

The Almanac

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Tears, hugs and masks as children go back to school

Ravenswood, Portola Valley and Las Lomitas district students kick off their fall terms

By Angela Swartz

There were tears from parents and kindergartners alike at Los Robles-Ronald McNair Academy in East Palo Alto as they hugged each other at drop-off on the first day of school Wednesday, Aug. 25. Some students returned to campus last winter in small, stable cohorts, but with everyone back this school year full time, some of the young students are experiencing their first days in school, having forgone preschool amid the pandemic.

Alex Quezada, principal of the K-5 school, said school staffers feel “excited, hopeful, energized and committed” to the prospect of restoring and strengthening relationships with students and families.

“We reaped the rewards of building strong relationships with students because our student cohorts were smaller, compared to a pre-pandemic year,” he said in an email. “This fall, we continued to apply that

knowledge and experience and designed the student experience to be more intimate and personalized.”

Kindergarten teacher Ruth Cuellar said it’s nice to see all the faces, smiles and laughs.

Starting Nov. 1, Ravenswood School District will require vaccination for eligible students in order to participate in extracurricular activities such as sports, view according to the district’s 2021 safety plan. Students who become eligible for the vaccine during the school year will have two months to provide proof of full vaccination before this requirement applies.

If families give permission, the district will test students weekly for COVID-19.

Staff vaccination rates

Ravenswood district staff report a much lower COVID-19 vaccination rate than neighboring school districts. As of Aug. 12, 72% of certified staff (which includes teachers) and 73% of classified staff have gotten their



Magali Gauthier

Marcedalia Bocanegra gives her daughter Yazlen Lozano, 5, a kiss on the first day of school at Los Robles-Ronald McNair Academy in East Palo Alto on Aug. 25.

COVID-19 vaccine.

To encourage vaccinations among staff, the district has hosted vaccination clinics at its school sites to facilitate access and “will continue to find

opportunities to do so throughout the year,” said governing board member Ana Maria Pulido in an email.

In the neighboring Menlo Park City School District, over

95% of staff members are fully vaccinated. The staff vaccination rate is 90% in the Woodside Elementary School District.

See **BACK TO SCHOOL**, page 17

Portola Valley residents hold ad hoc evacuation drill

By Angela Swartz

Cars pulled up to the Alpine Road entrance off Interstate Highway 280 and made U-turns, heading back into Portola Valley on a Thursday evening in August.

The drivers were taking part in a grassroots evacuation drill led by longtime Portola Valley resident Sofie Vandeputte, who took matters into her own hands after town officials said such an exercise wasn’t worthwhile. Counters said 384 cars left town via Portola, Alpine and Arastradero roads, mostly through Alpine, during the Aug. 12 drill.

“Do we feel fully prepared? Absolutely not. Will it start

a conversation? I hope so,” Vandeputte said, noting that she’s convinced more people will participate if a drill is organized by the town. Such a drill could help ease any existing tensions between residents and town officials, she said.

“I was told they (town officials) are not going to organize a townwide drill because they believe they get much more data from simulation models, which is probably true, but I thought an exercise, or combination of both, would provide more data.”

The town is getting ready to launch an evacuation study this month to analyze different scenarios that may affect evacuations and suggest whether improvements to

Portola Valley’s infrastructure may be beneficial, according to the town.

Of the 384 cars spotted, not all were participating in the drill. Only 198 participants filled out a Google spreadsheet noting where they left from, what exit route they used and how long it took to get to the freeway. Vandeputte acknowledged a lot of residents were away on vacation in mid-August.

Vandeputte said she was motivated by the 2020 CZU Lightning Complex fires, which came close to Portola Valley but didn’t require residents to evacuate. She said she’s lost sleep worrying about what an evacuation would look like and noted it’s been “very, very expensive” to

remove eight eucalyptus trees in the back of her property.

“It came close last year,” Vandeputte said. “I looked onto Windy Hill and I saw the glow (from the fire) at night and it became real. Some nights we parked the cars outside because it would be easier to leave if the power goes out and you can’t open your garage door. It’s no longer a hypothetical.”

Two days before the ad hoc drill, town and county officials emailed residents that because of “on-going community comments,” they don’t plan to host a townwide evacuation drill since they didn’t expect participation to be significant.

The group Portola Valley Neighbors United (PVNU)

requested the town conduct at least one townwide emergency evacuation drill with the Woodside Fire Protection District, San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) before the fire season began in late May or early June and before acting further on housing mandates from the state (Portola Valley is tasked with designating locations for 253 new housing units in its next housing element.)

Town Manager Jeremy Dennis clarified that the message wasn’t specifically about Vandeputte’s efforts, as others have asked in the past about hosting a drill.

See **EVACUATION**, page 14

INSIDE

FALL CLASS GUIDE 19 | ARTS 21 | FOOD 22

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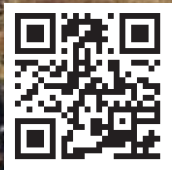
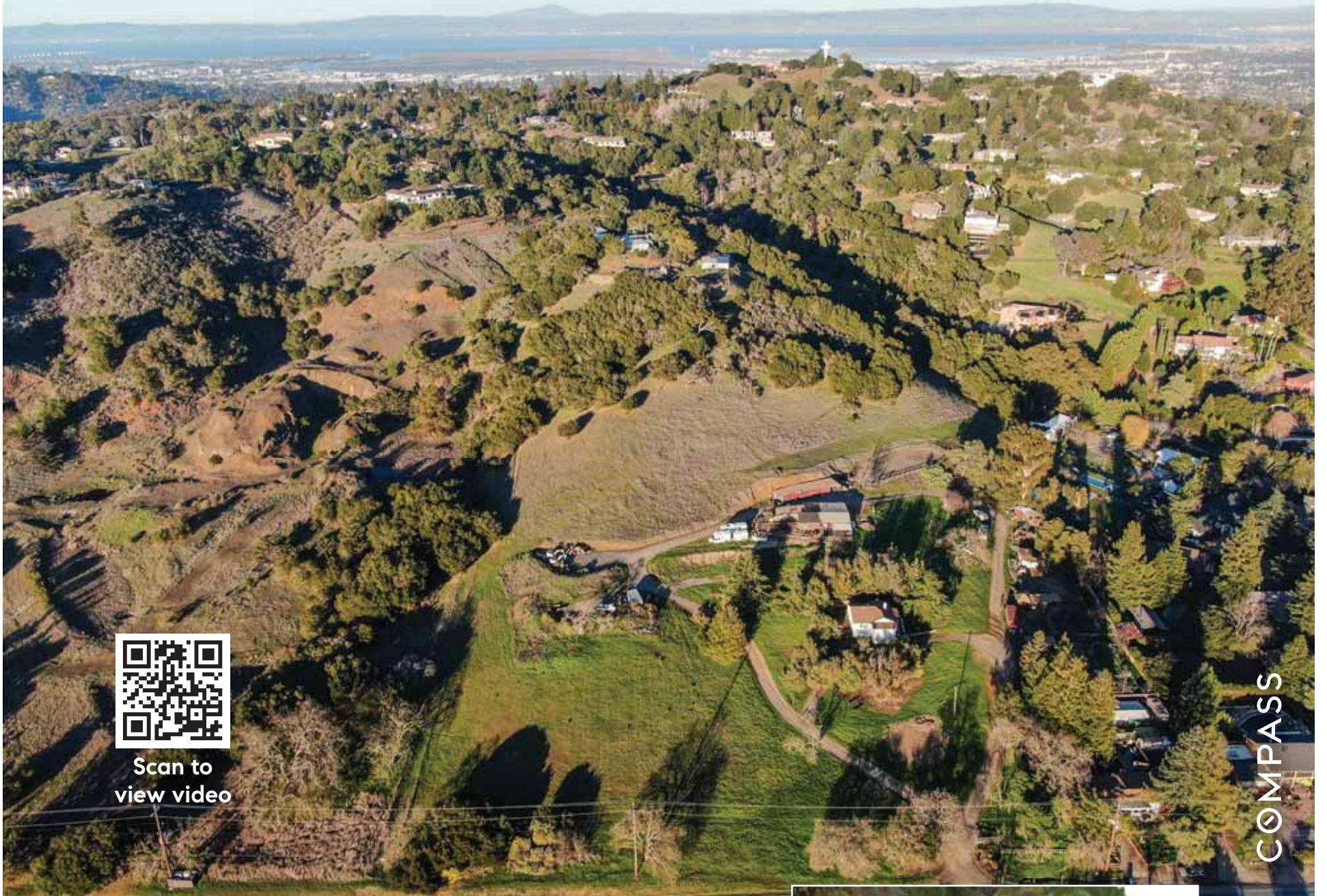


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Philip Wartena

Jesse Love, 16, stands in front of his race car. Love, who hails from Menlo Park, has been racing since he was 5 years old.

Data-driven Menlo Park teen is turning NASCAR into a science

Champion driver Jesse Love blends man, machine and his Silicon Valley roots

By Kali Shiloh

After just 12 laps at Sonoma Raceway, Jesse Love's fireproof bodysuit is soaked through and heavy. That's not unusual. Roasting in the driver's seat, he can lose up to 8 pounds of sweat before he crosses the finish line. His pit crew — all adults — also wear fireproof

suits and perspire in the heat, blazing through cigarettes as they watch the empty track and listen to their race radios, waiting for his car to whip around the bend.

When it finally does, they run to the vehicle, hoist it up on a jack stand and start pulling off metal panels. Jesse stays in the car, which the engine has turned into a furnace at

135 degrees. The heat is unrelenting throughout the race — up to three hours of sweatbox torture — and he endures it as he weaves around other cars at 200 mph, taking corners so sharp he feels up to 3 G's, the same acceleration astronauts experience when they're launched into space.

See **JESSE LOVE**, page 16

Cold case murder trial's evidence points to fierce struggle

John Getreu accused of killing La Honda resident Janet Taylor in 1974

By Sue Dremann

Janet Ann Taylor was caught in a struggle so intense with her alleged attacker, John Arthur Getreu, that her rain jacket was torn from the shoulder and her shirt was opened all the way down one side, evidence presented on Tuesday in San Mateo County Superior Court showed.

Taylor, who was 21 years old when she was murdered on March 24, 1974, was found in

a ditch by the side of Sand Hill Road and Manzanita Way on Stanford University land. She had been strangled by hands strong enough to have left the ribbed impressions of her turtleneck sweater on her neck, a forensic pathologist testified during the second day of Getreu's trial for her killing. Her face was severely beaten.

Getreu, now 76, was about 29 when she died. On Tuesday, Deputy District Attorney Josh Stauffer laid out evidence

linking Getreu to the violent crime while defense attorney John Halley sought to discredit how the evidence was collected and handled.

Witness Celia Hartnett, a forensics science consultant and retired criminologist for the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office crime lab, said she remembered the case particularly because Taylor had been her biology lab partner in high school. As a

See **GETREU**, page 10

Menlo Park: Voter ban on building housing at city parks proposed

By Kate Bradshaw

To keep city parks from being considered for housing development or any other uses, Menlo Park City Councilman Ray Mueller on Tuesday requested that the city of Menlo Park pass an ordinance banning zoning changes at city parks. He also favors asking voters to approve a "Park Preservation Measure" that would ban any other land uses at city parks, including housing, unless a majority of voters support it.

In an email sent to Mayor Drew Combs, City Manager Starla Jerome-Robinson and City Attorney Nira Doherty, Mueller requested that the matter be brought before the City Council before the city's housing element in the works is completed.

A housing element is a state-mandated document that lays out where and how each city plans to meet a requirement to plan for new housing units at various affordability levels between 2023 and 2031.

