56 NO. 26



WWW.ALMANACNEWS.COM



Magali Gauthier

**Oak Knoll Elementary School** first grader Hannah jumps rope while wearing a mask during recess at the Menlo Park school on Sept. 29. This pandemic year has been one of major upheaval for local students and their families.

## One year in

How the pandemic has changed us

By Almanac staff

We all remember a moment last year when unease about the coronavirus started to creep into our consciousness.

Maybe it was when we heard about the long lines outside of Costco and the shelves inside stripped bare of toilet paper and bottles of water. Or the first time someone elbow-bumped us instead of shaking hands (jokingly, but not really). Or when we started seeing people walking around wearing blue surgical masks, and we didn't even own one, let alone know

where to get one.

And then came March 17, the day that the Bay Area's stay-at-home order took effect. It was the first in the nation, initiated by our alarmed public health leaders.

In the seemingly endless year since, our unease has turned into a multitude of emotions and unusual, only-in-a-pandemic experiences.

To give us the chance collectively to pause and reflect on the impact these past 12 months have had on our lives, The Almanac is publishing this two-part series of profiles and

See **ONE YEAR IN**, page 16



Sammy Dallal

**Ada Braun shops at Bianchini's Market** in Portola Valley on March 20, 2020.

INSIDE

VIEWPOINT 22 | ARTS 24

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*It's time to put your creativity to work and create a fire safety poster!  
The grand winning poster will be displayed in the local paper.*

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- 8 ½ x 11 poster
- No lined paper
- Artist information on the back -  
Name  
Age range (K-1, 2-3, & 4-5 Grades)  
Phone number

Start Date: March 1, 2021

Deadline: March 31, 2021

One entry per child. Prizes will be awarded



Please mail to 170 Middlefield Road, Menlo Park, CA 94025 or drop off at your nearest fire station's mailbox.



Pictured left: "Laundry Day" by Teri Vershel — 2020 Best In Show and Travel Winner

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# Local News

MENLO PARK | AHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY



Magali Gauthier

**Protesters** called for local high schools to reopen when San Mateo County moved to the red tier. A deal to bring students back on campus next month is expected to be ratified this week.

## Sequoia high school district classrooms set to reopen April 5

With 'Zoomers and roomers' model, some students would watch lessons remotely while others are in class

By **Angela Swartz**  
Almanac Staff Writer

After nearly a year of distance learning, Sequoia Union High School District students will have the option to return to classrooms for in-person learning on April 5.

The decision comes on the heels of a tentative agreement between the district's teachers union, the Sequoia

District Teachers Association, and district officials on Feb. 23, the district's governing board announced at a Feb. 24 meeting.

A simple majority vote of teachers in the union will make it official. Edith Salvatore, the teacher association president, said the union would vote from March 3 to March 5 on the agreement (after The Almanac's Wednesday press deadline). "Obviously, we hope

that it will be considerably higher and represents a consensus among staff," Salvatore said.

With social distancing requirements, classrooms can hold an average of 10 to 12 students, according to the district.

Locally, the district operates Menlo-Atherton and Woodside high schools, as well

See **REOPEN**, page 12

## Feldman's Books building set to be replaced by apartments

By **Kate Bradshaw**  
Almanac Staff Writer

The countdown is on for Menlo Park's Feldman's Books to find a new home after a proposal to redevelop the site was approved by the city's Planning Commission Feb. 22.

The developer, Prince Street Partners, gained approval to build a new nine-unit, three-story residential building at the property, 1162 to 1170 El Camino

Real. Three units are designated for rent below market rate, two of which the firm promised as part of its agreement with the city for a nearby development at Santa Cruz Avenue and Merrill Street. The architecture involves prefabricated modular building designs.

Jack Feldman, owner of the longtime used bookstore at the site, said that he did not yet have a new place lined up, but was hoping to relocate somewhere within a few blocks of its current location

— "maybe Santa Cruz Avenue or somewhere thereabouts," he said.

He added that there are probably five to six months before the old building is demolished and encouraged anyone who has a good spot in mind to let him know. They're looking for a spot with around 2,000 square feet that's "hopefully somewhat affordable."

"I think the community wants

See **FELDMAN'S**, page 13

## San Mateo cop to be new Menlo Park police chief

By **Kate Bradshaw**  
Almanac Staff Writer

After months of searching, the city of Menlo Park has selected David Norris as its new police chief.

Norris, who is expected to start March 22, has worked with the San Mateo Police Department since 1993, according to a city announcement March 2.

With that department, he worked his way up from police service aide to officer, sergeant, lieutenant and then captain. He has worked as a police captain for six years, during which time he served as the city's acting and interim chief during periods between 2019 and 2020.

"David Norris is a great addition to the Menlo Park Police Department," said Mayor Drew Combs in a statement. "He brings a wealth of experience from the many roles he has held in the San Mateo Police Department. Additionally, his familiarity with the Peninsula and past interactions with the Menlo Park Police Department will allow for a speedy ramp up."

Combs said Norris is the right person to lead the department as the city begins a dialogue with the community about how police resources are deployed.

"Incoming Chief Norris is a well-respected and experienced law enforcement executive who will be a strong partner on our Menlo Park team. He brings an open mind, valuable insights and the necessary skills to help mentor and lead our police department," said City Manager Starla Jerome-Robinson.

Norris has 27 years of experience in local law enforcement, was a co-founder of the Bay Area Law Enforcement Social Media Group and has done work with media and community relations. He is a member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police and serves on the Police Professional Standards, Ethics and Image Committee, which is an international team of experts working to review the Law Enforcement Code of Ethics and creating tools for police agencies to engage with their communities, according to the announcement.

He also holds a master's degree in law enforcement and public safety leadership from the University of San Diego and a bachelor's degree in human performance from St. Mary's College.

"I am proud to work in a county where police departments prioritize our connection with our community and our ability to work collaboratively with our communities and each other," Norris said in a statement. "It was incredibly important to me to take on a responsibility like police chief locally. I'm excited to get to know the people who live, work and play here in Menlo Park and the dedicated professionals who serve this community."

With the San Mateo Police Department, Norris formed the department's first community and media relations unit and has



David Norris

See **POLICE CHIEF**, page 13



Courtesy ch x tld prefab evolved/Prince Street Partners

**A rendering** of the nine apartments planned by developer Prince Street Partners at 1162 to 1170 El Camino Real, near Oak Grove Avenue in downtown Menlo Park.



**TOWN OF WOODSIDE**  
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**INVITES APPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING COMMISSION  
DISTRICT 4  
EXPIRING FEBRUARY 2022**

The Planning Commission participates in the administration of the planning laws and policies of the Town. It is responsible for recommending to the Town Council ordinances and resolutions necessary to implement the General Plan and adopted development policy. The Commission also conducts necessary public hearings to administer the planning laws and policies of the Town and acts upon applications for zoning amendments, conditional use permits, variances, subdivisions, and other related functions as may be assigned by the Council.

During COVID-19, the Planning Commission meets virtually on the first and third Wednesday of the month at 6:00 p.m.

Interested residents may check residency requirements, request information, and submit applications to the Town Clerk by emailing Jennifer Li at [jli@woodsidetown.org](mailto:jli@woodsidetown.org).

**APPLICATION DEADLINE:**

**Friday, April 2, 2021, by 5:00 p.m.**

**INTERVIEW AND APPOINTMENT BY TOWN COUNCIL:**

**Tuesday, April 13, 2021, 7:00 p.m.**



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**CRIME BRIEFS**

**Young man fatally shot in North Fair Oaks**

A 22-year-old man died of apparent gunshot wounds in North Fair Oaks on March 2, according to the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office.

Around 11:30 p.m., the Sheriff's Office received a call that shots had been fired in the 400 block of Fifth Avenue in North Fair Oaks, according to the Sheriff's Office.

When they arrived, they found a young man with apparent gunshot wounds. Paramedics responded and confirmed the man was dead, according to a press statement.

The San Mateo County Coroner's Office identified the man as Andrew Michael Pohahau. The Sheriff's Office said he was a 22-year-old.

The motive and the suspect are still under investigation. Detectives are working with the county's crime lab to process the crime scene and have initiated a homicide investigation.

Anyone who may have heard or seen anything related to the crime is encouraged to contact Detective Boragno at 650-363-4064 or [nboragno@smcgov.org](mailto:nboragno@smcgov.org). They can also call an anonymous tip line at 1-800-547-2700.

The Sheriff's Office released a video on Facebook regarding the incident available at [is.gd/nfocrimel](https://www.facebook.com/is.gd/nfocrimel).

—Kate Bradshaw

**One arrested in Atherton strong-armed robbery**

Police have arrested one of two men who allegedly attempted to rob a man in front of his Atherton home last weekend and injured the man's wife after firing a round in her direction, police said Feb. 25.

On Feb. 21 around 2:50 p.m., two men in a black sedan

See **CRIME BRIEFS**, page 10

**COMMUNITY BRIEFS**

**New rector starts at St. Bede's Episcopal Church**

St. Bede's Episcopal Church in Menlo Park has a new rector, the Rev. Daniel Spors, according to a recent announcement from the church.

Spors began the role online on Feb. 1 and moved to Menlo Park from Virginia in mid-February. Most recently, he worked as assistant to the rector of Saint Peter's Episcopal Church in Arlington, Virginia.

He is originally from Milwaukee and attended a master's of divinity degree from Grand Rapids Theological Seminary in Michigan and his undergraduate degree in Anglican studies at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee.

He worked as a hospital chaplain for several years before he was ordained as an Episcopal priest.

He and his wife Ashley enjoy camping, hiking and outdoor rock climbing, the announcement said.

"The members of St. Bede's are very happy to have Dan on board and look forward to the future with him as our rector," said Sue Sartor, who co-chaired the search committee, in an email.



Rev. Daniel Spors

**SamTrans offering free rides to vaccine sites**

SamTrans, the San Mateo County Transportation District, is providing free bus rides to COVID-19 vaccination sites for people living in San Mateo County, the transit agency announced last month.

The service is through existing bus routes, and people who are interested in the free ride should let the driver know as soon as they board the bus.

Passengers should plan to show proof of their appointment or a vaccination card, and fare will not be required.

For the county's Redi-Wheels and Redi-Coast paratransit services, riders should show that they will be traveling to the vaccination site at the time they book their reservations.

"As a public agency, it is important to provide our communities

See **COMMUNITY BRIEFS**, page 10



# Menlo Park to pay \$5.5 million to make 14 apartments affordable

By Kate Bradshaw  
Almanac Staff Writer

The Menlo Park City Council voted unanimously Feb. 23 to spend \$5.5 million from the city's below-market-rate housing fund to help the San Mateo County nonprofit HIP Housing purchase 14 apartments to preserve as affordable housing.

HIP Housing and its development arm, the HIP Housing Development Corporation, serve about 1,400 low-income people throughout the county through several programs they operate, which include home-sharing and helping families develop self sufficiency, as well as one that purchases housing for rent



Courtesy HIP Housing

**Fourteen apartments** on Coleman Place in Menlo Park will be preserved as affordable housing and managed by San Mateo County-based nonprofit HIP Housing.

by low-income tenants and provides property management at those locations, according to

Kate Comfort Harr, executive director of HIP Housing.

The decision came after the

city put out a "notice of funding availability" to affordable housing providers to say that money in its below-market-rate fund is available for worthy projects. According to staff, the city received three proposals, including the HIP Housing project. The other two, from Habitat for Humanity and MidPen Housing, are set to come to the council at a later date and are estimated to cost a total of \$10.3 million.

The city had a total of \$17.2 million in the fund as of Feb. 18, according to staff.

The \$5.5 million in city funding will help purchase two, two-bedroom and 12 one-bedroom apartments housed in two buildings at 6 to 8 Coleman Place in Menlo Park's District 3 and

cost a total of \$7.45 million. The rest of the funds are expected to be covered by private bank loans and donations.

Comfort Harr told the council that the nonprofit looks for properties that have specific characteristics when considering which homes to preserve for affordable housing. They should be located in areas near services; offer between six and 16 housing units so as to be within reach of purchase on short notice; be in good, well-maintained condition; and have tenants who likely already qualify for affordable housing, since otherwise the owner is required to pay property taxes. In addition, the seller

See **AFFORDABLE**, page 11

## Atherton student files suit against state for indoor sports ban

By Angela Swartz  
Almanac Staff Writer

A Menlo School freshman has filed a lawsuit in San Mateo County against the county, the state and state health officials for prohibiting indoor team sports competitions at the high school level.

Stella Buch, 14, said in the filing on Friday, Feb. 26, that the ban denies equal protection because there is no medical evidence that competing in indoor team sports is safe for college and professional athletes but not high school athletes. The lawsuit emphasizes the disparate impact an indoor team sport ban has on female athletes.

Stella, a Menlo Park resident and member of Menlo School's volleyball team, said in a Feb. 28 email to The Almanac that when kids are cut off from

sports, it has a huge impact on their mental health. According to the filing, Stella wants to play not only for the competition, but because she is interested in "potentially securing an NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) scholarship down the line to extend her playing career and allow her to attend a university she may not otherwise have had the opportunity to attend."

"Not being able to play volleyball is really hard for me," she said. "After a long day of distance learning and sitting in front of my computer, going to practice is the one place where I can leave it all on the court and forget about all the other things I might be dealing with in my life. I also love being able to see my teammates especially when I don't get to talk to people at school with distance learning. I can focus on my work better and I am overall happier when I am able to play volleyball, and I know there are a lot of other high schoolers who feel the same way."

Stella's mother, Heather Buch, a volleyball coach, said in a statement that it is important that a decision comes quickly; otherwise it could be another school year before girls can play again.