Under new housing element requirements, Menlo Park is expected to plan for 740 new homes for very low-income earners or those earning less than half of the area's median income; 426 new homes for low-income earners earning up to 80% of the area median income; 496 new homes for moderate-income earners who receive up to 120% of the area median income; and 1,284 new homes for above-moderate earners who receive

more than 120% of the area median income. That's a total of 2,946 new homes the city is expected to plan for between 2023 and 2031.

In early community meetings held to discuss the possibilities for where and how those new homes should be planned for, some community members have expressed interest in adding housing growth more equitably throughout the city.

Over the past decade in Menlo Park, the bulk of new housing either built or planned has been concentrated in two areas that underwent zoning changes to allow more density: in the city's downtown area and in Menlo Park territory on the Bay side of U.S. Highway 101.

Now, with the new housing element in the works, some community members have expressed interest in developing more housing in areas considered "high opportunity" that are, for instance, located out of the flood plain and away from other environmental threats, near community and transit services, and are within zones where children may attend school in the Las Lomas or Menlo Park City school districts — putting new pressure on Menlo Park's western neighborhoods to accommodate new housing growth. That includes Mueller's District 5, which includes the Sharon Heights neighborhood.

Housing Commissioner Karen

See **VOTER BAN**, page 17



Magali Gauthier

A woman watches ducks swim by at Sharon Park on July 15, 2020. Menlo Park Councilman Ray Mueller, who represents the Sharon Heights neighborhood, has proposed a voter ban on any zoning changes at city parks.

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CRIME BRIEFS

Man dies of gunshot wounds

A man who died after he was found unresponsive in a parked car in East Palo Alto on Tuesday night has sparked a homicide investigation, police said Wednesday.

Around 9 p.m., emergency responders from the Menlo Park Fire Protection District located an unresponsive man sitting in a car parked along a sidewalk in the 100 block of Jasmine Way, according to a press release. The street is near San Francisquito Creek.

Paramedics found he was suffering from gunshot wounds and police were called, the release states. He was taken to a hospital, where he died of his injuries.

He was a 26-year-old Redwood City resident, according to police. As of Wednesday morning, the San Mateo County Coroner's Office was not releasing his name to the public until his next of kin was notified.

The case is the fourth homicide in the city this year.

Anyone who has information related to Tuesday's homicide is asked to contact East Palo Alto police by calling Detective Aleyda Romero at 650-853-7249. Anonymous tips can also be made by text or voicemail at 650-409-6792 or email to epa@tipnow.org.

—Palo Alto Weekly staff

Man arrested after resident sees him looking into vehicle

A 34-year-old man was arrested in Menlo Park early Tuesday morning after a resident saw him peering into a vehicle parked in the driveway and officers found him with stolen items and a firearm in his possession, police said.

Officers responded around 12:10 a.m. to the 300 block of Lexington Drive, where the resident said she saw on her video surveillance system a man looking into the car.

She gave police a description of the suspect and his direction of travel and officers found him minutes later hiding in the driveway of a nearby home. Officers searched the neighborhood and found a backpack along with a loaded semi-automatic handgun, as well as car keys in his possession that were to a vehicle parked in the same block and had been stolen from Millbrae, police said.

The man was booked into San Mateo County Jail on suspicion of possession of a stolen vehicle, illegal possession of a firearm, petty theft and other offenses.

—Bay City News Service

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Kings Mountain Art Fair stays virtual this year

The Kings Mountain Art Fair is staying close to home — as close as the computer or tablet in your home — for the second year in a row. Due to the pandemic, the popular juried art show is again taking place online, Sept. 4-6, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day.

The fair offers fine art and pieces for the home in a variety of media, including paintings, jewelry, sculpture, photography, glassware and furniture.

Though visitors won't get to stroll through the fair's peaceful redwood forest setting, organizers are aiming to make the experience resemble an in-person festival visit. With the online "Walk the Fair" feature, clicking on "booths" displayed on a map of the festival layout gives a virtual sense of strolling through the festival. The online platform also offers a live chat function so that visitors can still enjoy speaking with artists.

The fair, which has been held for nearly 60 years, is an important annual fundraiser for the Kings Mountain Volunteer Fire Brigade and Kings Mountain Elementary School.

For more information, visit kingsmountainartfair.org.

—Heather Zimmerman

Student receives \$10,000 equestrian scholarship

The Woodside-area Horse Owners Association (WHOA!) and the Mounted Patrol Foundation granted the \$10,000 Woodside-area Equestrian Merit Scholarship Award to Olivia Bodner, a recent graduate of Carlmont High School and Cañada Middle College, according to an Aug. 1 press release. She will attend University of California at Davis this fall.

This is the second year the pair has awarded the scholarship



Magali Gauthier

Joan Kuntz boards her horse Bumpy at Alpine Rock Ranch on the Stanford Wedge property at 3530 Alpine Road in Portola Valley. A proposed housing development would displace the ranch.

Displacement from proposed Stanford Wedge housing site would be 'devastating,' says horse boarder

Environmental impact report for the Portola Valley site is expected this fall

By Angela Swartz

A wooden arch above the entrance to a stable at Portola Valley's Alpine Rock Ranch is etched with the name "Bumpy" for its longtime inhabitant.

The 39-year-old brown quarter horse mare is in good health, other than some discoloration on her tongue from old age. What's precarious is the future of her home of 28 years on the Stanford Wedge property at 3530 Alpine Road, where she and eight other horses live. The 6-acre site, owned by Stanford University, is the proposed location of the university's Portola Terrace housing development.

"We want to keep the ranch," said Joan Kuntz, Bumpy's owner of 25 years, calling the possible loss of the land "tragic." "It's a home for the horses. ... Hopefully people won't let it happen. It would be devastating for Bumpy to have to move; as they (horses) get older, they get more sensitive."

Kuntz, a Redwood City resident, describes Bumpy as her "biggest best buddy" and her "horse soulmate."

The project, which includes 39 housing units on part of the Wedge's 75 acres located between Westridge and Golden Oak drives, was initially proposed over two years ago, and ever since, residents have cited

potential traffic jams and fire hazards as reasons for opposing the development plans.

Last week, Stanford officials hosted public site tours for anyone interested in seeing where buildings would be placed if the development gets the go-ahead from the Town Council. About 120 people signed up for tours, said John Donahoe, director of planning and entitlements at Stanford.

Portola Terrace would include 27 single-family residences for Stanford faculty and 12 workforce housing units that would be available at below-market-rate rents.

During the tour, officials used stakes to indicate where certain buildings would be, and how tall they would be, by using color-coded flags.

An environmental impact report for the project is expected this fall, said Town Manager Jeremy Dennis.

A resident whose home borders the property erected a large white sign denouncing the project within 24 hours of the Aug. 26 site tour, according to Stanford officials.

Stanford is trying not to react to any one person's opinion on the project until the environmental impact report is released, Donahoe said.

Fire safety

Most of the property will remain as an oak woodland,

and there's a vegetation management plan for the site. Elevations within the project site range from approximately 323 feet to 678 feet above sea level. The area of proposed development is on the flattest portion of the site. The vegetation management plan, together with fire prevention measures in the housing development, will "significantly improve fire safety for the surrounding residents and community," according to Stanford.

A former firefighter walked "every square foot" of the site plan to make sure aerial vegetation maps were accurate, said Donahoe. The site is mostly populated by oak woodland trees.

Stanford hasn't cut down any trees yet, but it has removed branches and cleared brush as part of its initial fire mitigation efforts, Donahoe said.

Two fire behavior modeling programs — computer simulations that reproduce characteristics like how quickly a fire can spread, in which directions and how much heat it may generate given the conditions of the fuels, land, and predicted weather — were used to assess the probability and intensity of fire on the property and to identify effective ways to lower the likelihood of a fire breaking out and spreading, according to the vegetation plan. Fire

See **STANFORD WEDGE**, page 17

REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman



2022 Energy Code Proposed Changes:

Dear Monica: I read that electric power will soon be required for all new buildings instead of natural gas. What are the changes coming? Lisa G.

Dear Lisa:

The California Energy Commission has proposed the changes to the Building Code. If passed they will take effect January 1, 2023. Changes include: Encouraging

electric heat pump technology for space and water heating; Establishing electric-ready requirements for single-family homes; Expanding solar photovoltaic (PV) system and battery storage standards to make clean energy available onsite; and Strengthening ventilation standards to improve indoor air quality. It will be voted on in December by the California Building Standards Commission.

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Coronavirus central: County vaccination rate among highest in Bay Area

Cal/OSHA encourages indoor masking at jobs regardless of vaccine status

By Embarcadero Media staff

Nearly all Bay Area counties outpace state vaccination rates

In the greater Bay Area, COVID-19 vaccination rates among people ages 12 and up are outpacing the state's vaccination rate in all but one county as of Monday.

Roughly 80% of the state's vaccine-eligible residents have received at least one dose, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, while 65.4% of those 12 and older are fully vaccinated.

As of Monday, Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Monterey, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz and Sonoma counties are all ahead of both statewide metrics, with local data showing many counties surpassing 80% and 90% of eligible residents receiving at least one dose.

Solano County is the only Bay Area county trailing the state's numbers, with 74% of its eligible residents having received at least one dose and 61% fully vaccinated.

Marin and San Mateo counties are currently the gold standard in the Bay Area and are the only two counties in the region with more than 90% of their eligible populations having received at least one dose.

In Marin County, 95.8% of those age 12 and up have received at least one dose and 88.6% are fully vaccinated. Both figures are the highest among any Bay Area county.

San Mateo County sits slightly behind, with 91.4% of its eligible residents having received at least one vaccine dose and 81.6% now fully vaccinated.

Santa Clara County and San Francisco have also fully vaccinated at least 80% of their eligible populations, while Napa, Alameda and Contra Costa counties have all surpassed 75% of their eligible populations being fully vaccinated.

Nearly 370 million COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered across the country, according to the CDC, with some 174 million Americans now fully vaccinated.

That includes 61.3% of those

ages 12 and up and 52.4% of the country's population of roughly 330 million.

Indoor masking at jobs encouraged

The California Division of Occupational Safety and Health encouraged employers and workers last week to follow the state's public health recommendation to wear a mask when indoors regardless of their COVID-19 vaccination status.

While the state has not issued a new indoor face covering mandate that would also apply to fully vaccinated people, the California Department of Public Health still requires face coverings in certain settings like health care facilities and on public transit.

Cal/OSHA guidelines also do not require the use of a mask indoors for fully vaccinated workers, but encouraged workers to do so in an effort to prevent the spread of the highly contagious delta variant.

Unvaccinated workers are still required to wear a face covering at all times when indoors under the workplace safety guidelines Cal/OSHA approved in June.

Workers are encouraged to contact Cal/OSHA at 833-579-0927 or visit dir.ca.gov/dosh/Complaint.htm for information about COVID-19 hazards in the workplace and how to report them.

Employers can also contact Cal/OSHA at 800-963-9424 for information or assistance with developing a COVID-10 prevention and safety program.

Comprehensive COVID-19 coverage

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

CalMatters and Bay City News Service contributed to this report.

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Former M-A coach lands at College of San Mateo

The next step in the coaching journey for **Adhir Ravipati** is at College of San Mateo, where the former **Menlo-Atherton** head coach has been added to the staff as quarterbacks coach.

Ravipati was the M-A coach from 2015 through 2018. In those four years the Bears won two Central Coast Section championships, as well as a state title in his final season.



Adhir Ravipati

During Ravipati's tenure at M-A he lifted the program up into elite status in the CCS. Now he has joined an elite community college program. In 2019 CSM went undefeated through conference play, won a Northern California championship with a 41-0 win over Modesto, and advanced to the state final where the Bulldogs finally incurred their first loss, to Riverside.