Menlo School, according to its website, will return to "hybrid learning" on March 8. If a temporary restraining order is issued before March 8, it might mean that indoor volleyball could be played, even though Menlo School students would still be learning remotely.

The law firm representing Stella and Heather Buch, Wingert Grebing Brubaker & Juskie, won a decision two weeks ago to remove restrictions on indoor and outdoor sports in

San Diego. Judge Earl H. Maas III ruled all indoor and outdoor sports can be played immediately in San Diego County, including women's volleyball, basketball, wrestling and other sports.

"We plan to spread this victory throughout California," said Stephen C. Grebing of Wingert Grebing Brubaker & Juskie. He called the decision "an important victory." He said it will be difficult for Gov. Gavin Newsom to appeal because the state presented no medical evidence of COVID-19 dangers to youth — and in an appeal only the original facts can be disputed.

Grebing said that the firm has also filed lawsuits in Santa Clara, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Orange, Santa Barbara, Riverside and San Bernardino counties to ensure all youth have the same right to play sports — indoor and outdoor — as professional athletes do.

Let Them Play CA, a group of more than 60,000 kids, parents and coaches pushing for the reopening of sports in California, praised the statewide effort to allow girls to play outdoor and indoor sports.

The local chapter of the group staged a rally in January at

Sequoia High School in Redwood City asking officials to allow students to resume sports competitions.

On Feb. 19, the California Department of Public Health issued new guidance on youth and adult recreational sports. In counties in the purple and red tiers, all indoor high school sports are banned. San Mateo County is in the less restrictive red tier.

Stella Buch's complaint alleges that girls indoor volleyball was played in more than 40 states in the fall of 2020.

In an earlier decision in February, the court invalidated broad restrictions on gatherings for worship, but allowed

a 25% capacity limitation on inside gatherings and a ban on singing and chanting. School sports, unlike gatherings for worship, do not generally enjoy the same level of constitutional protection as First Amendment-protected activity.

A hearing on the temporary restraining order application for Buch's case had yet been scheduled, according to a spokesperson for the plaintiff's law firm.

View the full suit at [tinyurl.com/volleyballsuit](https://tinyurl.com/volleyballsuit).

Bay City News Service contributed to this report.

Email Angela Swartz at [aswartz@almanacnews.com](mailto:aswartz@almanacnews.com)



Courtesy Stella Buch

**Stella Buch**, a Menlo School freshman, at the Colorado Crossroads tournament about a year ago before the shelter-in-place order took effect.

### REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman

#### Using An Out-of-Area Agent to Sell My House



**Dear Monica: We are selling our house and my sister, who is an agent living in another part of the state, has offered to list it and reduce her commission. Is it a good idea to use an out of area agent?**

Gina T.

Dear Gina: There are a few reasons why using your sister as your agent may not be a good idea. She may not be familiar with the contract used in this area, nor with the disclosures you and she are required to do. Local agents

may consider her remote which could affect the ease of communication. It could be awkward for her as well if she doesn't have a local network of agents to market to, and if she needs to visit the property often.

A better plan would be for her to either co-list the property with a known local agent, or to refer it to a good agent. She could credit you her commission, which would save you money.

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# Coronavirus central: Santa Clara County moves to red tier

State attorney general warns of illegal COVID-19 fees

By Embarcadero Media staff

Santa Clara County as of Tuesday had 38,912 cumulative cases of COVID-19, with 521 deaths. There were 39 people hospitalized. Santa Clara County as of Tuesday had 110,911 cumulative COVID-19 cases and 1,797 deaths. There were 178 people hospitalized, 19 of which were new.

## Santa Clara County improves to red tier

Movie theaters, gyms and restaurants reopened in Santa Clara County Wednesday, after county officials announced that the region was returning to California's less-restrictive red tier.

The announcement came amid declining COVID-19 cases in the county and a significant drop in hospitalizations, turning a corner on an explosive increase in cases over the winter. Santa Clara is one of seven counties to join the red tier on March 3.

The change means that indoor dining can resume for the first time since November, and gyms and fitness centers

will be allowed to operate indoors at 10% capacity. Movie theaters, museums, zoos and aquariums are all allowed to open at 25% capacity.

Santa Clara County Health Officer Dr. Sara Cody said it's been just a few days shy of one year since she issued her first public health orders in March 2020, and that the county has since endured a "devastating" winter surge that claimed the lives of too many county residents. But with case counts down and vaccinations providing a clear path to recovery, she said the county was prepared to ease public health restrictions.

"It's been an extraordinarily long year for everyone," she said. "We have and we will continue to do everything that we can to safeguard the health of everyone living and working in our county."

The last time Santa Clara County entered the red tier, many of the activities that were allowed under the state's framework remained banned in the county. Indoor dining, for example, was not allowed to resume until October.

That is not the case this time.

Cody said the relaxed public health rules would be largely aligned with the state, though she cautioned residents against participating in risky activities.

"Please remember, just because the state's framework may allow an activity, that doesn't mean it's safe," she said.

What remains in place is the county's guidance that all activities should be moved outdoors whenever possible and that residents should keep wearing masks regardless of whether they're required. Residents also are asked to keep a safe social distance from people they do not live with and to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

## Illegal COVID-19 fees warning

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra issued a warning to consumers Tuesday about some health care providers reportedly charging a COVID-19 fee that many people are not obligated to pay.

People enrolled in Medi-Cal, Denti-Cal and Medicare may not be charged this fee, which is purported to be for more frequent

cleaning and disinfecting during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Becerra asks that people who are charged a fee — and who are enrolled in Medi-Cal or Denti-Cal — to call 800-541-5555 to report it to the California Department of Health Care Services Medi-Cal Member and Provider Helpline.

Those enrolled in Medicare who are charged the fee should call Medicare at 800-MEDICARE to report it.

Becerra also urged anyone enrolled in any of those three programs who has been charged a COVID-19 fee to file a complaint online with his office at [oag.ca.gov/report](http://oag.ca.gov/report).

People with private insurance may be subject to the fee but have the right to ask providers why they are being charged such a fee and what it covers, as well as the right to ask insurers if the provider can charge the fee under insurance plan rules.

Becerra said those with private insurance should also alert the California Department of Managed Health Care at 888-466-2219 or visit its website at [dmhc.ca.gov/fileacomplaint.aspx](http://dmhc.ca.gov/fileacomplaint.aspx), or contact the California Department

of Insurance at [insurance.ca.gov/01-consumers/101-help/](http://insurance.ca.gov/01-consumers/101-help/) or at 800-927-4357.

Patients enrolled in Tricare may not be charged a COVID-19 fee by in-network providers. It may only be appropriate to charge the fee when the patient does not inform the provider ahead of time that they have Tricare, and when the provider sends a written notice about a COVID fee to the patient before an appointment. For more information, people can visit [tricare.mil/ContactUs/ReportFraudAbuse](http://tricare.mil/ContactUs/ReportFraudAbuse).

## 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](http://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](http://tinyurl.com/c19-Almanac). **A** *CalMatters and Bay City News Service contributed to this report.*

# Hazard pay for county grocery store workers raises equity concerns

By Kate Bradshaw  
Almanac Staff Writer

A proposal to require large grocery and drugstores to offer temporary hazard pay to front-line workers in unincorporated county areas is on hold while it is reviewed to see if its outcomes will be equitable.

The proposal by two San Mateo County supervisors, board President David Canepa and Don Horsley, would require certain grocery and drugstores to offer an additional \$5 per hour in hazard pay to their front-line workers. However, its potential approval was postponed Feb. 23 after Supervisor Warren Slocum asked that the policy be reviewed to ensure that it complies with the county's equity policies.

The proposed ordinance would mandate grocery and drugstores in unincorporated county areas to pay their front-line workers \$5 per hour in additional pay for 120 days.

Grocery stores or drugstores affected by the ordinance would be those that have 300 or more employees nationwide and dedicate a certain amount of space to selling groceries or other



Magali Gauthier

Workers at grocery stores throughout the country have been infected with COVID-19. A proposal to give hazard pay to workers in unincorporated San Mateo County has hit a snag and is under review.

non-taxable goods. For instance, affected grocery stores would be those over 10,000 square feet that have 70% or more in their sales area dedicated to food sales or receive 70% of revenue from food sales, or stores larger than 85,000 square feet that devote at least 10% of their sales floor area to non-taxable consumer goods.

Workers who are affected include those who work at least two hours per week, are paid by the hour and qualify to be paid the minimum wage under state law, according to the draft ordinance.

In public comments, representatives from local unions emphasized the burdens that

grocery store workers have taken on during the pandemic.

According to Julie Lind of the San Mateo County Central Labor Council, grocery store workers have continued to face high levels of coronavirus exposure and safety risks by enforcing mask mandates on sometimes unwilling patrons, all while preserving the public's uninterrupted access to food and pharmacy goods.

They do all this while generally earning between \$15 and \$19 per hour and often lack paid sick leave, she said. And, she said, some research indicates that about 1 in 5 grocery store workers nationally have

been infected with the virus that causes COVID-19.

One study, published in October in the *Occupation and Environmental Medicine Journal*, found that 21 of 104 workers tested in a Boston grocery store tested positive for COVID-19, and a majority were asymptomatic at the time they were tested in May. It also found that those who were directly exposed to customers were five times more likely to test positive for the virus.

Although the county does not retain a registry of businesses in unincorporated San Mateo County, it appeared that the proposed ordinance would only apply to two grocery stores: the two Chavez Market locations in North Fair Oaks, on Fifth Avenue and on Middlefield Road.

Slocum expressed concern that the Latino-owned businesses could be unfairly burdened by the ordinance, and Supervisor Carole Groom said she worried that the ordinance could raise prices further in a neighborhood where many can not afford them.

"Does this meet requirements of our equity lens in the county?" Slocum asked.

While the proposal is sent back for review by county staff members, the pause will also

give the county a chance to monitor the progress of litigation against similar ordinances in California.

The California Grocers Association has so far filed suits against Long Beach, Oakland and Montebello in response to similar legislation in those communities, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

Supervisors planned to reconsider the matter in two weeks, with the possibility of extending the timeline if needed to ensure stakeholders have enough time to discuss the matter.

Some members also expressed interest in extending the ordinance to apply countywide rather than just in unincorporated areas, but it wasn't immediately clear if that was within the supervisors' jurisdiction. County Counsel John Beiers said it would take more analysis and work to make the needed findings for the ordinance to apply countywide.

The Menlo Park City Council is not considering a hazard pay ordinance at this time, Mayor Drew Combs said in an interview March 1. **A**

Email Kate Bradshaw at [kbradshaw@almanacnews.com](mailto:kbradshaw@almanacnews.com)



# Former Atherton mayor Malcolm Dudley dies at 88

By **Angela Swartz**  
Almanac Staff Writer

Malcolm Dudley, a former Atherton mayor and longtime resident, veteran and investment banker, died on Feb. 10 with Cosette Dudley, his wife of 67 years, and daughters Lynette Stebing and Virginia Rock by his side at his Atherton home. He had been in declining health, his family said. He was 88 years old.



Malcolm Dudley

Born in Santa Cruz, Dudley moved to Sacramento when he was 10, according to his family.

Dudley attended Sacramento City College, then University

of California at Davis, where he graduated in 1954. He played in the jazz band The Malgers, which helped finance his education.

Dudley met his future wife while both were college students working in the Sacramento Bee's circulation department. She had heard about a "tall, handsome and fit young" man who was charismatic, had a friendly smile and was "bigger than life" who was coming back from Navy officer training. He was "everything she heard," Rock said. The couple married in 1954.

From 1958 to 1961, Dudley served with U. S. naval command staff in London. He studied international monetary economics at the London School of Economics.

The family moved to Atherton when they returned to the

U.S. in the early 1960s. Their first house on Maple Avenue cost \$25,000, according to The Almanac's archives. Dudley entered the investment business with Dean Witter & Co. in 1962, and continued to work as a financial adviser until his retirement in 2017, according to his family.

## Civic service

Dudley was also concerned about the environment and traffic congestion. He first became involved in city politics when he worried about the impact of the building of the new Dumbarton Bridge on local communities, he told The Almanac in 1998.

In 1976 he ran for the Atherton City Council and was elected. He served over 24 years, making him the town's longest serving

council member. He served as mayor six times.

Dudley was a leader on regional transportation matters as a board member of the San Mateo County Transportation Authority. "More than any other single person, he may be responsible for the fact that San Mateo County now owns the Caltrain corridor from San Francisco to Gilroy, and consequently that trains are still running up and down the Peninsula," former Almanac reporter Marion Softky wrote in 2000. Dudley also helped establish a half-cent sales tax for transportation, according to the article.

"That sales tax, which will raise more than \$1 billion for transportation projects in the county over its 20-year life, enabled SamTrans to buy the Caltrain right-of-way in 1991

for \$49.2 million," Softky wrote. "This purchase saved the train from possibly being closed down, and enabled the improving rail service the Peninsula enjoys today."

In recent years, Dudley advocated for keeping train service alive in town during council meetings and was serving on the town's Rail Committee (his term was set to end in June).

"Malcolm Dudley was a role model for citizens to be engaged in their local communities," said Atherton Councilman Rick DeGolia in an email. "Malcolm didn't merely put in his time, he worked extremely hard at representing Atherton residents, both on the city council and on county committees. ... For me, Malcolm was a wonderful friend

See **DUDLEY**, page 11

# Tree hacked down on stormy night rattles neighborhood

By **Kate Bradshaw**  
Almanac Staff Writer

It happened on Jan. 27, the night that an atmospheric river triggered a landslide that sent a huge chunk of Highway 1 near Big Sur crumbling into the ocean.