During that 2019 season, Ravipati's first after stepping down at M-A, he served as an offensive analyst at CSM, breaking down film of upcoming opponents. This season, with more flexibility in place in his schedule, being able to work remotely at his full-time job with Dropbox, he was able to increase his commitment to CSM.

"That first year it was time for me to step back," Ravipati said. "I wanted to help place the kids I had at M-A. Most were still in the area and at CSM."

In reeling off the names of former Menlo-Atherton players who went on to CSM, he mentioned **Skyler Thomas**, now at Oregon State, **Tevita Tafuna**, now at UTEP, as well as current CSM players **Michael Pariseau**, **Joseph Paulo**, **Malik Johnson**, **Raymond Price**, **Semisi Mataele**, **Fale Mosley**, **Andre Bishop**, **Jaeden Barker** and **David Sulunga**.

There's a wealth of talent at CSM at the quarterback position for Ravipati to work with. With the 2020 season having been canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic, every player received an extra year of eligibility.

There are seven quarterbacks in the program at CSM.

"It's a big quarterback room," Ravipati said.

Luke Bottari (Serra) was the starter in 2019 and had a great season. He returns to a perch on top of the depth chart. Also on hand are Price, Shamir Bey (Mitty), Jerry Johnson (Pittsburg) and three other quarterbacks from outside the Bay

Area, two from the Sacramento area and one from out of state.

"They're all great kids," Ravipati said.

Bottari threw 18 touchdown passes and rushed for another three touchdowns in 2019.

"He's one of the best quarterbacks I've been around," Ravipati said. "He can athletically extend plays and make checks at the line of scrimmage."

CSM has a long tradition at the quarterback position. In the 1980s the teams coached by the late Tom Martinez, who later gained national renown as Tom Brady's personal coach and mentor, ran a sophisticated passing offense that was cutting edge for the time.

In one memorable game during those years, CSM beat De Anza 62-56 as the two teams accumulated upwards of 1,400 total yards.

Once Martinez stepped down as football coach he continued coaching the women's basketball and softball teams at the school, rarely, it seemed, ever losing a game.

The football program went through some so-so seasons under Biff Barnes and Jack Thur before Larry Owens took over as head coach, established a solid foundation and enjoyed some significant success. The program has really taken off into the upper echelon in recent years under Bret Pollack, Owens after his return, and current head coach Tim Tulloch.

When Ravipati interviewed for the head job at M-A, Owens was on the school's search committee.

"When I got the job I reached out to him," Ravipati said. "On a Saturday that first week I went to CSM and spent eight hours with him. Going over every detail about running a program. It was incredible how much time he gave me. He was a major influence. I don't think we would have had the success we had without him."

So there are plenty of connections between the two programs. Martinez lived a couple of blocks from the M-A campus and his son, Tom Jr., was an M-A quarterback during his prep days.

The step from high school to college is a big one for most all players. The same holds true for coaches who make that move.

"It's definitely different," Ravipati said. "It's a little bit more of a business. But like I tell the top kids from their high schools, you can succeed here, too. It's an opportunity to grow in a different environment." ■

—Glenn Reeves



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Menlo Park council cautious on proposal to ban new gas heaters

By Kate Bradshaw

A push in Menlo Park to transition gas appliances to electric-powered ones citywide will be delayed after Menlo Park council members agreed Tuesday to do additional outreach before considering a mandate.

On Aug. 31, council members discussed a policy recommended 6-0 by the city's Environmental Quality Commission to permit building owners to install only electricity-powered water and space heating appliances going forward, ending its allowance of new gas-powered water and space heating appliances within the city.

The recommendations emerged from the ambitious goal the Menlo Park City Council set last year to become a carbon neutral city by 2030. About 41% of the city's greenhouse gas emissions came from buildings in 2019, according to Sustainability Manager Rebecca Lucky.

As a result, Menlo Park's objective to achieve carbon neutrality has been followed up with another ambitious goal: to convert 95% of the existing buildings citywide to being powered only by electricity by 2030.

Because the city of Menlo Park is part of Peninsula Clean Energy, a joint powers authority that provides 100% carbon-free electricity to residents, transitioning home appliances from running

on gas to electric power is a big step toward curbing household carbon emissions.

By contrast, consuming natural gas emits about 12 pounds of carbon or greenhouse gas emissions per therm, a unit used to measure natural gas use. The average household served by PG&E was expected to use about 13 therms of natural gas in the month of August and up to 70 therms in December, according to its most recent residential rate forecast.

Out of a series of six next steps to realize the building electrification recommended by the Environmental Quality Commission, all but one received a majority of support to keep moving forward Tuesday, despite some misgivings by two council members.

The recommendations are to: Increase the city's Utility Users' Tax rate to the level that voters have approved to fund building electrification for low-income residents; find partners to fund and finance building electrification; create programs to streamline the building electrification process for building owners; start outlining an ordinance to ban installing gas-powered water and space heaters; start community outreach; and develop a long-term plan to achieve the city's building electrification goal.

Unlike space and water heaters, other commonly gas-powered appliances like stoves and clothes dryers don't require permits to

install, so the proposed ordinance wouldn't affect them.

The only one of the commission's six recommendations that didn't gain at least three votes to move forward in a straw poll held among the council members was to start outlining an ordinance to ban installing gas-powered water and space heaters.

Both Mayor Drew Combs and Ray Mueller raised concerns with the process that led to the recommendations and about raising taxes and imposing a mandate without more community input.

"I think that there are fundamentals missing from what's being proposed here," Combs said. He argued that the policy proposals should come more directly from city staff rather than an advisory commission and that the proposals showed "a lack of real understanding of what the impact on residents would be." He added that he favored voluntary programs to encourage people to convert from gas- to electricity-powered appliances instead.

Mueller said he favored hiring a company to conduct polling in Menlo Park to gauge its popularity, but other council members didn't support the idea. He also suggested having an advisory vote go before the community to see if gets majority support before raising the city's Utility Users' Tax.

The proposal would take the new revenue from the tax

increase and put it toward creating a new program to help very low-income households in the community — defined as those who receive utility assistance through PG&E — to convert their space and water heating systems to electric. Menlo Park voters have already approved a tax rate for utility users higher than what the city currently charges, so the City Council could authorize that rate hike without going before voters again.

Other Environmental Quality Commission recommendations that tentatively had unanimous support on the City Council were to identify partners to fund and finance programs to help people decarbonize their homes and to develop programs to reduce what Environmental Quality Commissioner Josie Gaillard called the "hassle factor" for building owners — the obstacles a homeowner or contractor might face in quickly getting electric appliances permitted, installed and working.

Such programs could include efforts to educate contractors and homeowners about electric appliances, simplify the permit process for electrification projects, or provide concierge services to help individuals navigate the electrification process.

Gaillard described the Environmental Quality Commission's recommendations as a "middle of the road" approach,

considering that Menlo Park is not currently on track to meet its adopted climate goals and the most recent Aug. 9 scientific report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which UN Secretary-General António Guterres called "a code red for humanity."

Creating a voluntary program to encourage people to convert their gas appliances to electric ones has in other communities only resulted in about 1% of households making that change, Gaillard added.

Acting to only provide permits for electricity-powered water and space heaters would result in a gradual community shift away from natural gas without artificially shortening the natural life span of those gas-powered appliances while they still work, she said.

Of 169 written comments the City Council had received, City Clerk Judi Herren reported that 110 expressed favor for at least some part of the recommendations proposed by the Environmental Quality Commission.

James Tuleya, chairman of Carbon Free Silicon Valley, an environmental advocacy organization working in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, called the proposal a "smart path to upgrade Menlo Park's buildings" to make them "safer, more resilient and more cost-effective."

See **GAS BAN**, page 12

GETREU

continued from page 5

young criminologist, Hartnett was tasked with examining Taylor's clothes for trace evidence. She noted in her report the large rips on a black rain jacket found partially beneath Taylor at the crime scene.

Taylor had worn the shirt beneath a bulky ribbed turtle-neck sweater.

Marks from that sweater on Taylor's neck also showed the full force of her strangulation. The imprint of the turtle-neck's ribbed pattern was found in the bruises at her throat, evidence of manual strangulation, according to testimony from the Nov. 5, 2019, preliminary hearing by the late Dr. Peter Benson, a county forensic pathologist who died in 2020. His testimony was read in court on Tuesday.

Taylor had hemorrhages in her neck and a fractured hyoid bone, a free-floating bone that sits on top of the throat, Benson found. She died as a result of strangulation.

She also had bruises on her face and on her left ear from

being beaten, he said.

Benson didn't find evidence of a sexual assault, however. Yet, he found "degenerated structures," which might be parts of sperm, in her cervical mucus but he couldn't say when intercourse had taken place.

Benson's finding of sperm could add to the evidence taken from the crotch area of Taylor's green corduroy pants. DNA evidence found on the pants in 2018 linked Getreu to the crime. The possibility of anyone else having that same DNA is 1 in 102 billion from the sample from inside the pants, Stauffer noted during his opening statement on Monday.

Benson hadn't noted the tear in the crotch of Taylor's pants at the time he examined them in 1974, however. He said his job was to examine the body and he probably wouldn't have noted tears in the clothing, Hartnett said.

On Tuesday after examining the clothing again, she found two small tears in a scarf that also belonged to Taylor but that she hadn't described in her original notes.

"It doesn't surprise me that I

missed the tears. In my notes, I said the purpose for which I was receiving evidence was to collect trace evidence," she said.

Halley tried to cast doubt on the methodology used to collect and preserve the evidence. Hartnett dismissed that notion.

Handling of evidence is different now than it was 47 years ago and the way Taylor's evidence was stored wasn't necessarily the same, indicative of sloppy handling, Hartnett said.

"The movement of DNA from one piece of evidence to another wasn't a concern back in the day as it is today," she said, in response to Halley's questions about why multiple items of clothing were stored in the same bag.

She testified that some trace evidence, such as fibers from the sweater, could be transferred onto the pants in Taylor's case, but whether the "contamination" would be important depends on many factors, including what kind of evidence had been transferred.

A strong woman able to fight back

The man who was closest to

Taylor also testified on Tuesday that the 21-year-old woman was well-skilled to protect herself.

"Janet had a brown belt. It really surprised me what happened here because I thought she'd be taking anybody apart if they tried to attack her," said Russell Bissonnette, Taylor's companion who lived with her in La Honda.

Bissonnette said he and Taylor were in love. "We were connected. We were kind of unusual people," he said, living in the woods and the mountains.

On the morning of the day she died, he drove Taylor to her job on Page Mill Road. Her car had broken down and he was trying to fix another one for her. Bissonnette dropped Taylor off on March 24, 1974, at about 10:30 a.m. She wasn't sure if she wanted him to pick her up. She planned to visit with her best friend, Debbie Adams, who was about to return to college out of state and she thought she might hitchhike back to La Honda, he said.

In the late afternoon, Bissonnette drove to his job at the Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society,

a jazz club in Miramar on the San Mateo County coast.

When he arrived home at about 10:30 or 11 p.m., Taylor wasn't there. He thought she might be staying overnight at Adams' house. By the morning, with no word from Taylor, he was worried.

"I started by freaking out. I knew something was wrong but I didn't think it was that drastic. This just put me in another world," he said.

He and their close friend, James "Gideon" Schroeder, looked for Taylor. Bissonnette called her parents, but they didn't know where she was, he recalled.

Taylor, in the meantime, had been found in the ditch by a Peninsula Creamery dairy truck driver, Ernest Evangelo, who was on his way to make deliveries in Woodside. At first he thought he saw debris by the road, then he noticed a foot, he testified. Seeing Taylor laid out on her back, he checked her pulse, then went to a neighbor's house and asked her to call the

See **GETREU**, page 17



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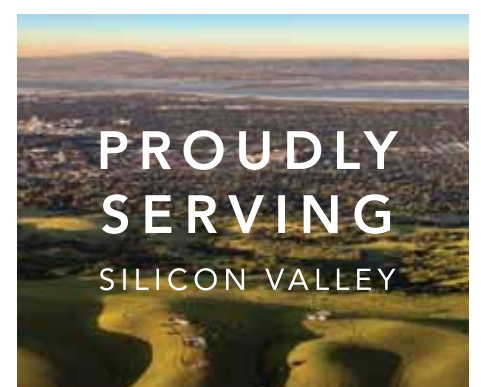
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COMMUNITY BRIEFS

continued from page 6

for students with a demonstrated involvement in equestrian activities as well as academic achievement, community service and financial need.

"All of this year's applicants impressed the selection committee with the depth of their involvement in the equestrian community, as well as the quality of their academic achievement and range of community service activities," said Anne Van Camp, chair of the WHOA! Steering Committee, in a statement. "The economic difficulties that are challenging many families during the pandemic made awarding this scholarship especially meaningful."

Besides higher education costs, Bodner has expenses for her horses.

"This scholarship will make a significant difference in my ability to continue working, learning, studying, and riding whilst studying animal sciences on the pre-vet track at my top choice university," she said. "It inspires and allows me to pursue the best learning opportunities possible in both my education and my riding."

Bodner began working at a local horse camp at the age of 11, progressing through increasingly responsible roles before becoming a head instructor,



Courtesy Woodside-area Horse Owners Association

The \$10,000 Woodside-area Equestrian Merit Scholarship Award is presented to Olivia Bodner, center, by representatives of the sponsoring organizations: Dean Witter III, Mounted Patrol Foundation, and Anne Van Camp, Woodside-area Horse Owners Association.

according to the press release.

She became a working student at another barn where she is currently responsible for the feeding, care, and management of 15 to 20 horses.

The early retirement of her 13-year-old thoroughbred was a crash course in veterinary medicine and inspired her to pursue a career in research to develop new approaches in equine orthopedic surgery. She currently has a 5-year-old horse.

Bodner is also a National Merit Commended Scholar and she has played the tenor sax since fourth grade.

She plans to major in animal science at UC Davis and audition for the school's band.

Portola Valley fall classes

Registration is open for classes at Portola Valley's Town Center this fall. Classes include kids' hip-hop, aerobics, fitness and conditioning, yoga and pickleball.

Masks are required in all indoor classes.

Register at portolavalley.net/for-residents/community-classes. For more information, call 650-851-1700, ext. 200. ▀

— Angela Swartz

GAS BAN

continued from page 10

Complete Streets Commission member Adina Levin, speaking on her own behalf, argued that

climate change has immediate impacts and pushed for city leadership on the issue — South Lake Tahoe was being evacuated that night due to the encroaching Caldor Fire, and Seattle saw temperatures over 100 degrees earlier this summer. The council's policymaking efforts last year to pass building codes requiring new buildings to be all-electric had an impact beyond city limits, setting an example for other cities and have since been supported by state action.

While a number of community members and environmental advocates supported the recommendations, others expressed deep opposition to the proposed ordinance. James Pistorino threatened litigation against the city should it move forward with the ordinance.

Some raised concerns about how the mandate could trigger additional costs for homeowners, especially of older homes, who would need to upgrade their electricity panels to be able to support the expanded power demands of electricity-powered space and water heaters, a step that can cost thousands of dollars, they said. Martin Rosenblum asked why commercial, industrial and institutional buildings weren't also being

considered for the mandate.

Others raised concerns about how relying wholly on electricity could leave the community without power if PG&E continues to enact power shutoffs, as it has throughout wide swaths of California in recent years during hot, dry months as a preventive measure against its equipment sparking wildfires.

There were also concerns raised that the ordinance would put more pressure on the electricity grid than it could handle. That concern was allayed in an email from Peninsula Clean Energy CEO Jan Pepper.

She explained that switching all of the county's residential power used for water and space heating, as well as cooking needs, from gas to electricity would increase demand on the county's overall electric load by about 15%. Peninsula Clean Energy currently uses only about 1.4% of all of the electricity generated in the state, so a 15% increase in that 1.4% is something the state's electricity system can handle. "(T)his amount of increase is definitely not going to stress the electric grid," she wrote. ▀

Email Staff Writer Kate Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com.



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EVACUATION

continued from page 1

Even with higher participation, the drill could not replicate or anticipate the host of variables related to an actual evacuation, the letter states.

“For instance, when an evacuation is called, every resident does not leave at the same time (if they leave at all); a recent study in Ashland, Oregon estimated that for those residents who wished to evacuate, it would take 195 minutes for 100% of those interested to actually leave,” officials noted.

The letter was signed by Dennis; fire Chief Rob Lindner; Lt. Mark Myers of the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office; Dale Pfau, chair of the town’s Emergency Preparedness Committee and Wildfire Preparedness Committee Evacuation Subcommittee; and Michael Tomars, chair of the town’s Wildfire Preparedness Committee.

Vandeputte said she didn’t want the evacuation drill to create any more divisiveness between residents and town officials. She hopes a larger drill could help ease tensions. Some residents, including members of PVNU, have sparred with the town about the proposed

Stanford Wedge housing development and the lack of an evacuation drill. Residents have argued that additional housing in town could increase wildfire risk.

“I’m not part of PVNU,” she said. “I only wanted to do this to see what the streets would be like.”

Vandeputte, who advertised the event by handing out flyers at the town’s cleanup day and posting on PV Forum, an online forum for residents, chose to host the drill in the evening so that people who work in town would not be impacted and the number of pedestrians and bicyclists on the roads was minimized.

Westridge resident and PVNU President Rita Comes said she was thrilled when she heard about the drill. She and her 11-year-old daughter brought along enough food and water for two weeks during the drill.

“I was shocked the other day when I saw the message from the town manager that was discouraging evacuation drills because the Dixie fire just (burned) over 500,000 acres,” she said the day after the drill.

People in town have been cutting down trees and doing all they can to improve defensible space around homes to decrease

fire risk, and not just waiting for a plan, she said. “I’m so proud that someone else is doing something. It’s a real protest against the town. To see that whole line of cars, it was really great to see,” she said.

Julie Fouquet, who took part in the drill and has lived in the Alpine Hills neighborhood since 1996, said she’s found from past experience that emergency preparation is worthwhile.

“Unfortunately, traffic is not linear,” said Fouquet in an email. “Once it gets heavy, doubling the number of cars causes more than double the trouble. Therefore, a small test like this one will likely underestimate the difficulties that will be encountered if the whole town evacuates at once.”

Even so, the drill drove home an important point: Many residents favor Alpine Road because it’s the quickest way to reach Highway 280 from their homes. However, turning left onto Alpine when it’s busy can be difficult.

“During this test, congestion on Alpine slowed drivers down by a couple of minutes,” she noted. “Instead, we turned right onto Alpine and then right onto Portola. Though that route normally takes an extra couple of minutes, lack of congestion

allowed us to reach 280 as soon as we would have if we had used Alpine. Unless an officer is directing us to turn left onto Alpine during an evacuation, Portola Road seems like a better option.”

Resident Cori Moesta said the drill has inspired discussion about evacuating during a wildfire among neighbors in Portola Valley and Woodside.

“My husband and I had an overdue dinner talk with our daughters about emergency preparedness and planning,” Moesta said in an email. “Our 8-year-old daughter wanted to know if she could bring her teddy bear ‘Cupcake’ in her evacuation bag and what we would do if all our books burned? We explained that we’d listen to emergency personnel and evacuate early so we could take as much as possible. But most importantly, we’d have each other.”

Town data on evacuations

The town’s ad hoc Wildfire Preparedness Committee has gathered data that can be used to model an evacuation in town, according to a presentation from its Aug. 17 meeting. Based on data from Zonehaven, a third-party software system that has teamed up with emergency services across the region to send out real-time evacuation information during disasters, about 7,500 vehicles would evacuate Portola Valley and other towns through Alpine and Portola roads. Single lane roads like Alpine and Portola can handle between 1,700 and 2,000 cars per hour during normal circumstances, according to the committee. Consultants use 950 to 1,000 cars per hour per lane for evacuation modeling.

Portola Valley has no evacuation routes to the west. Ladera

and the 280 intersections pose the greatest potential bottlenecks, according to the committee. Consultants currently do not model impacts from accidents, decreased visibility, rogue drivers, horse trailers, smoke, embers or even nighttime evacuations versus daytime.

Other key takeaways from the ad hoc committee include:

- In an orderly evacuation with adequate notice, current infrastructure can easily handle the anticipated traffic. With short notice and high participation, static models will likely produce evacuation times between two and four hours (it does not mean cars are stuck in traffic for that long).

- Ladera and 280, at least, will require traffic control to maximize flow.

- Single lane outbound traffic will be likely so there’s an ingress lane for first responders.

- Portola Valley does not have enough space to expand Alpine or Portola roads beyond their current two lanes (Alpine Road in Ladera is under San Mateo County’s jurisdiction.)

- Various fire scenarios will result in different exit routes and different results.

There is still considerable uncertainty due to issues that are difficult to model, according to the committee.

There might be a more advanced modeling system on the way. Dave Cardinal, a resident of the Alpine Hills neighborhood and adjunct lecturer in Stanford’s engineering school, has developed his own evacuation simulation. His modeling allows him to run different evacuation scenarios. The biggest lesson he learned? Leave early during an evacuation.

“It appears to be far more flexible than what is available from consultants’ models,” the ad hoc committee presentation said of Cardinal’s model. “Additional data will result from traffic study that should improve the model and sensitivities. Most scenarios currently show evacuation times of between two and three hours to completely evacuate.”

Cardinal is working to incorporate more complex variables — like accidents — into the model. This model could be an important planning tool moving forward, the ad hoc committee noted. Cardinal said there is “big interest” in modeling larger scale evacuations in response to events such as hurricanes.

“They look at, ‘How do we empty the state of New Jersey over two days?’” he said. “It’s a different problem than getting 5 miles away in two hours.” ▀

Email Staff Writer Angela Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com.



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George White Jr.

July 19, 1935 – August 25, 2021

Born on July 19, 1935 in St Louis, MO, George was the son of George White (P'33) and Carolyn Lawrence White. He passed away peacefully on August 25, 2021, in Carmel, CA.

George prepped at Lawrenceville then attended Princeton, graduating in 1957 with a degree in psychology. George developed many deep friendships at Princeton and as a member of Cottage Club.



The relationships with both the people and institutions were life long and of the greatest importance to him. Later in life, George worked diligently as a Trustee and Treasurer of the Classmate Fund, which was created to seek out and support P'57 classmates and their immediate families who were in need.

He spent the 4 years after graduation in the US Army, graduating from the Officer Candidate, Airborne, and Ranger schools. He was assigned to Fort Ord in California where he commanded an Airmobile Rifle Company and first got involved in sport parachuting.

After leaving the US Army, George spent the first 10 years of his business career in New York with Stone & Webster and later Drexel in institutional security sales. In 1970, he moved to California to join his father in the start-up of a nuclear fuel brokering, trading, and consulting company, NUEXCO. That company grew into the nuclear industry's preeminent source of information concerning the supply, demand, and price of uranium. It was challenging work, including worldwide travel to wherever uranium was mined and used. George spent the last 5 years of his career as an independent consultant.