That stormy night, witnesses allege, it appeared that several people swiftly cut down a large oak tree on a residential construction site in West Menlo Park.

Neighbors of the site were shocked — they had just paid more than \$600 in fees to appeal for the tree's preservation to the San Mateo County Planning Commission.

The tree, a 50-foot-tall coast live oak located at 2050 Santa Cruz Ave., was cut down by the property's developer, confirmed staff at the San Mateo County Planning and Building Department.

A stop work order was put into effect, and the developer is being fined \$4,385, according to emails provided to The Almanac. In addition, the San Mateo County Planning Commission is scheduled to review the matter at its upcoming meeting on March 10.

The developer, Zume Builders, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Gregory Faris, whose property abuts the construction site, told The Almanac he was concerned because of the rapid way the tree was cut down. It posed a threat to his family and property, he said.

According to Faris, there were three men who came in a white pickup truck and worked in the

dark and the rain with a chainsaw to fell the tree in a matter of minutes.

His son recorded several videos while the tree was being cut down. In the videos, it's too dark to see exactly what was happening, but the audio recorded that night sounds like a chainsaw and the creak of a large tree falling over.

The tree could easily have fallen the other way and hit his house, patio and even his son, Faris said.

"Fortunately, nobody did get hurt, but it was very reckless," he said.

"I don't want to see people so desperate to take a tree down that they endanger the crew and the neighbors — it's just absurd," he added.

Residents near the construction site expressed shock at the developer's brazen attitude toward county regulations.

"The tree just came down," said another neighbor, who asked not to be named due to fear of retaliation from the developer.

"We did everything we were supposed to do and the developer did what he wanted to do."

When asked how common it is for developers to disregard county protocols and cut down large trees without permits, county planners said in an email that "tree removal under circumstances similar to this case happens very rarely."

Lynne McClure, another neighbor of the construction site, said over email that the neighbors have worked for years with the county to try to protect a series of oak trees at that property.

The county Planning Commission reviewed the development proposal in 2017 and approved plans to divide the property into three lots and create a new private street connecting them called Cardinal Court. At the time, the county recommended modifications to the proposal to better protect several trees on the property, according to county planning documents.

As part of the approval, the developer agreed to go through a permitting process to remove the tree in question, McClure explained.

"Upon receipt of the permit application to remove this tree, we neighbors rallied to file an appeal," she said.

"If people wonder why one tree is so important, it seems that preserving our environment in the face of climate catastrophe takes place one tree at a time," she said.

The neighbors had noted that the tree was 2 feet inside the envelope of one of the new proposed houses, and that they had appealed to the county to encourage the developer to be "creative about how they place the house and save the tree,"

Faris said.

The appeal came together near the deadline — it was submitted Jan. 25, with a Tuesday deadline of Jan. 26, and because of the pandemic, the \$635 payment for the appeal could not be processed until Wednesday, Jan. 27.

That night, the tree was cut down.

## Not city territory

The neighbors' frustration with the situation has much to do with the hewn-down tree, but

See **TREE**, page 12

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# Youth sports competitions return

By Angela Swartz

After almost a year of being limited to conditioning, student athletes resumed competition on Jan. 25. Menlo-Atherton High School girls tennis players matched up against teams in the Sequoia Union High School District twice last week.

Swimmers competed last week at home, while girls varsity golfers competed in Foster City.

"It's a great feeling to be competing again and our student athletes are beyond ecstatic," said Paul Snow, M-A's co-athletic director, in an email. "I can almost see their ear-to-ear smiles through their masks!"

Woodside High School athletic directors said in a letter to families last week that they were working with district and site administrators to "put a comprehensive plan in place to allow our

teams to practice and compete," which could include weekly testing of athletes.

"Two critical areas of concern are the possible need for weekly testing and transportation," they wrote. "Over the next one to two weeks, we hope to have a comprehensive plan that we will share with you on how we will move forward. This is an exciting time for all of us and we can not wait to see more of our teams competing."

M-A cross country runners competed against Half Moon Bay High School in February. There are more cross country, swimming, golf and tennis games set for this month.

In January, the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF), the state's governing body for high school sports, said the soonest athletes could return to competition would be Jan. 25.

CIF said girls volleyball, cheerleading, cross country, football, water polo and other sports would start their seasons in

January and run into April. Cross country is the only season that can begin while San Mateo County is in the red COVID-19 tier, which signifies substantial transmission risk. The county has to improve to the orange tier (moderate risk) to start football and volleyball competition.

Back in the fall, CIF said seasons would resume in December, but the start date was pushed back. ■

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## CRIME BRIEFS

continued from page 6

attempted to steal the resident's watch in the driveway of his home on Belleau Avenue after following him from Highway 101, according to a police news bulletin and police Chief Steve McCulley. The home's gate was open when the crime occurred, police said.

The resident fought back with the aid of his daughters and wife, who ran out of the house to help him, police said. During the altercation, one of the suspects pulled out a pistol and fired one round in the direction of the wife. She was not struck by the bullet, but had minor injuries from shrapnel as the bullet ricocheted off another surface. The male resident sustained minor injuries to his face as a result of the fight.

According to police, the two suspects then fled in their vehicle headed toward El Camino Real.

Investigators were able to identify the suspects' car through use of the Flock automated

license plate readers (ALPRs), which the town installed in 2020. The suspects, who were both on probation, have extensive criminal histories, police said. On Feb. 25, Atherton police officers arrested Tavijar Hollis, a resident of Pittsburg, on suspicion of multiple offenses for his participation in this incident. The second suspect is still at large, McCulley in a Feb. 25 email.

Since the deployment of the Flock cameras, Atherton officers have recovered several stolen vehicles, arrested a suspect wanted in a felony hit-and-run collision, recovered a car wanted in connection with a serious violent felony, and have arrested several wanted and dangerous felons, police said in the news bulletin.

—Angela Swartz

### Fire injures mother and daughter, displaces 11

A residential fire in East Palo Alto injured three people, including a mother and daughter who were hospitalized with

burns, and displaced 11 people on Feb. 25, according to the Menlo Park Fire Protection District.

The blaze was reported on Almond Court, off Myrtle Street, shortly after 6:30 a.m., according to fire Chief Harold Schapelhouman. About 60% of the building caught on fire. The one-story residence is roughly a block away from the Ravenswood Shopping Center. The two-alarm incident was under control by about 7 a.m., Schapelhouman said.

Multiple people reported the fire, including one caller who said a woman suffered burns and that the building may still be occupied, Schapelhouman said.

When fire crews arrived at the scene, they didn't find anyone in the building. They cut holes in the roof to help release smoke from the residence and improve their visibility, Schapelhouman said.

A mother and her teenage daughter suffered burns, with the daughter's injuries

considered very serious, according to Schapelhouman. They were transported to the burn unit at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center in San Jose.

A third person had minor burns and a hand laceration but declined treatment at a hospital, the chief said.

A total of 11 people had occupied the residence and all had some type of burns; nine of them refused treatment at the scene. The American Red Cross was called to assist everyone who was displaced.

There were no working smoke detectors in the building, according to Schapelhouman. The fire caused an estimated \$550,000 in damage to the structure and its contents.

—Palo Alto Weekly staff

### Seven arrested for furnishing alcohol to minors

The Menlo Park Police Department and agents from California's Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control arrested and cited seven

people for furnishing alcoholic beverages to minors and other related crimes in the vicinity of Menlo Park on Feb. 23.

The police department and agents from the department target adults who buy alcohol for minors using a program called a "decoy shoulder tap," according to a Feb. 24 announcement from the police department.

During these operations, a supervised minor will approach adults outside of a liquor or convenience store and ask them to buy him or her some alcohol, while indicating that he or she is underage and cannot buy it.

If the adults agree to buy the alcohol, they are arrested and cited.

The penalty is a minimum fine of \$1,000 and 24 hours of community service.

The program is funded through a grant from the state department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, which is part of the Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency.

—Kate Bradshaw

## COMMUNITY BRIEFS

continued from page 6

with transit-friendly options to vaccination sites that will help ensure equitable access in San Mateo County, especially for vulnerable communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic," said Charles Stone, chair of the SamTrans Board of Directors, in a statement.

—Kate Bradshaw

### Family string trio performs at First Friday

Woodside Arts & Culture's First Friday event for March is truly a family affair: a performance by the Costanza-Fong Family String Trio. The performance takes place online at 7 p.m. on March 5.

The ensemble is set to perform a wide-ranging program of works for string trios and duos.

The Costanza-Fong Family String Trio features parents Debra Fong, violin, Christopher

Costanza, cello, and their daughter Isabella Costanza, viola.

Fong and Christopher Costanza are both members of the Stanford University Department of Music faculty. Since 2003, Christopher Costanza has also been a member of the St. Lawrence String Quartet, Stanford's ensemble in residence. Fong is the principal second violinist of the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra and a first violinist with the Santa Fe Opera Orchestra.

Isabella Costanza is studying for an artist diploma at the Glenn Gould School in Toronto.

The First Friday event marks a return appearance to Woodside for the ensemble, which performed for a Woodside Arts & Culture concert in January 2020, though this will be their first virtual performance for the organization.

For more information, visit [woodsidesartandculture.org](http://woodsidesartandculture.org)

—Heather Zimmerman



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**DUDLEY***continued from page 9*

and mentor. I and all of Atherton will deeply miss him, but his presence will be felt for years to come as he was instrumental in helping support Atherton's new town center."

Dudley played woodwind instruments — most recently the saxophone — with a dance band called the Unicorns. The Unicorns sometimes play on the restored Liberty ship "Jeremiah O'Brien" during Fleet Week in San Francisco Bay, according to The Almanac archives.

"He did it all and did it well and with so much energy," Rock said. "Papa was always very hard-working in business, local politics, (the) Navy and his business."

Family was a central focus for her father, she said. Dudley kept up connections by organizing annual family trips. The family would travel to Camp Richardson in South Lake Tahoe to water ski. Dudley took family and friends aboard his yacht, MV Lisa Marie. Boat trips reached all the way up to Canada. He also took regular boat trips in the San Francisco Bay with friends.

Dudley is survived by his wife Cosette; his daughters, Lynette Stebing and Virginia Rock; four grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. ■

*Email Angela Swartz at  
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**AFFORDABLE***continued from page 7*

needs to be interested in working with nonprofits, because generally they need more time than a traditional property buyer to pull together funding from multiple sources.

The properties at 6 to 8 Coleman Place met all of those qualifications, plus the buildings offer a pair of two-bedroom apartments, which can be hard to find in San Mateo County and represent important housing options for families, she said.

In response to questions from council members, Comfort Harr noted that HIP Housing would be open to considering programs to add some energy-efficient features and to consider making one or two of the units available for purchase.

Priority to live in the new units will go to people who live or work in Menlo Park, or have been displaced from the community.

Go to [is.gd/mpbmr](http://is.gd/mpbmr) to learn more about the city's below-market-rate housing program. ■

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**Marjorie Mary Wagstaffe***November 11, 1928 – February 23, 2021*

Marjorie Mary Thompson was born on November 11, 1928 at St. Paul's Hospital in Manila, The Philippines to Alice Antoinette Jones and Merville (Tommy) Judd Thompson. The second of six children in her large, tight-knit family, Margie was named for her paternal aunt Marjorie and was raised in Manila. Her family had the intention of moving back to the United States, but plans were interrupted by the outbreak of World War Two.

The family enjoyed a very social way of life with Sunday evenings spent at the Elks Club for dinner, where her father was the manager. Margie remembered Manila as a cosmopolitan city that was both beautiful and international. She was attending Assumption Convent in Manila and was halfway through the 7th grade when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. December 8, 1941, the day after the attack was a clear day in her memory. Her family was on their way to Sunday Mass, which they attended together weekly. As word of the attack on Pearl Harbor spread among their friends and neighbors, so did the fear that the Philippines would be attacked next. She remembered that the family hurried home and lined mattresses against the walls of their bathroom and agreed that if and when they heard planes overhead, they would all go directly to the bathroom for shelter. As feared, the Japanese planes came at midnight and the air raid sirens sounded as the planes appeared and the family sought safety in the bathroom. This was the beginning of Margie's wartime experience. The air raids continued and when the Philippine island of Corregidor fell to enemy forces, Americans and their allies in Manila were told to report to Santo Tomas Internment Camp with 3 days worth of clothing. Ultimately, her family was interred at Santo Tomas as prisoners of war. While women and children were later released from the camp, Tommy was kept there until General McArthur's famous return liberated him.

Near the end of the war Marjorie's brother Stan and uncle Frank were wounded by shrapnel from enemy mortar, which led to the family returning to the United States by hospital ship. They spent 35 days at sea and landed in the port of San Francisco, where they were met by family members.

Beginning their post-war return to the United States and a new life, her family ended up living in a house on Fairmont Boulevard in Eugene, Oregon. The people of the community were incredibly kind and generous to the Thompson family, knowing the hardships that they had endured during the war. She was very grateful for that experience and the kindness of strangers.

Upon graduation from St. Mary's High School, Margie went to First National Bank of Oregon and got a job, determined to build her future. She said that job was where she "really came alive." Being gregarious and magnetic, she made many friends and truly enjoyed her work; opening new accounts and working with the public. When one of her coworkers at the bank said that she was planning a move to San Francisco, Margie loved the idea and decided that she would go too, much to her parents' chagrin. So, at age 21, she made her way to San Francisco to begin a new adventure. Being part of a large family certainly had its advantages and she was able to stay at her great uncle's home on 5th Avenue in San Francisco until she could find a place of her own. Her goal was to

work for Crocker Bank but there was not a job opening when she arrived. Always one to pursue her goals until she achieved them, she waited. Each day when she walked home from work, she would stop at the Catholic church along the way, Notre Dame Des Victoires and say a prayer. She eventually did get that job at Crocker Bank. And she loved it — she always spoke fondly of her time in San Francisco.