His partner through all these years was Jo. Though George and Jo Volkening were married in 1960, their relationship began in 1951, before either one could even drive a car. She was and forever will be his one and only true love. In addition to his wife Jo, George is survived by his sister Mary Carolyn Chandor, his daughter Lindsay (P'87), his son Walker, and seven grandchildren, three of whom attend or attended George's beloved educational institutions.

Jo and George were and are passionate about giving, believing that to whom much is given, much is expected. They gave generously to a number of causes and foundations in Carmel and elsewhere about which they were passionate, both individually and collectively. George was particularly enthusiastic in his support for Lawrenceville, Princeton, the Carmel Public Library, and - most recently - the Carmel Valley Manor Foundation.

George spent much of his leisure time as an active skydiver. It was truly his thing. In 1986, he requalified and had - upon his retirement in 2013 - amassed almost 2,000 jumps and 34 hours of cumulative free fall time. He was most proud of his participation in a number of world records set by two senior groups - SOS (Skydivers Over Sixty) and JOS (Jumpers Over Seventy).

George will be missed deeply by all who knew and loved him. To the husband, father, grandfather, and friend, we wish him Blue Skies.

In lieu of flowers, a donation to either the Carmel Public Library Foundation or Carmel Valley Manor Foundation would be appreciated.

<https://carmelpubliclibraryfoundation.org/giving-support/>

PAID OBITUARY

Mervin G. Morris

July 4, 1920 - August 24, 2021

Mervin G. Morris, founder of Mervyn's Stores and philanthropist, passed away on August 24, 2021, at the age of 101.

Merv lived the quintessential American Dream. He was born in San Francisco on July 4, 1920, to Fannie and Harry Morris. He was a third generation Californian. His great grandparents ran a store in the Mother Lode during the Gold Rush. Merv grew up in the small Central Valley farming town of Delano, along with his sisters Bertille and Jacqueline. His parents ran a local retail store called Morris', and Merv learned the retail business early on by working as a sales clerk. After graduating from Delano High School in 1938, he went on to attend one semester at the University of California, Berkeley, before being called home.

Merv remained in Delano helping with the family business until he enlisted in the military during World War II. He was stationed domestically during the war, running an Army post exchange based in Arkansas. Merv was discharged with the rank of Captain.

Merv returned home after the war and re-joined his parents in the family business. He eventually decided he needed to strike out on his own and relocated to San Francisco. On July 29, 1949, at the age of 29, Merv opened the first Mervyn's in San Lorenzo, California.

While he was in the early years of building his business, Merv met Roslyn Grossman, a young woman from Napa, on a blind date. They married in San Francisco in September of 1950. They soon welcomed four children into their family: Diane, Jeff, and twins, John and Jim.

From 1949 to 1960, Merv continued to grow the San Lorenzo Mervyn's store, expanding multiple times beyond its original location and solidifying the Mervyn's way. He then set his sights on additional locations. Mervyn's celebrated its first day as a public company in the spring of 1971. With the additional funds from the public offering, Merv was able to rapidly expand Mervyn's. Mervyn's was sold to Dayton Hudson (now Target) in January 1978. Merv remained Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the company until 1979, by which point there were approximately 75 Mervyn's stores.

During his 30-year tenure as founder and CEO of Mervyn's, Merv built a reputation of having both a keen business mind and a deep sense of loyalty. His employees and customers loved Mervyn's, and Merv returned the feelings in spades. He was respected and beloved. He was an innovative leader, smartly choosing his store sites and understanding the consumers of the post-War boom years. In recognition of his achievements, in 1977, Merv was elected chairman of the board of directors of the National Retail Merchants Association, an organization comprised of approximately 3,500 retail stores worldwide. At the time, Merv was the first West Coast

retailer to head the organization in more than 60 years.

After he retired from Mervyn's, Merv became Chairman of Morris Management Company, a family investment firm. He held many board positions, including serving on the boards of Dayton Hudson Corporation, Ross Stores, Pacific Gas & Electric Company, Vans Shoes, and the Oakland Tribune. Merv

also became a committed philanthropist and served as a trustee on numerous non-profit boards, including the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, the California Academy of Sciences, the Palo Alto Medical Foundation, Stanford Hospital, the Jewish Home for the Aged, Mt. Zion Hospital of San Francisco, and the University of Southern California. He was appointed to serve as a Trustee of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum by President George W. Bush in 2002. He was



also a civilian advisor to the Commanding General of the Army and Air Force Exchange Service.

Merv and Roz built an admirable philanthropic legacy during their nearly 66 years of marriage. They made a major investment to build the Mervin G. Morris Clubhouse for the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula. They were also committed supporters of the Peninsula Volunteers in Menlo Park, providing critical funds to build the Roslyn G. Morris Activity Center. Their philanthropic interests further included the San Francisco Symphony, the San Francisco Opera, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Merv was the quintessential patriarch of his family. He was a devoted brother to his dear sisters and a remarkable father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. He was the master of the toast at every family affair and was deservedly the center of everyone's orbit. To imagine a family gathering without him is unthinkable, but we can rest assured that his astounding legacy will live on for his family and for the broader community for many years to come.

Merv was predeceased by his loving wife, Roz, by his parents, and by his sister, Bertille. He is survived by his four children and their spouses -- Diane, Jeff (Missy), John, and Jim (Susan) -- and by his sister, Jacqueline. He is also survived by his 14 grandchildren, his 10 great-grandchildren, and by his devoted friend, Cynthia Hockey. The family is grateful for the excellent assistance provided to Merv by Vicky Evangelista, Shirley Schall, Esthela Prado, Hicenia Aguirre, and Jane Feng.

Merv's family will host a Celebration of Life at a later date. In lieu of flowers, if you wish, the family asks that donations in honor of Merv be sent to the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula (401 Pierce Road, Menlo Park, CA 94025), Peninsula Volunteers, Inc. (800 Middle Avenue, Menlo Park, CA 94025), or your favorite charity.

PAID OBITUARY

JESSE LOVE

continued from page 5

For a 16-year-old, this is a lot of pressure.

And Jesse doesn't merely race under these conditions — he wins. Jesse is the youngest NASCAR champion in history, a distinction that comes with challenges. His competitors are all more experienced, and at many points in his career, he's been told no — he's too young, a car is too big, a track too advanced. Even in the racing community that applauded his early talent, many veterans weren't ready to see a 10-year-old driving a full-bodied car, or a 13-year-old breaking records set by racing royalty.

But Jesse rarely pays attention to the naysayers, because he's not interested in the status quo. Born in Menlo Park, he is the product of a Silicon Valley childhood. He was raised in the belly of ambition where college dropouts founded Facebook and high school seniors are CEOs. A key part of his prodigious success lies not in his physical skills, but in his academic work ethic, his pre-race research and his insatiable appetite for data analysis. With the help of new racing tech, Jesse Love is turning his racing career into a science, and he's just getting started.



Philip Wartena

Jesse Love in his car, which can reach 200 mph, on lap 14 of his NASCAR race at Sonoma Raceway on June 5.

On a different track

Jesse's parents still remember his first time on four wheels. His father, Duke Love, spent his own youth racing at local tracks with three-time Daytona 500 winner Jeff Gordon, and the day Jesse turned 5, Duke purchased his first racing car, a 200-pound go-cart like vehicle.

At San Jose's dirt track, the owner spotted Jesse instantly. "That kid can see the lines," he said to Duke on Jesse's first day.

Even at 5, Jesse showed not only a natural ability, but a dogged determination to win. "The training that normally takes a couple of months took him about a week and a half," Duke said. "He got in the car, won his first race, and I think by the time he left (the youth division) he'd won over 300 races or something to that effect."

By the time he was in fifth

grade, Jesse was traveling the country to race junior late model cars — stock cars almost as large as those you see on professional NASCAR circuits. With age restrictions barring his entry and racing decision-makers convinced he was too young, Jesse got waivers to participate, but even then people were skeptical.

"Everyone out there has pumped tons of money into this passion, this thing they love doing," said Dustin Edge, Jesse's driver relations manager. With such a high price to pay for mistakes, competitors and race organizers alike viewed young drivers as a dangerous liability. "Imagine being an adult out there — you work all week; when you get off work, you go home and you work on your race car in your garage. And then you go out on the race track, and some 12-year-old wrecks you and destroys all your stuff."

But Jesse didn't wreck. He won the first time he was ever in the car.

Jesse's mother, Elizabeth, was watching from the stands that day. "I look at my husband and he looks at me, and we're like, 'Holy cow, did that just happen?' And then he won the second one. And then he won the third one. And then he won the championship."

But as Jesse started earning respect in the racing world, back home in Menlo Park, most friends and neighbors were unsure why a 10-year-old was missing so many days of school and spending every weekend and holiday at race tracks out of state.

"It's not like we're living in North Carolina," said Elizabeth. "Out here, in (the Bay Area), not only is (racing) virtually unknown, but for a kid to be doing it, right? It was hard to explain to people why it was that we were choosing this path for our kid. Aside from the 'Aren't you scared, isn't it dangerous' — all of that stuff — there was like, a bunch of questions about, 'Well, what about college?'"

As it turned out, preparing for college was the easy part.

Only room for essentials

The Peninsula was certainly an unusual place to be a young

race car driver, but it was the perfect place to raise a young race car champion.

"I think there's so much to be said about growing up here, especially for an athlete, just because there is so much drive and ambition in this area," said Jesse's older sister, Vivian, who attends college just an hour from the race track where Jesse trains. "A lot of it has to do with the work ethic ... what Silicon Valley's kind of known for."

As Jesse transitioned to online school in ninth grade — essential if he wanted to reach higher levels of racing while still completing pre-college coursework — he began treating racing itself like an academic discipline. He developed systematic, annotated catalogues of his races in encyclopedic notebooks, which he studies in depth before every race.

"When you go to 50 different, 60 different race tracks a year, it's hard," Jesse said. "They all have their different characteristics ... you can kind of forget sometimes ... so you have to be able to keep a notebook on the changes that you made to the car, changes that you made to yourself as a driver and just the track in general."

"The notebooks," laughed Edge, the driver relations manager. "I don't really go through them too much because they're almost in another language, to be honest with you." In Jesse's notebooks, which he updates obsessively, there are notes on every variable affecting every performance at every track. He has maps of raceways; diagrams of corners; and annotations detailing how the roughness of the track, or air density, or temperature affected the grip of his tires on a particular day.

The details help him concentrate when he's out on the track. He can't afford to be surprised as he slips between two cars with just inches of clearance, so the preparation is an essential part of his strategy. His car, too, is all business, no frills. From afar, it can look like a normal sedan from a dealership lot. Up close though, Jesse's is bare, stripped of everything but the necessities. There are no airbags, no air conditioning, no reverse gear, and the headlights are decals. Inside there's no place for passengers, no seats at all except for Jesse's — a cage of soldered metal plates.

This is the environment in which Jesse thrives: a car, a race track, a life with only room for essentials, where the smallest distraction can end a race, and sometimes end a career.

Data freak

Jesse's notebooks are thorough, but they're only one

element of a data-driven scheme to be No. 1. The culture and principles of the tech-obsessed hometown he left behind fuel his daily attempts to out-strategize his opponents, and he mercilessly exploits any edge he can find.

"Jesse is a data freak," said his father. "About a week ago, I was walking through the house, and I walked through the living room, and Jesse was sitting at the table with graph paper writing equations on something. And I looked over and I said, 'Oh, is that for school?' And he said, 'No ... These are track bar load weighting equations, and I think I have a different way to attack this, and I want to share it with my crew chief.'"

Even in Silicon Valley, Jesse's commitment to studying his craft and taking ownership of his career is remarkable for someone so young. "I feel like I was a professional when I was like 10 years old," he said. "When you're around racing it's really serious, and you run the risk of getting hurt or even dying ... You have to kind of up your maturity level at a young age."