An active member of Old St. Mary's Center in San Francisco, she met handsome bachelor, William (Bill) Wagstaffe there and they shared their first date at an East West Shriners football game at Kezar Stadium on New Year's Day 1955. They were married at Old St. Mary's on February 11, 1956 and Margie and Bill settled on the Peninsula, first in Atherton and then in Menlo Park to raise their growing family. She was happily married to Bill for 56 years, until his death in 2012.

Anyone who knew Margie knew her bright spirit, friendly nature and astounding tenacity to not give up when she had her mind set on something. In

addition to devoting time and energy to raising her family, Margie volunteered for many charitable organizations, the Peninsula Volunteers, Athertons and Oakwood Auxiliary, among her favorites. When local landmark Douglas Hall was in danger of being demolished, she was instrumental in raising funds and awareness to save the historic building from destruction. It was one of her proudest accomplishments. Active in politics, she served as President of the Peninsula Republican Women, in addition to other positions within the organization. She was passionate about life and art in all its expressions. She created beautiful paintings. Music was always playing in her house, especially classical, and she was a gifted pianist. She loved to dance and she sang in the choir at St. Raymond Church.

When asked recently about the things that she was most proud of in her life, she said that everything she has gone through has been special. That was her true spirit — to take every element of her life and find meaning and purpose. Her fascinating stories, readiness for adventure and contagious laugh are just a few things that will be missed by all who knew and loved her. Most importantly, her strong faith set an enduring example for her family and will give them strength when they miss her.

Marjorie is the beloved mother to five children: Paul, Annmarie, Rosemary (Roger), Skip (Lisa), and Eileen (Jeff). Her twelve grandchildren and their spouses, Ryan, Perry (Andrea), Rachel, Julie (Howie), Lindsey (Jonathan), Rebecca,

Roxanne, William, Tori, Audrey, Jessi, and Ashley will miss their "Mimi" tremendously. As will her great grandson, Ronen Lee. Margie will hold a special place in the hearts of her many nieces and nephews.

She is survived by her sister Clare and brother Merv. She was preceded in death by her brothers Johnny and Stanley, and sister Georgie.

A funeral mass is scheduled for Friday, March 5th at 11am at The Church of the Nativity, 210 Oak Grove Avenue, Menlo Park. Private burial in Menlo Park will follow.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Oakwood Auxiliary and Ave Maria University.

A memorial tribute will be held for Marjorie at a later date.





## REOPEN

continued from page 5

as TIDE and East Palo Alto academies.

The decision also comes after a coalition of over 100 students, parents and teachers rallied at the district office on Feb. 23, calling on the district to resume in-person instruction. State Sen. Josh Becker, D-Menlo Park, also called for schools to reopen once the county entered the red tier on the same day.

The district will spend a few weeks planning out details of the reopening, said Interim Superintendent Crystal Leach at the meeting. The district resubmitted its reopening plan to the county Office of Education on March 1, she said. Students

would not spend time on campus during a typical Monday through Friday schedule, she noted. The district has chosen to adopt a concurrent learning model, known by many as “Zoomers and roomers,” which means some students would be learning from in the classrooms, while others would be Zooming into classes from home.

Ventilation upgrades on campuses have nearly been completed, Leach said.

## Concerns about returning

Parents spoke about the need for students to return to classrooms for their mental health.

The group Reopen SUHSD, which held the rally on Feb. 23, said in a Feb. 25 statement that it appreciates the hard work of the negotiating parties to get to the point of a reopening in five weeks. The group hopes the plan to return includes at least two days per week of in-person instruction and two days per week of synchronous distance learning, for students who choose to attend in person.

“This model is anchored to the CDC’s most recent phased mitigation guidance for K-12 schools, and even more recent studies on school reopenings across the country,” the group said. “Anything less than two

days per week in person would be massively disappointing given the very short time period left in the school year (the school year ends at the beginning of June) due to the April 5 start date ... With over five weeks to go, we are also encouraged by, and fully support, the ongoing push for teacher vaccinations. Now our district must continue to depend on science and learnings from other successfully reopened school districts to drive decision making in the days and weeks ahead.”

Teachers became eligible for vaccines on Feb. 23. Some teachers have been able to sign up for vaccines, while others have struggled to secure appointments on the state’s vaccination website. Some expressed concerns during the meeting about when they will actually be able to be vaccinated.

During the board meeting, one teacher shared her fears about returning after having lost her father to COVID-19. She also said there is an inequity between who is contracting the coronavirus (fewer people in affluent Atherton versus more in East Palo Alto). There have been 174 total cases among Atherton’s roughly 7,000 residents, meaning a little under 3% of its residents have tested positive. In contrast, East Palo Alto has had about 14% of its residents test positive (4,197 cases among its almost 30,000 residents, according to county data).

That inequity has also carried over to vaccination rates, which have been much higher in wealthier areas of the Peninsula,

the teacher said.

According to data from the county updated Feb. 24, Atherton has one of the highest vaccination rates in San Mateo County with 42.83% of residents age 16 and up vaccinated. Some 22.4% of Atherton’s population is over 65 years old, according to census data — the group that makes up the majority of people vaccinated so far. Just 9.96% of East Palo Alto residents have been vaccinated (16.5% of its population is over 65 years old, according to census data).

Some community members are concerned about widespread COVID-19 cases in parts of the school community, board Vice President Carrie DuBois said. She said it seemed like the data was not adequate for older teens, who are not as good at social distancing as younger children. “Is the data absolutely clear we don’t need to worry about the spread of COVID in our large public schools?” she asked.

Board President Alan Sarver noted there will always be some potential risk to students — be it an earthquake, school shooting or the virus.

Other schools have found ways to safely reopen with little to no transmission of the virus between teachers and students, according to recent studies. The CDC advises that it’s safe for students to go back to school with mask wearing and social distancing in the more restrictive purple tier.

Some students might not be able to return to campus because they are home taking care of their younger siblings

while their parents go to work, said Jennifer Hettel, the school psychologist at Menlo-Atherton High School. Hettel is supervising her own children at home with distance learning, so she won’t be able to be on campus to support students.

“It’s lovely we’re going to give this opportunity to students to come on campus, but it’s going to be a select group,” she said. “When we talk about equity, those are the equity issues we’re talking about.”

Trustee Shawneece Stevenson said the district was in a bind because it has two different populations and needs to serve them both. One group of students wants to come back because they’re doing fine academically but struggling emotionally, and on the other side are families trying to live day-to-day and they may want to have their kids back at school, but are busy with struggles that make it difficult to return to campus. She noted that there’s been a community of people who have rallied louder to return to classrooms than some of the other families she’s spoken to.

“I think we are making choices with the information we have,” Stevenson said. “Had you asked me in November I think I would have said, ‘No, I don’t think so,’ but when the option comes up (to return students to classrooms) we have a choice and we can talk about those choices with our families, and our families can make informed decisions about what they want to do.”

Email Angela Swartz at [aswartz@almanacnews.com](mailto:aswartz@almanacnews.com)

## OBITUARIES

Local residents who died recently include **Malcolm Hardy Dudley**, 88, former mayor of Atherton, on Feb. 10; and **Mary Alice Byrne**, 94, an educator and Portola Valley resident, on Feb. 21.

To read full obituaries, leave remembrances and post photos, go to Lasting Memories at [almanacnews.com/obituaries](http://almanacnews.com/obituaries).

## Malcolm Hardy Dudley

September 11, 1932 – February 10, 2021

Malcolm Hardy Dudley, former Mayor of Atherton, businessman, naval captain and musician, died peacefully on February 10, at home in Atherton with Cosette Dudley, his wife of 67 years, and his two daughters, Lynette Stebing and Virginia Rock. He will be remembered for his love of family and extended circle of friends, his generosity, kindness, and engaging character. Malcolm greeted people with a warm smile, friendly handshake and an enthusiastic story. He always took great interest in helping people, and believed in fairness and opportunity for all. Malcolm’s charismatic, thoughtful, trustworthy and caring personality drew people to him, and he will be greatly missed.



Malcolm is survived by his wife, Cosette, two daughters, Lynette Stebing and Virginia Rock, four grandchildren, Chris Van Kirk, Thomas Van Kirk, Charlie Rock and Sierra Rock, three great grandchildren and sister, Carol Foster.

A family celebration of his life will take place at East Lawn Memorial Park, Sacramento, where his ashes will be interred. A memorial will be arranged at a later date to honor a life well lived, at Saint Mark’s Episcopal Church, Palo Alto.

If you would like to make a donation in his name please consider one of the following:

Saint Mark’s Episcopal Church, 600 Colorado Ave, Palo Alto, CA 94306

Bach Dancing & Dynamite Society, 311 Mirada Rd, Half Moon Bay, CA 94019

Sierra Club, Loma Prieta Chapter

PAID OBITUARY

## TREE

continued from page 9

some also expressed frustration with another longer-running tension in their neighborhood: Would this have happened if their neighborhood was within Menlo Park city limits?

McClure, for one, is skeptical. “The owner/developer may have been defiant under the city too, but I think the city is more vigilant and more clear about the rules and regulations,” she said in an email.

Faris said he wasn’t sure if being in city limits would have helped. “The tree would be considered a heritage tree in the City of Menlo Park, and it might afford the tree more protections. However, the people who cut the tree down had no respect for the law, so I imagine they would have cut it down whether the property were in the county or the city,” he said in an email.

The site is within a triangle of unincorporated Menlo Park bounded by Santa Cruz Avenue,

Alameda de las Pulgas and Sharon Road, where residents have sought annexation into the city of Menlo Park since 2016.

From the outset, one reason some residents, including McClure, have said that they want to be part of the city is because Menlo Park has more stringent protections and enforcement of regulations around heritage trees compared to unincorporated areas.

However, the residents’ request for annexation has been tied up and tabled as the county and city have struggled to negotiate over how to manage the liabilities and benefits of taking on the area.

In the meantime, Faris expressed concerns that the repercussions the developer faces from the county may not be enough to deter future disrespect for the rules by others.

“There’s a lot of money at stake,” Faris said, noting he estimated that each of the three new homes would likely sell for around \$4 million. A \$4,000 fine on \$12 million is 0.03% of

the overall estimated sale price — not much, he argued.

“I think something needs to happen to make this developer and other developers understand that you don’t just do things like this,” he said.

A county staff report brought up another point that would have perhaps protected the trees, and would have likely posed a bigger obstacle for the developer. If the triangle were to be annexed, the report said, the neighborhood would likely undergo a “prezoning” process, and would likely be incorporated into a part of the city’s zoning code that sets a 10,000-square-foot minimum lot size. As a result, the three new homes would likely not have been permitted at all, the report said.

The San Mateo County Planning Commission is scheduled to review the matter of the axed oak at its March 10 meeting. The agenda was set to be posted on March 4 at [is.gd/smcpc310](http://is.gd/smcpc310).

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**FELDMAN'S***continued from page 5*

us to stick around," he said, adding he feels he's got about five more years of running the bookstore before he retires.

In a letter to the Planning Commission, developers Chase Rapp and Brady Fuerst said that they offered Feldman guaranteed tenancy to find time for a new location, brought potential new locations to Feldman's attention and offered to relocate the bookstore to their new retail site at 556 Santa Cruz Ave. for below-market-rate rent, and offered rent relief during the pandemic.

"Unfortunately, all of our efforts have been rejected," they wrote.

However, Feldman said he is open to taking up the developers on their offer to relocate the avocado tree at the bookstore to his own yard.

In the Planning Commission's deliberations, one point of debate was whether the current buildings on-site can be considered historic, and therefore worthy of certain legal protections.

The property has two buildings on it that are more than 100 years old: The 1162 El Camino Real building, which was built in 1910 and was the former home of Doughty's Meat Market, and the 1170 El Camino Real building, now Feldman's, which was built in 1905 and once housed Martin J. McCarthy Groceries. A peer review of a historical resources evaluation for the property found that the property did not meet the criteria for state or federal historic preservations but would be eligible at the local level.

However, Menlo Park does not have its own registry of historic resources, so adding it to a local registry isn't an option. Other analyses also agreed that

**POLICE CHIEF***continued from page 5*

supported and developed the department's community engagement approach. He also managed high-profile cases, helped to develop a youth services unit and coached personnel through professional development and promotions, according to the announcement.

Norris will be the third Dave or David in a row to lead the department — he was preceded by Chief Dave Bertini, who announced his departure from the department suddenly last June during a discussion on police reform.

Bertini was followed by interim Chief David Spiller, who recently announced he planned to take on the police chief role for the city of San Rafael. Spiller is set to start his new position March 16. ▀

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the property did not qualify for historic preservation. Most recently, in December, a 2016 report surfaced that argued that the property was historic under state guidelines. Ultimately, the consensus was that the new arguments did not trump the existing findings that the buildings were not historical.

When commissioners asked, though, Rapp said he would be happy to develop a plaque to install on the new building to describe the historical significance of the current buildings on-site.

Commissioner Chris DeCardy

said he felt that the City Council should take up the question of how to evaluate buildings for historical significance at the local level, and favored writing a "very strong letter" to the City Council telling them "they have essentially dodged a huge headache for themselves and should not let this happen (again)."

"This is not a good way to do public policy and not a good way to make a decision," he said.

Other commissioners disagreed that the building had historical significance. "I think the building itself is not noteworthy," said Commission Vice Chair Michael

Doran. "There are lots of buildings like this around the Bay Area and other parts of the country."

Rapp said that his team hoped to receive permits in August and build the development in 10 to 14 months.