One benefit of taking on exceptional responsibility has been the opportunity to experiment with exceptional technology. At Toyota Racing Development in North Carolina, Jesse now trains in a state-of-the-art race car simulator that gives drivers the chance to virtually test out any track in the country from a single room. At a track in Virginia last year, Jesse and his team used a combination of sensors, GoPro cameras and a GPS device to not only monitor his every move in a car, but to feed the data points into a computer, graph them and compare them to those of veteran drivers.

"Jesse was literally sitting down and he was looking at all this with the team owner and the guy analyzing it all, and then he would get back in the race car and he would go tremendously faster," Edge said, adding that after a single session of interpreting the graphs, he shaved full seconds off his time.

In the motorsport world, even one-thousandth of a second makes a difference, but not all drivers utilize the myriad figures recorded every time they strap into a car. It puts Jesse at a huge advantage, and recently he's compounded that by trying to master the fundamental mechanics of race cars, too.

"Most drivers are just like, 'Oh, the car's a little too tight here,' or, 'It's a little too loose here,'" Edge said, describing typical responses after a driver comes back from practice laps.

See **JESSE LOVE**, page 17

Public Notices

995 Fictitious Name Statement

AA PAINTING
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
File No.: 288443

The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:
AA Painting, located at 1327 Henderson Ave., Menlo Park, CA 94025, San Mateo County.

Registered owner(s):
ALEJANDRO ARGUELLO
1327 Henderson Ave.
Menlo Park, CA 94025

This business is conducted by: An Individual.

The registrant commenced to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 07/02/2021. This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on August 3, 2021.

(ALM Aug. 13, 20, 27; Sep. 3, 2021)

NAIROBI EPA ADVOCATES
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
File No.: 288492

The following person(s) is (are) doing business as:
Nairobi EPA Advocates, located at 1364 Sevier Avenue, Menlo Park, CA 94025, San Mateo County.

Registered owner(s):
JUANITA LOUISE CROFT
1364 Sevier Avenue
Menlo Park, CA 94025

VULINDLELA I. WOBOGO
2776 Hunter Street
East Palo Alto, CA 94303

MARTHA HANKS
1184 Laurel Avenue

East Palo Alto, CA 94303
KALAMU CHACHE
1038 Runnymede Street
East Palo Alto, CA 94303

This business is conducted by: An Unincorporated Association Other than a Partnership.

The registrant commenced to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on N/A. This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on August 6, 2021.

(ALM Aug. 13, 20, 27; Sep. 3, 2021)

PELLARIN ENTERPRISES
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
File No.: 288512

The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:
Pellarin Enterprises, located at 1520 Main Street, Redwood City, CA 94063, San Mateo County.

Registered owner(s):
ARRON PELLARIN
1520 Main Street
Redwood City, CA 94063

CLAUDE PELLARIN
1520 Main Street
Redwood City, CA 94063

ALICE PELLARIN
1520 Main Street
Redwood City, CA 94063

This business is conducted by: A General Partnership.
The registrant commenced to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on June 25, 1985. This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on August 9, 2021.

(ALM Aug. 20, 27; Sep. 3, 10, 2021)

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JESSE LOVE

continued from page 16

“Their crew chief has to take that very vague information and kind of take swings at whatever they want to do to make the car better.”

But Jesse isn't daunted by thermodynamics, mechanical engineering, or software simulations, and on his quest to become the best driver, he's teaching himself the basics of being a crew chief. Crew chiefs are the ultimate experts on race cars, carefully choosing car setups and making late-race pit strategy decisions. Once glorified mechanics, many now have training in physics or other hard sciences. By 2015, nearly half of all crew chiefs in the Daytona 500 had at least a bachelor's degree in engineering, and the proportion has only increased. In a sport that has long been dominated by street smarts and measured in grease under fingernails, science and academia are encroaching, and Jesse is ready.

“Jesse can jump out there and he can say, ‘Hey, it's loose, but it's loose in the back of the car, specifically the right side of the car. I think that shock needs to be adjusted, and the spring rate could go up another 500 pounds,’” said Edge, who accompanies Jesse to every race — a necessity since he is still a minor. “It's just insane that he can say that, because most drivers don't even know what adjusting a spring rate will do to the car, let alone be able to recommend a change.”

That's what Jesse wants — a leg up on competitors. In the top tier of NASCAR, all drivers are talented and they all log

long hours. The only way to beat them is to outwork them, and Jesse knows that most of that happens off the track.

A racing mind

It's easy to forget that underneath the calculations and high-octane exploits is a 16-year-old boy still navigating his adolescence. Jesse has mentors and teachers, veterans he admires, but none of them can give him a road map to success. His approach is unique and on the cutting edge of the sport. It's exciting and unprecedented, but it's also consuming, and it takes a toll on Jesse and those who love him.

His friendships are strong but scarce, which is something he's come to terms with. After all, in racing, every friend is eventually competition. “Whether you want to admit it or not, as a driver you kind of think of that when you're on the track,” he said. “I try not to have a huge circle of friends, especially racing friends. If you want to have a friend on the track, you can bring your dog.”

It's all worth it to him though, because it's made him a champion — his research, his notebooks, his commitment at the expense of all else.

“The mindset is so much of an athlete's performance,” he said. “Is there really something about Tom Brady and how he was born that makes him way different? Makes him the best quarterback of all time? Probably not.”

Jesse tapped his temple. “It's all pretty much up here.” ■

*Email Contributing Writer
Kali Shiloh at kshiloh@embarcaderopublishing.com.*

GETREU

continued from page 10

police. Taylor was dead, he said. Bissonnette saw Taylor for the last time in the morgue when he went with her parents to identify their daughter's body, he said.

Schroeder, who also took the witness stand on Tuesday, said during a separate interview that he's been waiting for 47 years for Taylor's killer to be found

Taylor was a warm, honest and loving person; the kind of person who opened her home on the Saturday after Thanksgiving to two strangers, he said.

“It was just like Russell and Janet to welcome people like that,” Schroeder said.

He thinks about Taylor's death “all the time — many times a year,” he said.

Sometimes, he feels regret. He and Bissonnette were working on fixing up a car they'd gotten to replace the one Taylor

had that broke down. If the car was ready on March 24, Taylor would not have hitchhiked and she would still be alive, he said.

“I've thought about this. Why didn't we get that car done? If that car was ready, we'd all be sitting around drinking beer with Janet,” he said.

Mostly, though, he thinks about Bissonnette.

“How sad it is for Russell — to have somebody ripped out of your life,” he said.

Getreu looked down and seemed disinterested during much of the testimony. But when Bissonnette and Schroeder took the stand, he looked directly at them and they looked back. Schroeder said he didn't feel much when he saw Getreu. Maybe, he said, if he'd seen him 47 years ago he'd feel different. ■

*Email Staff Writer Sue
Dremann at sdremann@pawebly.com.*

BACK TO SCHOOL

continued from page 1

Portola Valley and Las Lomas school districts

Ormondale School Principal Lynette Hovland said things went smoothly on the first day on Thursday, Aug. 26. She called her students “mask-wearing champions” who are used to the safety protocols since the district reopened on a hybrid basis last school year.

“The energy and buzz outside as I was greeting students and parents was electric,” she said in an email. “We started our day with an all-school virtual assembly where the counselor and I read our first book of the month, ‘Everyone is Welcome.’”

One difference for the students this year is that recess is divided into grade level cohorts instead of just classroom cohorts. They're also excited their library has reopened, Hovland said.

The district is updating its COVID-19 cases on a weekly basis on its website. One case, in the district of a little under 500 students, was reported at Ormondale the week of Aug. 23, prior to the start of school.

Construction projects, which kicked off this summer as part of Portola Valley School



Magali Gauthier

Parents drop off their children at Ormondale Elementary School on the first day of classes in Portola Valley on Aug. 26.

District's \$49.5 million bond measure project, are ongoing. The projects include classroom and courtyard renovations.

The projects are on track, said Adam Lint, director of bond and facilities for the district. The district planned provide an update on the construction at the governing board's meeting on Thursday, Sept. 2, after The Almanac's Wednesday afternoon press deadline.

The Las Lomas School District, home to Las Lomas Elementary School in Atherton and La Entrada Middle School

in Menlo Park, reopened on a hybrid basis last school year. Students at the schools also returned for the fall term on Wednesday, Aug. 25.

“The first week went really well,” said Superintendent Beth Polito in an email. “Lots of happy faces.”

The staff vaccination rate is over 90%, she said, and the district will update its COVID-19 case dashboard on its website. ■

*Email Staff Writer Angela
Swartz at aswartz@almanacnews.com.*

VOTER BAN

continued from page 5

Grove, a Sharon Heights resident, has suggested the possibility of dedicating a corner of the district's Sharon Park to affordable housing, or perhaps a part of Burgess Park.

“All of that would expand opportunities for everyone in the city,” Grove said, speaking as an individual rather than on behalf of the commission, in a community meeting on Aug. 26 dedicated to discussing the

upcoming housing element.

In Mueller's email request for the parks rezoning ban to come before the City Council, he said that it was foreseeable that the vast majority of new housing resulting from the housing element update wouldn't provide much new recreational space for residents, and noted that park space has been important to people's mental and physical health during the pandemic.

“As our population grows we must not cannibalize City park space that will support

the public health of present and future generations,” he wrote.

Instead of allowing housing at city parks, he added that he favored considerations to increase zoning at existing apartment developments and shifting zoning at the Sharon Heights Shopping Center to allow mixed-use housing and commercial development instead of using park space in his district. ■

*Email Staff Writer Kate
Bradshaw at kbradshaw@almanacnews.com.*

STANFORD WEDGE

continued from page 7

behavior modeling also looks at whether a fire would transition from the ground surface to tree crowns, which is much more dangerous.

Once fire behavior is estimated through modeling, an assessment of fire hazards to surrounding life and property can be done and modifications, known as vegetation treatments or prescriptions, can be made.

Nearly all areas of the property were shown to need some form of vegetation treatment to reduce fire hazard. The modeling shows that fire safety on the entire property is significantly improved with the vegetation plan, which is part of the development application for Portola

Terrace, according to the vegetation plan. Average flame lengths are greatly diminished from 4.8 feet to 0.7 feet and “integrated hazard” decreases by as much as 99%. This greatly reduces fire risk to surrounding homes and infrastructure, the plan states.

A new private, permanent road will be constructed from Alpine Road up to the middle of the property to allow for greater fire engine access since currently parts of the mountain can only be accessed through other residents' properties.

Environmental protections are also incorporated into the fire plan, including protection of significant trees, nesting birds, San Francisco dusky-footed woodrats, California red-legged frogs, and archaeological resources.

State housing requirements

The state is mandating that the town plan for building much more housing than it has in past housing element cycles.

Portola Valley is required to designate 253 new housing units in the next decade, and the council has been weighing the concept of adding housing while also preserving Portola Valley's treasured rural character and not creating more wildfire risk in the process. In the last Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) cycle, the California Department of Housing and Community Development assigned just 64 units to Portola Valley. ■

*Email Staff Writer Angela
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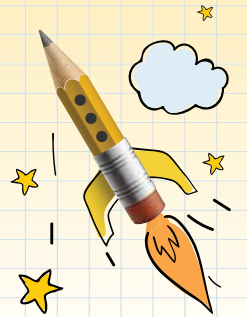
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The Almanac
Online



Fall 2021

Class Guide



This fall, jumpstart the season with a wide range of classes from schools, gyms and sports leagues, among others, that continue to ramp up their learning opportunities. Online classes are still available in many cases, or you can once again learn how to cook, paint and speak a new language right next to a teacher at many places that are now offering in-person classes and activities. Be sure to check each listing's COVID-19 protocols before signing up.