In the meantime, Feldman's is seeding another legacy. Aidan Stone, an apprentice of Jack Feldman's, said he has been learning the used bookshop trade and plans to purchase 1,000 books from Feldman to start his own used bookstore in San Francisco's Sunset neighborhood sometime this year.

The forced relocation of

Feldman's Books, plus the recent death of San Francisco's City Lights icon and poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, are a "catalyst" for moving forward with his own bookstore, which he plans to call Stone's Books, he said.

"With COVID hopefully on the decline, there's potential for a renaissance, a newfound appreciation for these kinds of spaces," Stone said.

He's hoping he can open his store around the time that the new Feldman's reopens, he said. ▀

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**Kevin G. Gillett***August 14, 1976 – February 15, 2021*

It is with great sadness and love that we mourn the loss of Kevin George Gillett who passed away from complications following a cardiac event on February 15, 2021. A devoted son, husband, father, brother, uncle, and friend, Kevin left us too soon. His life and legacy stretched from coast to coast.



Born in Rockledge, Florida, the only son of Karin and Ron Gillett, he grew up fishing, shooting hoops, playing golf and being a devoted big brother to his three younger sisters. He attended high school at The Bolles School and went on to study computer science and applied mathematics at Princeton University. At Princeton, he was a member of Quadrangle and experienced the joy of playing basketball for Coach Pete Carril, beating UCLA in the NCAA tournament his freshman year.

Upon graduation from Princeton Kevin moved west to California to begin his career at Oracle. After Oracle, he worked at Amazon and Google where he made significant contributions. He was Engineering Director at Facebook at the time of his passing. Technical, eloquent, driven, passionate and curious, Kevin was a valued team member throughout his career. Kevin thought of himself as a mentor to all members of his various teams, never the boss in the traditional sense.

Kevin met the love of his life, Erin, on a date arranged by one of her friends. What started with a walk on the beach evolved into a shared journey of 21 years. They enjoyed summers boating at Lake Tahoe and golfing at Pebble Beach, where they married in 2002. They were both passionate about basketball, the ocean and, of course, their



amazing children. There was nothing Kevin enjoyed more than (loudly) cheering on his daughter at her water polo matches or (not so loudly) cheering for his son at competitive chess tournaments.

At 6'10" Kevin was a big guy with an even bigger heart, and he will be

deeply missed by all those who had the pleasure to know him.

Kevin is survived by parents, Karin and Ron Gillett; wife, Erin; children, Paedrin and Kingsley Gillett; sisters, Keira (Neil Dergenski), Caidi Gillett Phillips (Eric) and Caia Gillett; in-laws, Bob and Claudette Rosenberg; brother-in-law, Shanan Rosenberg (Sarah); nephews, Clyde, Walt and Gus Rosenberg and numerous aunts, uncles and cousins.

A Memorial Service will be held at a later date when COVID restrictions lift.

Memorial Contributions may be made to Princeton Men's Basketball Program: [makeagift.Princeton.edu](http://makeagift.Princeton.edu)

Sacred Heart Schools Atherton: [gifts@shschools.org](mailto:gifts@shschools.org) or [Oceana.org](http://Oceana.org).

PAID OBITUARY

**Michael Collins Brown***August 4, 1947 – February 21, 2021*

Michael Collins Patrick (Mike) Brown, the recently retired Director of Communications for the Archdiocese of San Francisco, died peacefully at home on Sunday following a long battle with cancer. He was 73.

Mike served as Associate Editor of Catholic San Francisco, the Archdiocesan weekly, and worked closely with the archbishop and the 93 parishes of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, capping off a half-century-long career in public relations. He began his professional career in 1968 as a copy boy for the San Francisco Chronicle, transitioning easily to Senior Columnist Assistant to the late nationally syndicated columnist Charles McCabe, editor, and book review staff writer.

In 1981 he became the Director of Alumni Relations and University Communications for the University of San Francisco, where he served his alma mater for over a decade cutting his teeth in crisis communication through the dissolution of his beloved USF Don's basketball program. Similarly, he expertly guided corporations such as Southern Pacific Railroad, Fleishman Hillard, and Consolidated Freightways directing strategic communications and managing chaotic situations with ease and calm. Mike was a founding partner at Brown and Raleigh, a full-service public relations firm but his devotion to the Catholic Church and his spiritual life were never far from Mike's heart.

In 2002 he was recruited to serve as Director of Communications and Community Relations for the Oakland Catholic Diocese overseeing public relations and communications for the highly anticipated Cathedral Project. In 2011, he moved to the San Francisco Diocese to work with Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone. Mike was named 2020 Communications Director of the Year by the U.S.-Canada Catholic Press Association and retired in January of 2021 after a 52-year career.

Mike was born in Spokane, WA in 1947 and moved to the newly developed community of Ladera in the foothills of the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center in 1954 with his parents Ralph and Eleanor Brown, now deceased. He attended St. Raymond's Elementary school, rode the train each day to Bellarmine College Preparatory and completed his Bachelors' Degree in English at the University of San Francisco in 1969.

He is survived by his wife of 51 years, Kathy Fenton Brown with whom he raised four children in his childhood home in Ladera. He is also survived by daughters Becky Brown of Ashland, OR and Molly Toapanta Brown of Mindo, Ecuador, sons Michael Brown of Ft. Collins, CO, and Thomas Brown who is now raising the 3rd generation of Browns in the family home in Ladera. Mike's seven grandchildren live across three states and two continents and range in age from 2 to 24. Although Mike was an only child, he leaves behind a large and ever-growing family who carry the memory of his dry wit and warm heart for generations to come.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in his memory to Catholic Charities San Francisco.

PAID OBITUARY





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# One year in

How the pandemic has changed us

## ONE YEAR IN

*continued from page 1*

recollections of local residents. This week, we feature the stories and perspectives of those who've been on the front lines, including medical staff, gig workers and an educator. And we also hear from one person who got

**A Stanford Medicine technician** in Dr. Benjamin Pinsky's lab sorts through patient samples for the COVID-19 infection. Courtesy Steve Fisch/Stanford Medicine.

COVID-19 even before the public health mandate kicked in.

In two weeks, we turn these pages over to our readers, who are stepping forward with their insights about how they've changed as a result of the pandemic.

It's not too late to share your story, whether brief or lengthy. Send it to us by emailing [editor@paweekly.com](mailto:editor@paweekly.com) or by leaving us a three-minute voicemail message at 650-223-6514 by Friday, March 12. Include your full name and a way for us to contact you, and we'll be in touch. ■

## Fearing racism more than the virus

A COVID-19 survivor, Monica Yeung Arima says it's hate crimes against Asian Americans that worry her the most

By Sue Dremann

One year ago in February, Monica Yeung Arima and her husband, Adrian Arima, were celebrating his 70th birthday with their four mates during a trip to Egypt. One week later, on March 3, they became ill with COVID-19 and landed in Stanford Hospital.

The Arimas were among the first Palo Altans to be diagnosed with the deadly coronavirus, which has now killed more than 500,000 Americans. Monica Arima became seriously ill and spent two weeks in the hospital. One of the first patients to receive the drug remdesivir in an early clinical trial, she began to recover within days of treatment, she recalled.

**'I have some immunity, but I still wear my mask and socially distance and do all of the things other people do.'**

MONICA YEUNG ARIMA

Arima recuperated at home for a while longer, and she still experiences some health problems a year later: shortness of breath and congestion. She isn't sure if COVID-19 is to blame or if it's caused by her self-imposed lifestyle changes during the pandemic, she said. She hasn't been to the gym in a year.

An eternal optimist, she took

her recovery from COVID-19 in relative stride.

"I believe in fate. I was scared when I got this disease, but I just dealt with it," she said. "I just try to solve it. I think it's the engineer in me."

Surviving COVID-19 hasn't blunted her caution toward the disease, however. She follows the research and is aware that her immunity might not protect her against the virus' variants. She also doesn't know how long her immunity will last.

"I'm not too, too worried — as long as I'm in protective gear," she said. "I feel I have some immunity, but I still wear my mask and socially distance and do all of the things other people do."

Some people also seem apprehensive around her, knowing she had the disease — another reason why she still takes many visible precautions, she said.

"Since I was sick, some people are very paranoid about it, and I feel it," she said.

Over the past year, Arima says she's also grown concerned about another type of pandemic: xenophobia. Some people have used the virus' origins in China as an excuse for violence — the latest chapter in the long history of racism against Asian Americans in the United States. She says she saw hatred rising a few years ago as political rhetoric turned more anti-immigrant.

It feels more daunting than the virus itself, she said.

"The (coronavirus) doesn't kill me. It's the hate crime that kills



Magali Gauthier

**Monica Yeung Arima** was one of the first known local COVID-19 cases.

me," she said.

Arima herself hasn't been attacked, but fears of victimization are limiting people's sense of freedom, she said. Now people look out for each other in ways that never happened before, she said.

"People say, 'I'll walk you to the car.' It's a gesture to be safe. The security of our Asian Americans is being violated," she said.

Overall, Arima feels fortunate to have survived COVID-19. After a month of isolation and recovery, the first thing she did when she tested negative for the virus was to enjoy her garden. It's the place where she finds solace and connection to nature, she said.

As it is for other people, the pandemic shutdown has taken away many things she used to enjoy to the fullest: gatherings with friends, travel and seeing family.

"I miss the social life I had. I

miss the freedom of being able to travel around. Life under COVID has been more sedentary.

"We watch more TV than normal. I don't cook as much. We buy more food (from restaurants). On average, four to five days a week, we order from outside," she said.

"Before COVID, I had lost weight. After COVID, I gained every single drop back."

Arima does go out with one or two friends to walk or to socialize, but the luncheons with a large group are on hold for now. Zoom meetings fill some of the void.

Arima has used her experience with COVID-19 to further scientific research. She has volunteered in two studies at Stanford University School of Medicine, including one investigating the mental health impacts of the coronavirus, she said.

On Feb. 20, she and her husband discussed their experiences with the virus in a Zoom

webinar with doctors from Palo Alto Medical Foundation and Kaiser Permanente. The event attracted 500 people, she said.

She also has found a philosophical silver lining in the pandemic.

"The society is moving so fast — too fast for anybody to catch up," she said of the Bay Area's frenetic pace.

But things happen in life to make people change their pace.

"Sometimes it slows down so we can stop and smell the roses," she said.

Arima has taken that adage to heart. Her family has bonded more since her son is working from home now, and the Arimas also have rediscovered long-forgotten, simple joys.

"We went to a drive-in movie. We haven't gone to a drive-in for years," she said. ■

Email Sue Dremann at [sdremann@paweekly.com](mailto:sdremann@paweekly.com)



# Finding her footing

Nonprofit leader, mom and advocate for gig workers shares challenges of her pandemic year

By **Kate Bradshaw**  
Almanac Staff Writer

**V**anessa Bain, an organizer and nonprofit leader who lives in Menlo Park, knows she probably isn't alone in calling the pandemic "the hardest period of protracted, long precarity and uncertainty in my life."

As an advocate for essential workers, a mom and one of eight family members stuck mainly at home together over the past year, figuring out how to juggle the demands of advocating for gig workers, protecting her family and taking care of herself has been a struggle, she said in a recent interview.

"It just feels like a constant struggle to really achieve any kind of balance. And at times, I feel like I just have to throw my hands up and be like, 'OK, there's no such thing as balance,'" she said.

The past year has been a challenging one for gig workers in particular, a fact Bain, as an advocate for their interests, has felt acutely.

Bain has worked for the gig grocery shopping and delivery company Instacart and has been a longtime organizer on behalf of its workers. Because she shares a home with seniors who are vulnerable to developing complications from COVID-19, though, she has abstained from making food deliveries for most of the past year.

Instead, she transitioned to working full-time as the

executive director of the gig worker organizing nonprofit Gig Workers Collective. Because funding for the nonprofit is so limited, she isn't taking a paycheck there yet, she said.

The hardest moment of the past year came at the onset of the pandemic, she said. When the shelter-in-place orders came out in California, Instacart announced it planned to hire 300,000 new workers. At first, being declared an essential worker felt like a privilege — it meant being able to work while many, many others weren't.

**'I feel the onus of responsibility to keep my family safe and protected, which has definitely changed the way that I would normally live my life.'**

VANESSA BAIN

But "what became very clear very quickly is that essential is just a useful euphemism for disposable," she said.

"None of us had access to (personal protective equipment); none of us had access to, like, disinfectants or sanitizers or anything like that," Bain said.

So she and her colleagues helped to organize a nationwide walkout for Instacart shoppers.

Even as the workforce of gig-work grocery shoppers doubled or even tripled over the past



Sammy Dallal

**Vanessa Bain** gave up gig work with Instacart during the pandemic in order to protect the health of older family members in her multigenerational household in Menlo Park.

year, she said, Instacart and other companies providing essential services failed to support their workers.

"There's a lot of folks that have showed up day in, day out throughout the pandemic to do work in an essential capacity. And I think all of our companies have really failed to properly protect us and make us feel safe and comfortable in our workplaces, let alone adequately compensate us for the risks that we're taking."

Another blow to gig worker protections that Bain found personally devastating was when California voters passed Proposition 22 in November.

The proposition, heavily funded by gig companies, exempts app-based transportation and delivery companies from having to comply with state legislation and lets them continue to classify their workers as independent contractors rather than employees. The exemption means those companies do not have to provide traditional employee benefits like

overtime, paid sick time or health care to their gig workers.

Its passage, she said, was disheartening because the legislation has clearly been profitable for those companies and its impacts won't affect just the gig economy but also properly classified employees.

Still, she's not giving up.

"There are a lot of us that are committed to seeing this through and ensuring that this isn't a model that spreads to other places, and doesn't get enshrined or codified into law at the national level as well," she said.