DANCE

Captivating Dance by Nona

1923 Menalto Ave., Menlo Park
650-980-8555 / captivating-dancebynona.com

Captivating Dance by Nona instructs youth of various ages and abilities in ballet, tap, jazz, lyrical, hip hop and other styles and skills. Classes are in-person or virtual. Registration for in-person camp is now open.

Dance Expressions

701 Laurel St., Menlo Park
650-450-3209 / DanceExpressionsMP@gmail.com / danceexpressions5678.com

Dance instruction for students ages 3 and up, focusing on jazz technique at various experience and skill levels. Contact the studio for latest class schedule.

SPORTS & FITNESS

Menlo Swim & Sport

Burgess Pool, 501 Laurel St., Menlo Park / customerservice@menloswim.com / menloswim.com

Youth, adult and community programs at Burgess pool, including year-round swim lessons, youth swim teams, masters swimming, water

polo and water exercise, as well as other sports programs. Belle Haven pool is closed for remodeling until 2023.

One Heart Yoga

Little House Activity Center, Fitness Room, 800 Middle Ave., Menlo Park
415-494-7021 / oneheartyyoga.com

Weekly classes in Kundalini yoga and meditation, aimed at helping students increase flexibility and strength, learn breathing techniques to calm and focus and reduce anxiety and depression. The studio offers classes via Zoom. View schedules and register for classes online.

Isola Riding Academy

3639 Alpine Road, Portola Valley
805-857-5464 / isolastables.com

Hands-on programs teaching riders to groom their horses, tack and provide riding instruction depending on individual riding level. Private and small group lessons are offered.

Menlo Park Tennis

Nealon Park Tennis Courts, 800 Middle Ave., Menlo Park
650-814-6734 / menloparktennis.com

Tennis classes for adults and children ages 5 and up and at

all levels. Lessons include tips, strategy, drills and entertaining games. Check the website or call to register.

Spring Down Equestrian Center

725 Portola Road, Portola Valley
650-851-1114 / sdecenter@aol.com / springdown.com

Spring Down Equestrian Center educates children (beginning at age 3) and adults on horses and horseback riding. Instruction in basic riding, jumping, dressage, western riding and horsemanship is offered.



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Classes and camps held year-round. Registration for Thanksgiving camp is open.

Webb Ranch Riding School
2720 Alpine Road, Portola Valley
650-854-7755 / lessons@webbranchinc.com / webbranchinc.com

Instruction for beginning and intermediate riders in both group and private settings. Specialties include Western riding, dressage and hunt-seat riding. In addition, there are a number of weeklong camp sessions for children ages 7 to 18. Call or go online for more information on fall camp programs.

LANGUAGE

German-American School of Palo Alto

German-American International School campus, 475 Pope St., Menlo Park.
650-520-3646 / gaspa-ca.org
The German-American School of Palo Alto (GASPA) teaches immersive German language classes, which also cover culture and traditions, to students ages 2.5 to 18. No prior knowledge of German is required. Fall instruction will be online only.

MUSIC, ARTS & CRAFTS

Music Together Menlo Park
75 Arbor Road, Suite N, Menlo

Park, 650-799-1624 / admin@mt-mp.com / mt-mp.com
Music Together holds classes exploring music and movement for children from birth up to age 5 and their guardians at the Allied Arts Guild. In-person and live online classes are available. Fall semester begins Sept. 7.

Old World Designs

727 Santa Cruz Ave., Menlo Park
650-321-3494 / info@oldworlddesigns.com / oldworlddesigns.com
In addition to stocking supplies and giving private lessons in stitching, Old World Designs organizes project classes and “stitch-ins.” Year-round group and private lessons are available. Some events and private instruction will be in person. Contact the store for more information.

EDUCATION

Littlest Angels Preschool

1095 Cloud Ave., Menlo Park
650-854-4973 / preschool@bethany-mp.org / bethany-mp.org/preschool
At the preschool, children ages 2 to 5 follow a Christian curriculum that encourages creative, emotional, intellectual, physical and social development. Contact the school for the latest updates.

Lydian Academy

815 El Camino Real, Menlo Park
650-535-8711 / lydianacademy.com

Lydian Academy is a middle and high school offering individualized instruction to prepare students for college. Lessons include a mix of one-on-one teaching and group sessions. It also offers tutoring and after-school programs. In-person and online instruction are available. Enrollment is ongoing.

Phillips Brooks School

2245 Avy Ave., Menlo Park
650-854-4545 ext. 137 / admission@phillipsbrooks.org / phillipsbrooks.org
Phillips Brooks School is a coeducational day school teaching children in preschool through fifth grade and integrates social learning and individual instruction. In addition to core subjects, children can also study science, technology, music, art, library, physical education and Spanish.

Woodland School

360 La Cuesta Drive, Portola Valley
650-854-9065 / woodland-school.org
Woodland School is an innovative, project-based school for students in early childhood through eighth grade that gives individualized attention, develops leadership skills and emphasizes the values of caring, respect and community. In-person and distance learning options are available.

CAREER PREP

JobTrain

1200 O’ Brien Drive, Menlo Park
650-330-6429 / info@jobtrainworks.org / jobtrainworks.org
JobTrain has a variety of training programs for adults — providing instruction in the culinary arts, business administration, health care, web technology, construction and other fields — as well as programs specifically for youth, to help with GED preparation, job placement and vocational training. View available workshops online.

Sequoia District Adult School

3247 Middlefield Road, Menlo Park
650-306-8866 / seqsas.org
Sequoia District Adult Education holds classes in English as a second language and computer and business skills. Students can also earn a high school diploma or GED certificate. Counselors are available to help students transition to college programs. Classes are in-person. Register online.

SENIORS

Little House, Roslyn G. Morris Activity Center

800 Middle Ave., Menlo Park
650-272-5000 / penvol.org/littlehouse
Little House Activity Center offers classes for adults of all ages on various topics and activities,

including health and wellness for seniors; fitness exercises like line dancing and Pilates; ceramics, drawing and other arts; languages; history and culture; and computer skills. Most classes remain virtual. Check online.

ENRICHMENT

The Riekes Center for Human Enhancement

3455 Edison Way, Menlo Park
650-364-2509 / info@riekes.org / riekes.org
A nonprofit organization, the Riekes Center provides a number of programs focused on self-enhancement for youth and adults: strength and speed fitness courses, adaptive sports, a class for musical bands, photography workshops and nature exploration, among other opportunities. In-person programs are available.

THE CLASS GUIDE

is published quarterly in the Almanac. Descriptions of classes offered in Menlo Park, Atherton, Portola Valley and Woodside are free, subject to editing and given priority.

To inquire about submitting a listing for the next Class Guide, email Editorial Assistant Lloyd Lee at llee@pawekly.com or call 650-223-6526. To place a paid advertisement in the Class Guide, call the display advertising department at 650-326-8210.

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SCAN AND SIGN UP FOR PENINSULA PLAYBOOK

Torch songs

Life in a Peninsula hacker house helped inspire a scorching tale of techies versus hippies in “Burning Man: The Musical”

By Heather Zimmerman

Inside a spacious, well-appointed tent somewhere on the desert playa at Burning Man, there’s singing, dancing, sparkly costumes, and moments of both crushing doubt and soaring personal enlightenment. Outside, the weather is harsh; swirling in the wind, it’s not powdery playa dust, but snow.

This deluxe campsite has been built on a soundstage in upstate New York, where in the spring of 2021, a small cast and crew is filming “Burning Man: The Musical.”

The scene is a couple of thousand miles from the Nevada desert where Burning Man takes place every Labor Day weekend, but the camp and its cast of characters have origins much closer to home: places like a hacker house in Mountain View.

Matt Werner, creator of “Burning Man: The Musical” lived in that house for a time, with housemates who worked at various tech companies, both startups and established names — Werner himself at Google, where he still works as a senior technical writer. An Oakland native, Werner developed the musical over a number of years. The show is as much about the valley as it is the festival itself and how the two are intertwined for better and sometimes worse.

Werner intended “Burning Man: The Musical” for the stage, in a form that seems to truly reflect a festival where it’s said “there are no spectators.”

“Our goal was to bring it to

the Bay Area as a theater piece, specifically, an immersive, site-specific theater piece where you would be surrounded by the actors and you would be part of the show,” Werner said.

The pandemic brought about the show’s adaptation into a film, which premiered on Aug. 27 via the online platforms Broadway on Demand and Streaming Musicals. Werner wrote the script and lyrics, with music by Gene Back, and the film is directed by Tyler Milliron, with choreography by Ari Grooves. The cast features many Broadway- and New York-based artists. The production was filmed over three weeks with cast and crew quarantined.

“Burning Man: The Musical” follows the story of Molly (Morgan Siobhan Green), a brilliant new hire at Safeword Venture Capital, a Silicon Valley firm run by Bill the Billionaire (Tally Sessions).

Bill takes Molly with him to Burning Man to help strike a deal with a self-driving car startup, but soon demands that she track down a large quantity of mind-altering pharmaceuticals for him after his stash gets confiscated. Molly’s quest, with guileless startup founder Joe (Troy Iwata) in tow, leads her to various camps that reveal different sides of Burning Man, such as the tent of a kindly longtime Burner called Hazel the Hippie (Michelle Duffy).

Life in the hacker house inspired some aspects of the musical: One housemate’s deep admiration for Steve Jobs was the basis for a number, Werner said,

and everyday life in the valley helped inform the show. He also drew from his own festival experiences and those of his older sister, Kelly, who had been attending Burning Man off and on since the ‘90s and saw the festival’s growth firsthand.

In roughly the past decade, the once firmly countercultural Burning Man has become known for attracting wealthy visitors with a seamy ulterior motive: tech dealmaking. The musical lampoons how tech CEOs and other moneyed visitors eschew the grassroots, maker ethos on which the festival was founded, hopping on jets or helicopters to the desert and setting up restricted luxury camps, where they forgo the festival’s unique gifting economy and exclude fellow festival-goers.

“It’s about the people who come in on private jets and stay in their camps — they actually hire ‘sherpas.’ They hire models to serve drinks and they have wristbands and bouncers outside, and they’re in these overly opulent, decorated camps,” Werner said.

But he also points out that of the 70,000 people that typically turn out for the festival (in a non-pandemic year), such gated “glamping” experiences are far from the norm.

“It’s in no way reflective of (the other) 65,000 people, camping in Walmart tents, or a dozen people crashing in an old camper, or a yurt.”

Werner was drawn to make the show a musical in part by the sound of the festival itself. Though he notes that Burning Man expressly does not bill itself



Courtesy Rachel Monteleone

Molly and Joe (Morgan Siobhan Green, left, and Troy Iwata) have a special glow after navigating through different camps in “Burning Man: The Musical.”

as a musical event — not like the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, for example — life on the playa means experiencing a varied soundscape, with music of many types blasting from different camps.

And as a playwright, Werner of course also took cues from musical theater.

“When I was thinking of a story set out in the desert, I was kind of inspired by ‘Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat,’ with wild pageantry and costumes, sound, light and color. It just seems like something so epic as Burning Man needed to be captured in an epic musical stage play,” Werner said.

He promises plenty of Easter eggs for musical theater fans, who are likely to appreciate lyrics like the wistful “I dreamed a dream of burns gone by ...”

Despite the show’s literally dividing techies and hippies into separate camps, Burning Man, which was founded in 1986 in San Francisco, doesn’t just have close ties to tech and Silicon Valley, Werner noted: the festival’s ethos, with its 10 principles including radical self-expression, radical self-reliance and civic responsibility, has plenty in common with the roots of Silicon Valley.

“The original techies were actually counterculture people back in the ‘70s. ... They were kind of renegades back then and we forget about that,” he said.

People building their own home computers or experimenting with robotics as a hobby used to be pretty unusual, Werner pointed out, and that same curiosity and technical skill has helped foster the art cars, robots and fiery sculptures that have been populating the playa over Burning Man’s 35 years.

But musicals aren’t known for nuance, so for storytelling purposes, Werner said he unblurred these lines, though he did purposely create a character with a foot in both worlds, representing

the valley’s early renegades.

“The dichotomy that I’ve created in the musical is a false dichotomy, techie vs. hippie, because there was at one point a tremendous crossover,” he said.

As the show began to come together, it had several staged readings pre-pandemic in New York and San Francisco and it was well-received, particularly among the audiences who might have been most critical: the regular, dedicated festival-goers sometimes called Burners.

“As I’ve been developing this piece, I wanted to make sure that the tone of it is ‘laughing with us’ and not ‘laughing at us,’” Werner said. Some early test performances of the show in December 2019 invited the feedback of several hundred Burners.

“Overall, they just loved it. So they totally got the humor, they got the satire,” he said.

“Burning Man: The Musical” is not affiliated with the Burning Man organization that hosts the festival, but the company did give its blessing to the production for the use of the Burning Man name. The organization will feature the film as part of the official festivities, which due to the pandemic will take place virtually over this Labor Day weekend.

“Burning Man: The Musical” will be screened online as part of the celebrations on Burn Night, the festival’s culmination, when the iconic towering man sculpture is set aflame, shown via webcast on Saturday, Sept. 4.

Werner said that he still hopes to someday bring the musical to in-person theater as more of an experiential event, perhaps with heat lamps simulating the desert sun and fans mimicking dust storms — and of course, there would have to be a significant budget for pyrotechnics.

For more information, visit burningmanthemusical.com. ■

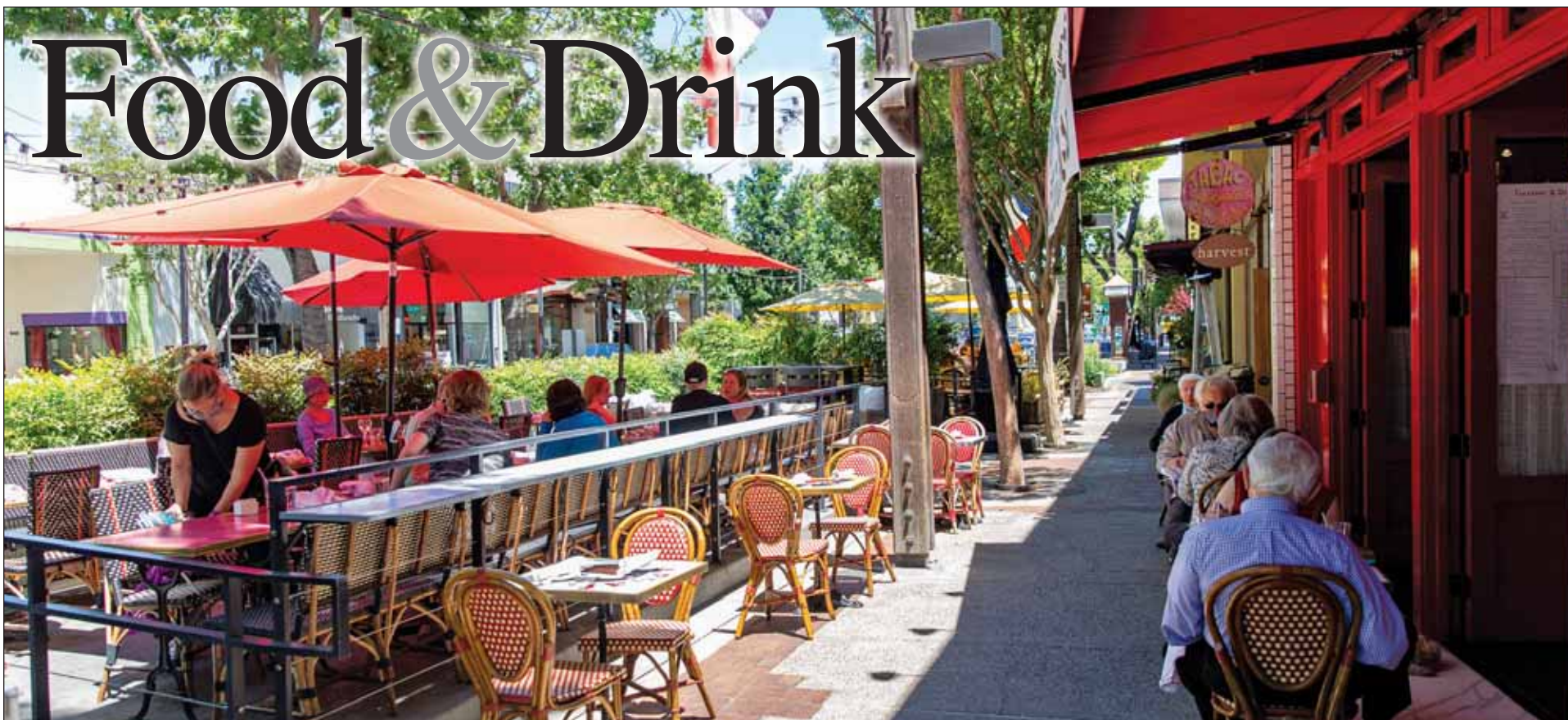
Email Arts & Entertainment Editor Heather Zimmerman at hzimmerman@almanacnews.com.



Courtesy Burning Man: The Musical

“Burning Man: The Musical” tells of how tech bro Bill the Billionaire (Tally Sessions, center) comes to Burning Man to make deals, and worse, to the horror of Molly (Morgan Siobahn Green, left) and other Burners (Mila Jam, Allison Griffith).

Food & Drink



Magali Gauthier

Bistro Vida feted as small business of the year

Restaurateur offers gathering spot for community to eat, play and dance

By Sara Hayden

Bistro Vida in Menlo Park has been recognized as the 13th Senate District's Small Business of the Year. The bistro has been much more than a place to eat. Especially during the pandemic, it's become a place for people to gather outdoors.

"We're different, very homey. You feel like this is your neighborhood place, where you would like to come hang out. When you come in, everyone knows each other. It's like (the TV show) 'Cheers' — the homey place for everybody," owner Ali El Safy said.

Lately, depending on the time of day, you might stroll Santa Cruz Avenue, and radiating out from number 641 as the central hub, there may be people playing musical instruments, kids hanging out after school or diners enjoying a cocktail or a meal. People have hung out in "social circles" drawn on the ground. Some dance.

"I think people were having a hard time mentally and

emotionally," El Safy said. "Everyone was drained ... You need something to distract you from what was going on."

Creating a space for community connection provided that. Since then, El Safy and his team have offered picnic tables and live music, and cleaned the space for the public. "There's room for everybody, I look at the restaurant like my living room, my home ... I go out of my way to take care of you."

Bistro Vida is one of the countless local businesses that changed operations in light of COVID-19. The team sought to develop amenities for the community, protective equipment for the staff and permitting to develop a parklet. The parklet reflects the detail that El Safy envisioned for the interior of the restaurant, incorporating chandeliers, black and white images of bridges and the Sacré-Cœur Basilica in Paris, and tables from the south of France, inspired by the country he lived in after emigrating from Alexandria, Egypt. Then El Safy invited a friend to play music, and things took off from there.

"Community spirit is part of Bistro Vida's DNA. That's been clear since Ali opened its doors in 1998. Thanks to that unflagging spirit and Ali's leadership, Bistro Vida not only met the challenges of the pandemic, the restaurant and its owner also helped keep the vibrancy of Menlo Park's downtown alive," state Sen. Josh Becker said in a statement.

El Safy said Bistro Vida retained all 22 employees on staff throughout the pandemic. Demand for

food service slowed, but the team continued to work.

"I couldn't have done it without my staff and the people I work with. Hats off to them. They all stayed with me and we did what we had to do," El Safy said. "We painted the restaurant, we cleaned the restaurant. We did a little bit of landscaping, just to keep the mind stimulated."

Now, El Safy is hopeful for the future. "The more people we get vaccinated, the more clients we get to see coming out," he said.

Aiming for an autumn launch, El Safy's focus is now on developing another way to engage the Menlo Park community: He's helping coordinate a French-style outdoor market, which could dedicate up to two city blocks to vendors, each specializing in their own fare.

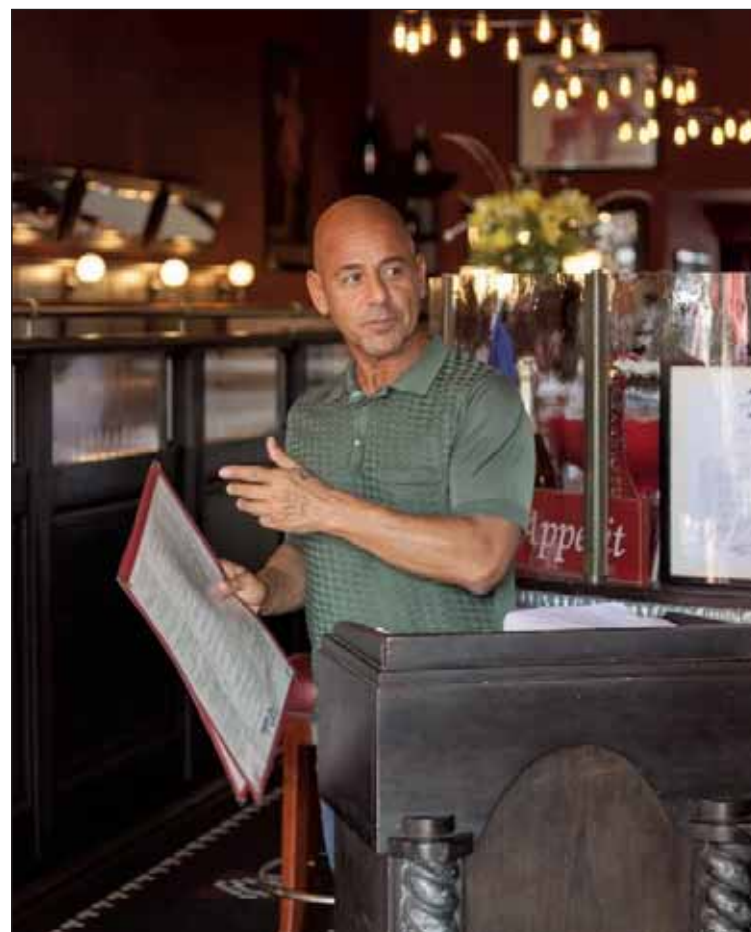
"We'll bring the best gelato, the best saucisson. There will be the mushroom guy, and the cheese guy," El Safy said. "We're all foreigners here, and we bring something different."

Until then, the Bistro Vida team will continue to offer "warm, homey comfort," welcoming families the team has seen grow up over the years and newcomers alike.

"We have become what we have always wanted to be — the neighborhood bistro," El Safy said.

Bistro Vida, 641 Santa Cruz Ave., Menlo Park; 650-462-1686, bistro-vida.com. ■

Email Associate Digital Editor Sara Hayden at peninsulafoodist@almanacnews.com.



Courtesy Christie Perego

Above, Ali El Safy's Bistro Vida has been recognized as the small business of the year by state Sen. Josh Becker and the California Small Business Association. **Top,** people sit for lunch at Bistro Vida's outdoor dining area in downtown Menlo Park.

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