## The onus of responsibility

Bain has been doing all of her organizing work while sharing a home with her husband, their 12-year-old daughter, her sister, her sister's partner, and a grandmother, grandfather and great-grandmother — all of whom have had to learn to share a single bathroom and kitchen over the past year.

While it's been difficult at

times, being able to live with family has also provided a sense of financial security, since they are able to share bills, she said.

"I feel really grateful for having this multigenerational household where people have pooled resources and energy and time together to take care of one another in a way that a lot of people don't have," she said.

But that proximity to loved ones has also come with worry about protecting them.

For instance, she worries about how sheltering in place is affecting her child.

"I will say I really miss my daughter's childhood. ... I feel in a lot of ways she's been really stripped of it through this pandemic," she said. "She's an only kid and she's living with seven adults. I can't imagine what that's like on just a social and emotional level for her."

So far, she said, they've all stayed safe and healthy, but for

See **VANESSA BAIN**, page 18

# Back on the mend

Health care worker says constant fear is giving way to hopefulness

By **Kevin Forestieri**

**A**t the start of the pandemic, the normal cadence of working in health care was thrown into complete disarray.

Patients stopped showing up for appointments, and many important visits were relegated to video calls. Protective equipment was in short supply, and health care workers — anxious and unfamiliar with COVID-19 and all of its peculiar traits — were frightened to show up to work. Tens of thousands were infected last year in California alone, and many died.

One year into the pandemic, the frustrations of public health

restrictions and the fear of contracting the potentially deadly illness are still very real. Yet some health care workers are finding reasons to be hopeful and believe the worst of the virus is behind them.

Kerry Boynton, who has worked as a medical assistant at a Mountain View clinic since the start of the pandemic, doesn't sugarcoat her experience: It's been a year filled with sadness, depression, grief, stress and anger. But with declining case numbers and more and more residents receiving the vaccine, misery has given way to optimism.

"We're at the stage of the pandemic where we can have hope

that it can be alleviated, or at least contained," she said.

One of those bright spots is that people are starting to go to the doctor again. When the virus started to spread in March 2020, Boynton remembers her office turning into a complete ghost town. Company policy and public health orders contributed to the situation, she said, but many patients were simply unwilling to come in and risk exposure to the coronavirus.

Many appointments had to instead be conducted over video calls, which she said is anything but ideal. Technical problems, long setup times and remote diagnoses are common, and everyone involved — from



Courtesy Kerry Boynton

**Kerry Boynton**, a medical assistant, says the grief and stress of the pandemic is finally starting to give way to optimism as more people get vaccinated against COVID-19.

the doctors and nurses to the patients themselves — agree that nothing can replace face-to-face appointments.

But now, patients are coming in for non-urgent appointments, Boynton said.

"They say, 'We are so happy to see you' and 'I'm so happy to be out of the house,'" she said. "They say they're lonely, sad and depressed and felt like they didn't have hope. Now they do."

Keeping up with the safety protocols and wearing extra protective equipment at all times remains a slog, however, and it can be brutal over a long shift, she said. The double masks, the sweaty plastic gowns, the face shields that constantly fog up and obscure vision — all of it adds up and makes work a chore. Some of the more industrial-strength face shields look and feel like welding masks and are heavy enough to induce pounding headaches.

"For nine hours a day it is absolutely exhausting," Boynton said. "Our skin is breaking out;

See **KERRY BOYNTON**, page 18



# Finding a silver lining in the pandemic

As an educator and a parent, Jessica Clark has experienced the reopening debate from both sides

By Elena Kadvany

Before last March, the Clark family was constantly in motion.

Jessica Clark to the kindergarten classroom at Duveneck Elementary School where she works as a teacher's aide. Her husband, Jeremy, to O'Connor Hospital in San Jose, where he supervises the respiratory department. Their three children to school, to soccer practice, to endless extracurriculars. Days filled by hurrying up to be somewhere and do something.

"Before the pandemic we were moving in so many different directions in my house. It was just go, go, go all the time," Jessica Clark said. "When all of that stopped, it made you say: Was all that really important? Do we want to go back to that life?"

Thinking about it brings Clark to tears. They now spend more time as a tight-knit family unit whose members lift each other up when one of them is down. It's a silver lining of the pandemic, which for the Clarks and so many brought isolation, fear and anxiety — but also a forced

slowing down that people may have never otherwise accepted.

The week before schools closed last spring, Clark's husband was seeing the early impact of the novel coronavirus at the O'Connor respiratory department. They had started keeping a clothes hamper outside the house where he would change before coming inside. He warned her not to go into work. She emailed her principal and teacher and told them she was taking off Friday, March 13. She didn't feel safe coming in. That Friday, Santa Clara County ordered all public schools in the county to close for what everyone expected would be an extended spring break.

"I didn't know that was going to be my last time seeing that classroom for seven months," Clark said.

Clark's and her children's lives moved online. Instead of reading books to kindergartners and holding their hands while they learn to use scissors for the first time, she became the "mute master" on Zoom — muting a chaotic screen of 5- and 6-year-olds trying to learn online.

For her older children, now a Gunn High School freshman and



Magali Gauthier

**Jessica Clark**, a teacher at Duveneck Elementary in Palo Alto, knows firsthand of the challenges facing both educators and parents of students who struggle with distance learning.

senior, distance learning wasn't the same as in-person school and they missed their friends, but they mostly managed.

But online education was near impossible for Clark's youngest daughter, now a fifth grader at Juana Briones Elementary School, who struggles with anxiety. She stopped logging on to her classes and couldn't access therapy online. (She has an individualized education plan, or IEP, for anxiety and receives specialized services.)

So when the school district

started talking, controversially for some, about elementary schools reopening in the fall, Clark reacted both as an employee and a mother watching her child fall through the cracks at home. She felt terrified about the health risks of working in person but knew firsthand there were children who desperately needed in-person support.

"If I was going to be a parent wanting her to go back then I needed to do that at my job as well," she said.

Clark was part of the first

group of teachers and students to return to elementary campuses in October. She couldn't help but feel like a guinea pig, but she said her husband's experience of working at a hospital helped ground her. Throughout the fall, she watched heated debates over reopening intensify in Zoomed school board meetings and on social media, pitting teachers against parents.

She said she felt confident in the district's safety protocols, but

See **JESSICA CLARK**, page 19

## KERRY BOYNTON

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our bodies are feeling heavy. It's been really rough with all the precautions to keep ourselves, our families, our coworkers and our patients safe."

**'We're at the stage of the pandemic where we can have hope that it can be alleviated, or at least contained.'**

KERRY BOYNTON

One major change since the start of the pandemic has been a decreasing fear level among health care workers. Boynton, like most health care workers in the county, has received two shots of the COVID-19 vaccine, giving her an extra level of safety in working with patients. She said it has helped her dial back the constant fear, which was taking a toll on her health for months.

It was all anxiety all the time before the vaccine. Boynton

said she and her colleagues felt like they were at constant risk of contracting the virus within the next five minutes. Some patients would show up without knowing the results of their COVID-19 test, and a quick phone call would reveal they had tested positive — putting everyone in the building at heightened risk.

Others simply lied.

"We would have people who would flat out lie and say they were coming for an annual physical, and once they got in the room they revealed to us that they had COVID symptoms," she said.

The holiday season was the worst, Boynton said, because of the huge spike in patients who had COVID-19 or had family members who had contracted or even died from the virus. Yet for whatever reason, people remained cavalier about the problem and refused to cancel their plans to travel for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Meanwhile, she was receiving messages almost every day from her union that another employee had died from COVID-19 while just doing their job.

"It's just been heartbreaking," she said. "That goes anywhere from housekeeping and registration duties to nurses and doctors. It's every level of health care that has been affected by this."

Though the pandemic has taken its mental and emotional toll, Boynton said she's been able to keep a level head. At work, she and her colleagues have bonded more than ever before, sharing stories and keeping one another in high spirits. At home, she's learned to hit the brakes and take life slower, appreciating family life while taking care of her elderly mother. The hubbub of social outings has been replaced with quiet contemplation, and that could very well continue once the pandemic subsides.

"Even if I just sit in my backyard and appreciate the squirrels running around the tree, just slowing things down in life rather than being social and having to go out to eat at restaurants or meet up with people," she said, "I've been appreciating a slower pace in life, and it's been OK." ■

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## VANESSA BAIN

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her it meant giving up app-based grocery shopping work outside the home — even while she's had to take on some of those risks anyway as her family's primary grocery shopper.

"I feel the onus of responsibility to keep my family safe and protected, which has definitely changed the way that I would normally live my life," she said.

On a personal level, she added, as someone who worked outside of the home pre-pandemic, it has taken some adjustment for grandparents and her child to understand that just because she's home doesn't mean she's available to play or help out.

Having blurrier boundaries between her work and home lives has also made it harder to feel that she's fully succeeding in one realm or the other, she said.

"I still continue to feel like I'm constantly failing everybody around me, everything I do, be it work or my personal life, because I feel like there aren't the same kind of parameters around

how you allocate time," she said.

"I've actually felt a pretty tremendous amount of guilt around the idea that I can't dedicate myself fully to work or home right now. I'm constantly split between the two," she said. "And it ... has definitely led to some very real changes in my mental health and well-being."

Looking back, she said, one lesson she's learned from her pandemic experience is the importance of self-care. It didn't come easily, and it took seeing other people she loves struggle with similar challenges for her to take the matter seriously, she said.

"You're not really any good to anybody else if you're not feeling OK or feeling capable of doing things," she said. "I've had to hold myself accountable more to my well-being."

"I feel like I'm advocating for myself more at this point than I have in a long time," she added. "And I think that's actually something that, while it's challenging, is long overdue." ■

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# The stress test

Palo Alto paramedic reflects on the fire department's evolving response to COVID-19

By Gennady Sheyner

As a paramedic in the Palo Alto Fire Department, Sunny Johnson-Gutter is no stranger to helping residents deal with trauma, devastation and — at times — even celebration.

In his 10 years in Palo Alto, he has responded to emergencies both within the city limits — as when he helped deliver a baby on University Avenue in 2011 — and beyond, as when he took part in a 2019 strike force that battled wildfires in Napa County.

But in January, Johnson-Gutter and Palo Alto firefighter/paramedics Gregory Coffelt, Jordan Braa and Matt Ferguson found themselves in a new setting: a hospital in Bakersfield that was overflowing with COVID-19 patients after a surge of cases in the weeks that followed the holiday season.

When the firefighters arrived at Kern Adventist Hospital on Jan. 3, the intensive care unit was overflowing, Johnson-Gutter said in a recent interview. The hospital had established care treatment areas by putting up tents in the parking lot, and nurses and doctors were hustling to take care of “waves upon waves” of patients.

The Palo Alto paramedics immediately joined the fray by helping to administer medication, take vital signs and move patients, some of whom were

intubated and had to be flipped over several times per day. In many cases, the assistance came down to helping a patient get to the bathroom or providing them with a cup of water, he said. With nurses focused on providing vital care to dozens of patients at a time, the “human aspects” of patient care sometimes got relegated to a second tier of importance, he said.

“It’s just a constant barrage of needs, needs, needs and needs — people who are sick, and they need care and compassion,” Johnson-Gutter, 43, said. “Everyone is doing a great job, but I just don’t know how they can continue to do that without having some sort of relief.”

The human aspect has always been a critical component of the job for Palo Alto firefighters, and it’s one that has been put to the test in this year of social distancing. Firefighters and paramedics are, after all, the ultimate team players. They respond in units, and when they’re not on calls, they train, decompress and — to a great extent — reside in neighborhood stations, where they work 48-hour shifts.

So when the COVID-19 pandemic began to accelerate in February and March of 2020, they weren’t just dealing with the threat of a mysterious and deadly virus; they were also confronting new rules that, in many ways, ran counter to the firefighter ethos of togetherness.



Magali Gauthier

**Sunny Johnson-Gutter**, a Palo Alto Fire Department paramedic, spent two weeks working at a hospital in Bakersfield that was overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients.

In the early weeks of the pandemic, Palo Alto firefighters were told that they can no longer eat meals together. Dining in separate rooms, Johnson-Gutter said, took away from the normal bonding experience, which he said is a critical way that department staff recuperate, share experiences and re-energize after calls.

So employees responded by installing heat lamps and creating outdoor areas that allowed them to share their meals while maintaining a safe distance. They also agreed that they would do everything they could to protect one another from the spreading virus.

“We all made an agreement that we would wear masks even

before a lot of other departments were making a push,” he said. “We encouraged each other, ‘I’m wearing my mask to show support for the fact that I don’t want you and your family to get sick.’”

**‘It’s just a constant barrage of needs, needs and needs — people who are sick, and they need care and compassion.’**

SUNNY JOHNSON-GUTTER

Even with these precautions, the first responders felt heightened anxiety, thanks in no small

part to a shortage of personal protective equipment. Much like hospital workers and emergency responders elsewhere, Palo Alto firefighters were asked to reuse gowns and N95 masks. There was also a lack of knowledge back then about the incubation period of the virus and the best ways to stem its spread.

Despite these uncertainties, Johnson-Gutter said he and his colleagues at the fire department were confident that they’d be able to cope with the looming threat. They were resigned to the fact that some would probably catch the virus, but they also felt that, if that were to happen, they’d have the means to take

See **SUNNY JOHNSON-GUTTER**, page 20

## JESSICA CLARK

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it was troubling not being able to control students’ and families’ behaviors outside the classroom. Her students, too young to know any better, would blurt out that their family was planning to travel to Hawaii over the holidays or that they were allowed to have playdates without masks on.

“It was a little hard to stomach when my husband is working 15-hour days,” Clark said. “It almost felt like there were two worlds going on — some were sacrificing a lot, and some weren’t sacrificing anything.”

Her fears eased over time as she adjusted to a new way of interacting with students — and especially when she saw them benefiting from being back in school.

“It was such a joy to see them on the first day of school. It was like they came to life,” she said.

Unlike in the spring, when

they moved to distance learning with students they already knew, this year’s class only knew each other and their teacher as squares on a computer screen.

**‘Before the pandemic ... it was just go, go, go all the time. When all of that stopped, it made you say: Was all that really important?’**

JESSICA CLARK

“Some kids you would think were alright on Zoom and then they get into the classroom and you see a different side to them or a different personality. Was all this going outside the camera view?” she said.

Clark didn’t hesitate to send her youngest daughter back to school for hybrid learning when the option became available,

and it’s been a “game-changer,” Clark said. In the fall, she initially let her older children decide if they would want to return, back when district officials thought high schools would be able to reopen in January — but has since changed her mind. Now, a year into the pandemic and with options for high schoolers to come to campus to Zoom from classrooms on the horizon, “there’s no question,” she said. “I know they need to go back. I see that they need that social interaction with their peers.”

A year into their new life, the family has settled into a routine. Her husband, who’s now vaccinated, leaves for work at 5 a.m. Clark leaves at 7:30 a.m. to be at Duveneck three days a week, where she wears an N95 mask and has learned to talk loudly over the industrial air purifier whirring in the back of the classroom. The oldest Clark daughter drives her sister

to school in the mornings and makes sure her younger brother (who no longer plays club soccer, his busy pre-pandemic activity) is up for his online classes.

Clark sees herself in educators who are nervous about coming back to work this spring and is now in the position of sharing several months of reopening experience, both the good and the challenging. The vaccine will make a huge difference in teachers’ comfort levels, she said. She was excited and relieved to get her first vaccine shot on Monday.

The biggest challenge of the last 12 months, Clark said, remains living with the stress of the unknown. What if she or her husband is exposed to the coronavirus and brings it home? When will she be able to hug her parents or get together with her siblings, freely, for a family barbecue?

“I’m not usually a person

who’s anxious. I seriously have had some anxiety just trying to keep everything together and afloat,” Clark said. “We’re all just trying to keep our head above water and get to that finish line, wherever it is. Just like everyone else, right?”

But she comes back to that silver lining: family. She got to spend more time than she would have otherwise with her oldest daughter before she leaves for college. They talk about mental health and tell each other that everyone’s allowed to have bad days.

“It’s been a really hard year. When one person is up, someone might be down but you help each other meet in the middle and bring that person back up where maybe we didn’t do that before as a family so much,” Clark said. “We know now that we’re a really tight-knit family.”

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# A life put on hold

Grit, family and a Latin radio station are the few things helping one family hang on

By Lloyd Lee

The beginning of the pandemic felt like a sprint to Francisca Vazquez. That's when she and her household of five at Buena Vista Mobile Home Park in Palo Alto found themselves scrambling to come up with a month's rent in April.

Now a year into the public health crisis, Vazquez — like so many others still struggling with the consequences of the pandemic — tells of a seemingly endless marathon for survival, and a life that has largely been put on hold.

"We are barely recovering," Vazquez, 25, said in a recent interview.

Vazquez has spent the past year mostly tending to her family, which includes her now 1-year-old little brother, Jorge Amir De La Luz. She's also picked up gig work, as so many have during the pandemic, making deliveries through apps such as DoorDash, UberEats and Instacart.

Her mom, Ryena, was a floral designer who lost her job after her employer, a flower shop, shut down. She recently started selling "a bit of everything" at a flea market, including clothes and children's toys, which required her to invest her own money just to get started.

These choices weren't driven out of some entrepreneurial spirit with the hopes of growing a flourishing business or making a lucrative living through

delivery apps — they were one of many tactical decisions Vazquez said her family made to just get by.

"That's what we use to make ends meet when we have tough times," she said.

Vazquez's household at the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park, where she has lived for over a decade, includes her mom, her stepfather, two younger siblings, one of whom is in college, and her boyfriend who recently became her fiance and is also helping the household through delivery-app work.

Her stepfather was a chef contracted by Google prior to the pandemic. Since the offices closed, Vazquez said, the company has sent checks that have somewhat helped to sustain the family. But around last week, according to Vazquez, all the contract chefs at Google were given a 60-day notice that their contract would not be renewed.

So far, her family has received zero help from federal government aid. Vazquez and a few others in her family are some of the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. who were left out of the two stimulus packages passed in 2020.

While millions of Americans have received COVID-19 relief, Vazquez and her family have been left behind to fend for themselves.

"At the moment, when this hit and they talked about all this government help, we knew we were not gonna qualify at all," Vazquez said. "We just had



Magali Gauthier

**Francisca Vazquez** and her siblings, Jorge Amir and Camantha De La Luz, stand in the doorway of their home in Buena Vista Mobile Home Park in Palo Alto on March 3. Her family has to move out after losing jobs due to the pandemic.

to see how we could make it through without the help that everybody else was getting."

## 'We are barely recovering.'

FRANCISCA VAZQUEZ

The closest her family has gotten to a stimulus check so far was \$500 from Sacred Heart Community Service — a resource Vazquez said her family only heard about through a Latin radio station.

To add to the financial instability, there's a new challenge as well: Vazquez and her family have recently been left with no choice but to move out of Palo Alto, a city she has lived in for

most of her life.

Owing to a complicated ownership situation at the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park, Vazquez said her mobile home unit is one of around 11 on the property the owners of the park are trying to get rid of. Her options were either to live in a smaller unit within the park or be paid to relocate entirely. Vazquez went with the latter.

With such short notice of the move, Vazquez said her family will not be able to purchase a new mobile home elsewhere. Instead, for the next few years, Vazquez and her family will rent another mobile home in Sunnyvale.

For Vazquez, what's helped the most throughout the past year hasn't been the small checks or

the news of a vaccine — though it certainly helps her feel that there will be an end to the pandemic — but rather familial support.

"We're actually really family-oriented," she said. "Throughout this whole time, we actually had each other so that's what really helped all of us."

Vazquez is happy to report that no one in her family was infected with the coronavirus.

With her fiance, she hopes that she will start talking about a new family when things become more stable.

"It's a little weird how everything happened," she said, "But it's become a new normal."

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## SUNNY JOHNSON-GUTTER

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care of themselves and the city's support.

While maintaining social distance between themselves, Johnson-Gutter's team at the Rinconada Park fire station, known as Station 3, was also confronting isolation from the wider community. When the newly rebuilt station opened in March 2020 and the Station 3 crew was able to return to its assigned neighborhood after a two-year exile in a makeshift station near the Baylands, the long-awaited milestone passed without any public ceremony or a community celebration.

Firefighter crews also had to halt their tradition of shopping at local supermarkets. Not wishing to go into the crowds and compete for space with other shoppers, including local

seniors, Station 3 staff began to buy supplies in bulk from food distributors, Johnson-Gutter said.

That was just one of many adjustments that emergency responders have had to make over the past year, as they were basically charged with crafting a new playbook to deal with a once-a-century threat. Among other protocols paramedics established: They limited the number of staff members who got close to patients with COVID-19 symptoms. They also began to rely more on decontamination misters after calls that involve potential COVID-19 cases.

Despite these changes, and the ongoing concerns about recent (and pending) budget cuts in the fire department, Johnson-Gutter said he and his colleagues feel fortunate to have the ability to do a job they love and to see their

close friends and colleagues on a daily basis — a luxury that many people don't have these days.

He was also happy to volunteer for the assignment in Bakersfield, where the response unit stayed for two weeks. Even though the four paramedics had different shifts, they made a point to still meet daily for outdoor meals.

"It is so integral in just how we've been trained and how we've learned to deal with stress," Johnson-Gutter said. "Being away from our families for two weeks straight, it was very refreshing to be able to meet with our co-workers on a daily basis and kind of recount what we learned and pass on information and kind of share experiences."

When they returned, each member of the team went through five days of quarantine and a debriefing session with a

department therapist. They took some time to reflect on the stress of the prior two weeks. The trip, he said, left them feeling "on edge."

"It took us a while to kind of process, 'Why am I having this argument with my wife right now? What is this about?' It's this realization that you've just been through a very stressful experience, and it's going to take a while to readjust to normal life. It's normal. It's OK to be aware of it."

The trip also brought into stark relief the ways in which different regions have responded to the pandemic. Here, tech workers immediately shifted to remote working, which helped halt the spread of COVID-19, and public health officials quickly imposed shelter-in-place rules. In Bakersfield, many employees don't have the luxury of working remotely, and the health restrictions had

been less stringent — as evidenced by restaurants that were completely packed with indoor customers, he said.

While Palo Alto's budget challenges continue to cast a shadow over the fire department, the past few months have brought some hope. Every member of the department has been vaccinated against COVID-19, and the city was largely spared during the post-holiday surge, when other parts of the county saw increases in cases.

"You walk around Palo Alto and you see people running with masks on," Johnson-Gutter said. "People in this community and surrounding communities are very much on board with following the guidelines, which has made our jobs much more bearable for sure." ■

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File No.: 286717

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

Senior Care Authority Peninsula, located at 1040 S. Claremont St., San Mateo, CA 94402, San Mateo County.

Registered owner(s):  
ANNAMARIE BUONOCORE  
414 Barneson Ave.  
San Mateo, CA 94402

This business is conducted by: An Individual.

The registrant commenced to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 02/01/2017. This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on February 18, 2021.  
(ALM Feb. 26; Mar. 5, 12, 19, 2021)

EQUINE EVENTS  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
File No.: 286787

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

Equine Events, located at 1619 Carleton Ct., Redwood City, CA 94061, San Mateo County; Mailing address: PO Box 620143, Woodside, CA 94062.

Registered owner(s):  
JOAN LORRAINE MCLAREN  
1619 Carleton Ct.  
Redwood City, CA 94061

This business is conducted by: An Individual.

The registrant commenced to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on Feb. 24, 2021. This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on February 24, 2021.  
(ALM Mar. 5, 12, 19, 26, 2021)

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# Viewpoint

IDEAS, THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS ABOUT LOCAL ISSUES

## Answering the call

Late last year, we launched our annual Holiday Fund charitable campaign for local nonprofits, well aware that we were at the tail end of a year unlike any other and unsure of what to expect when it concluded. Almanac readers have been very generous over the years — since its inception, The Almanac's fund has given away more than \$4 million to Peninsula organizations providing essential services that benefit needy families, children and individuals — but 2020 was marked by economic and personal turmoil from the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in March.

But fortunately, readers answered our call for donations at a critical time for these nonprofits, raising \$272,000 — including a \$100,000 anonymous donation in December — and exceeding the previous year's total of over \$150,000. The money will be divided evenly among 10 nonprofit beneficiaries: LifeMoves, the Boys & Girls Club of the Peninsula, Ecumenical Hunger Program, Health Connected, Literacy Partners-Menlo Park, Ravenswood Family Health Center, St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room, StarVista, St. Francis Center and Upward Scholars.

These organizations offer critical programs and

support, ranging from emergency housing and food assistance to health care and education services, and they have had to pivot and adapt quickly to coronavirus restrictions to continue their important work. The Boys & Girls Club, for example, set up in-person working spaces for online learning to safely support students with distance learning, while Literacy Partners-Menlo Park transformed its mission in May to be able to support worthy organizations beyond its prior mission of library-based adult and family literacy. And health care providers like Ravenswood Family Health Center had to quickly put in place a swath of new regulations to keep their patients and staff safe, and leverage connections to track down needed personal protective equipment. It has been inspiring to hear how many people have worked tirelessly to meet the needs of Peninsula residents at such a tumultuous time, and to hear stories about how grateful people are to have the help of these nonprofits.

Amid such a dark time, it is uplifting to see the community come together in recognition of a worthy cause like the Holiday Fund. Thank you to our readers for supporting this year's campaign. ▣

## EDITORIAL

The opinion of The Almanac

## LETTERS

Our readers write

## Publicizing solutions during the pandemic

Thank you to The Almanac for your ongoing coverage of the societal impacts of COVID-19, and of ways that our community can cope with the financial and personal challenges which have affected all of us.

Two recent stories led to this letter: In early January there was an excellent review of 2020's challenges, providing thoughtful perspectives for us all and focusing on Menlo Park's resiliency ("2020: A difficult year that showcased Menlo Park's resilience," Jan. 1). On Jan. 29 there was an explanation of San Mateo County's relief fund for restaurants, which is now receiving applications for grants ("San Mateo County creates 'financial lifeline' for eateries").

In a crisis like this pandemic, the challenges are so complicated that they can be overwhelming. Our leaders in the community are responding as best as they can with relief programs, in order to help people feed their families and pay their rent.

The press has a big role in publicizing these various relief programs which are available. Thank you for your efforts to help people find solutions to their families' day-to-day challenges.

Another group that is helping to publicize solutions are our cities' chambers of commerce. In collaboration with elected officials

countywide, they are helping to organize and publicize all of the relief services to individuals and employers so they can keep their heads above water.

Those programs include food delivery to families in need, rent relief and eviction protection, child care resources, health services, housing and utilities assistance, financial relief and resources to help small businesses, and publicizing volunteer opportunities and ways to donate to these various efforts.

The impact of COVID on wage earning, paying the rent, and feeding our families has been staggering. It is important to remember that the small businesses in our town employ so many people, providing the paychecks which keep families going. These small businesses are scrambling to stay afloat and bring back their employees, so that everyone can return to earning their living. Thank you to all The Almanac staff for working hard to publicize the solutions which will help families, seniors, and employers to successfully get past this pandemic.

*Clem Molony  
Menalto Avenue, Menlo Park*

## Becker's call to reopen schools

While I disagree with several of state Sen. Becker's assertions, application of sketchy statistics, and use of the tropes "recent studies" and "common sense," I am confused by his worry about students' "...mental health, social isolation ... emotional costs..." ("State

Sen. Josh Becker calls for San Mateo County schools to reopen," Feb. 26). For years, I have witnessed teens everywhere sitting in groups not socially involved but glued to their phones while not engaging in verbal discussions. The "studies" I have seen refer to this phenomenon as destructive of the very concerns he raises. Last, perhaps in school districts with hefty financial resources, those officials are able to purchase the wherewithal to allow schools to become more safe; what does he propose to do to aid those school districts that are not able to afford his recommendations?

*Jeff Colflesh  
Placitas Avenue, Menlo Park*

## Violence begets violence

I am very disappointed that President Joe Biden, who ran on ending wars and not escalating conflicts in the Middle East, authorized a round of airstrikes in Syria last week. The bombed facilities were used by Iran backed militia, but such a raid is not going to accomplish anything, especially if we want to restart nuclear talks with Iran. Where is diplomacy? Why didn't Biden ask Congress for permission for such a strike? What are the consequences for such actions? The public should be outraged. I am worried that Biden's national security team is using force when they could be using other means. Time and time again, history has shown that violence begets violence.

*Barbara Kyser  
Los Altos*





# 2797 Ross Road, Palo Alto



## Bright, Luxurious, with a Modern Floorplan

Recently completed in 2017, this incredible home offers top-of-the-line luxury, spectacular build quality, and a floorplan ideally suited for the modern family. Offering 4 bedrooms, 3.5 bathrooms, and nearly 3,300 square feet of living space, this stunning modern farmhouse-style home welcomes you with a fully enclosed, fireplace-centered outdoor living room, and inside, high, dramatic ceilings and excellent use of glass craft a bright, airy ambiance. White oak floors extend throughout expansive, open gathering spaces, including the living room with a linear fireplace, the quartz-appointed kitchen with Thermador appliances, and the family room with a wall of glass opening completely to the backyard for true indoor/outdoor living. Four spacious bedrooms include the inviting master suite with a spa-like bathroom plus access to the backyard. This home also boasts numerous smart features, including a security system and a touchpad-controlled Sonos sound system, as well as an office so you can work from home in style. Topping it all off is a location close to California Avenue, with easy access to Caltrain and commute routes, and served by excellent Palo Alto schools.

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# Artscene

PEOPLE AND PERFORMANCES IN ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

## Creativity and joy:

### Palo Alto hopes to combat the ongoing pandemic blahs with new public art

Where to find temporary murals, interactive installations and more this March

By Karla Kane

What do a whimsical marching band, a playful sculpture, data about municipal trees and a scavenger hunt have in common? As the COVID-19 pandemic lumbers on, — keeping performing-arts venues shuttered, museums and galleries limited, and Zoom fatigue very, very real — the Palo Alto Public Art Department is ready to spruce things up with some colorful, uplifting new projects that can be safely encountered.

“Temporary public art has become a really big field,” the city’s Public Art Program Director Elise DeMarzo said in a recent interview. “There’s a really big focus right now for everyone because, while we like our big splashy permanent artworks and our big architectural artworks, those take a lot of time to engage. People really need some joy and relief now.”

In addition to offering something to the public, it’s also a way of supporting numerous artists during a tough time, she added.

First up in the new batch of works are the eight site-specific murals bringing good vibrations to the downtown and California Avenue business districts. The project was commissioned in conjunction with the city’s Uplift Local initiative and more funding is available to continue the program if the murals prove popular and more potential host sites come forward, DeMarzo said. The images are printed on aluminum, applied like wallpaper, recyclable and expected to remain in place for up to a year.

The work of Downtown North artist Lauren Berger has what she calls a “bohemian California feminist idealism,” reflected in her mix of 1970s inspiration and fresh, contemporary aesthetic. Her new mural, “See You Soon” is located close to home, at 542 High St.

“My digital illustrations typically live out their existences on screen, so the opportunity to have my digital artwork printed 8 feet wide for a public audience of passersby was really exciting to me,” Berger said.

“See You Soon” depicts an engaging scene of current life in the slice of downtown Palo Alto in which it’s displayed, complete with Stanford Theatre marquee, outdoor dining and safely-masked socializing.

“I was inspired by the supportive and interconnected nature of our community during this difficult and historic time,” she said. “Our dependence on one another has really come into focus for me this past year, whether it’s risking one’s health to provide important services, supporting local businesses, or simply wearing a mask.”

Another Palo Alto artist, Robin Apple, uses iPhone photography to create colorful, abstracted and collaged images, often inspired by local nature. Her “Sunrise at the Baylands, 2020” is installed at 668 Ramona St.

Apple, who’s also a clinical psychologist, said her work is informed by emotion within a cultural context.

“In today’s divisive world, I’m eager to create art that expresses themes of diversity. Because my phone serves as my art studio, I’m able to encounter all kinds of interesting and stimulating environments and situations,” she wrote in her application, which she shared with this news organization.

Over at 265 California Ave., Damon Belanger’s “California Avenue Marching Band” offers the neighborhood some welcome cheer, with a host of intriguing characters parading by. “They may look a bit odd, and they might play off key, but everyone’s welcome to join in and sing along,” according to the mural’s description from the Palo Alto Public Art Program.

**‘It’s a good mix of projects, some from high-traffic communities and other ones that are very neighborhood-specific, which is really the intent.’**

ELISE DEMARZO, PALO ALTO PUBLIC ART PROGRAM DIRECTOR

All eight murals can be found with the help of an interactive map (at [tinyurl.com/PaloAltoartmap](http://tinyurl.com/PaloAltoartmap)) which provides information on each artwork, in addition to its location.

Meanwhile, the city and Uplift Local have continued to offer funding and receive applications on a rolling basis for its \$1,000 Artilift microgrants, aimed at sparking nontraditional artwork, interactions and performances.

“It’s a good mix of projects, some from high-traffic communities and other ones that are very neighborhood-specific, which is really the intent,” DeMarzo said of the proposals received so far. “Everyone’s been isolated for a long time. This could be a good way for people to find connection, even if we have to isolate a little longer.”

Seventeen microgrant projects have been selected already and the first are starting to appear around town, including Connie Chuang, Debra Cen and David Peng’s “Trees of Gratitude in Old



Magali Gauthier

“See You Soon” by Lauren Jane Berger is a brightly colored temporary mural installed at 542 High St. in downtown Palo Alto.

Palo Alto: Lunar New Year Celebration, 2021,” which is located at Bryant Street and Lowell Avenue (a new version of an installation that first appeared in December). A scavenger hunt by Palo Alto artist Susan Meade is likely the next to launch. Meade will be creating artworks from her daily walks around Palo Alto and leaving small reproductions for finders to keep and post online, DeMarzo said.

Atherton artist Priyanka Rana’s upcoming installation involves help from the youngest members of the community. Her project will be a sculpture made up of small toys donated by kids — an ode to how children have struggled and persevered over the past year and a way for them to participate in art.

“I want to tell them, ‘We are proud of the resilience that you’ve shown,’” she said. “My proposal was that public art often neglects children as viewers, which is a shame because they are the most curious of us all.”

She wanted her microgrant work to be installed somewhere accessible to children, so locals will soon be able to find it at Edith Johnson Park. She’s enthusiastic about public art in general, especially with museums and other venues still pretty restricted. “Let the museums come to us,” she mused. “Let the art come to people.”

Rana said she was touched and inspired by how many busy families have gone out of their way to contribute toys to the project so far.

“I hope they bring the kids to the park and see this art piece,” she said. “They can see how their individual toys come together and create one form. The toys tell their own stories.”

She also hopes kids will be inspired to take things that may be destined for the landfill and recycle them into something new.

“It’s fascinating because my kids have contributed toys (to previous projects) and said, ‘What a waste, mom! Why are you wasting toys in a sculpture?’” she said with a laugh, “but they also love to see how it comes together.”

Other potential microgrant ideas DeMarzo mentioned include a plan by a

high-school student to restore, paint and make available a piano to the public; a songwriter who wants to compose something for getting kids excited to return to school; and a proposal to use a meditation exercise to create a mural at Gunn High School.

While the intent of the microgrants program is indeed to fund an eclectic mix of projects outside of what may more typically constitute public art, DeMarzo acknowledged that, as the COVID pandemic continues, projects that involve in-person interaction or live performances are less feasible at the moment. Still, with funding secured for up to 40 projects through September, she encourages performing artists to apply.

“We’re not seeing as many of those types of applications at the moment but we would love to,” she said.

King Plaza, in front of City Hall, has been home to temporary artwork for long before the COVID-19 crisis hit. Starting this week, the plaza will be host to a very Palo Alto-sounding project — Adam Marcus’ Arbor. Marcus took data about Palo Alto’s more than 45,000 public trees from the city’s Open Data Portal and turned it into a sculptural, three-dimensional map of sorts, representing all the trees in every direction, radiating out from King Plaza.

“This is like a data geek’s perfect artwork,” DeMarzo laughed. This data spatialization of Palo Alto’s urban forest, inspired by zoetropes and cycloramas, is anticipated to be in place for about 10 months.

While all of these recent and upcoming projects vary wildly in style, media and scope, what they have in common is the goal of enhancing the city’s vibrance and lifting public spirit. DeMarzo also hopes the initiatives will continue giving opportunities to emerging and local artists in particular.

“Everyone’s looking for some creativity and some joy,” she said. “Hopefully we can continue to deliver that.”

For more information, go to [tinyurl.com/PaloAltotemporaryart](http://tinyurl.com/PaloAltotemporaryart). ■

Email Karla Kane at [kkane@paweekly.com](mailto:kkane@paweekly.com)



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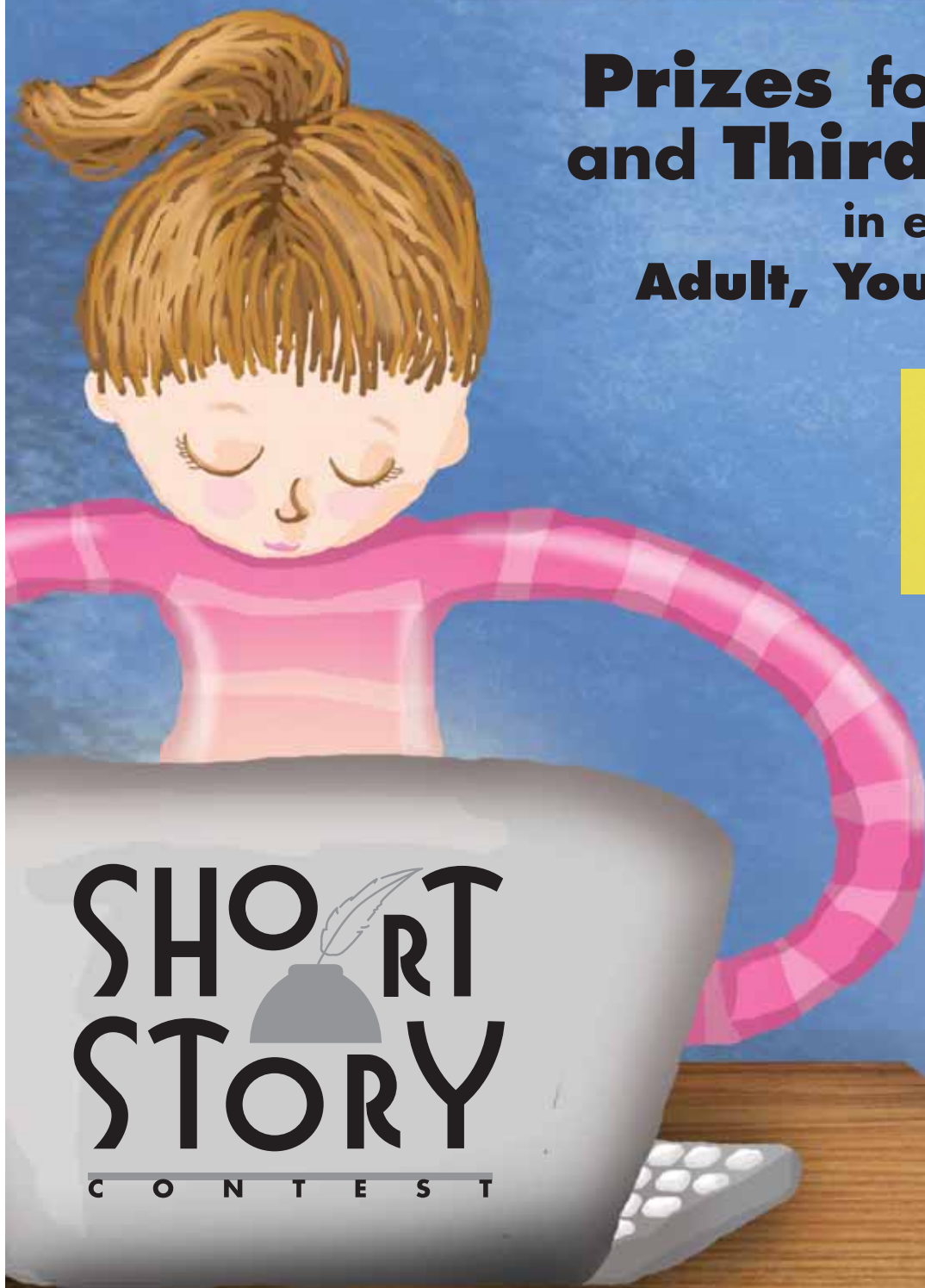
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# 242 Oak Grove Avenue, Atherton



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