

# The Almanac

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

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## Standing tall

How local state parks are recovering from the CZU Fire — and building resilience for the future

By Julia Brown / Magali Gauthier

Signs of the CZU Lightning Complex Fire are still visible in and around the coastal corridor where San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties meet. Staggered skeletons of bare trees line the side of the road off Highway 1, a stark reminder of the flames that tore through 86,509 acres of land in 2020. Blackened bark dots redwood trees along Butano State Park's Little Butano Creek Trail, which reopened this fall for the first time since the fire.

And inside the Pescadero park are literal signs of fire — notices for visitors about a controlled burn and forest restoration work with the aim of “returning the

forest to a state in which it is more resilient to fire.”

More than four years have passed since the CZU Fire was fully contained, but its impacts are still being felt at local state parks. Recovery has been measured in milestones not over months, but years, a process of navigating agencies and permits, environmental impact reports and sensitive species.

Over 100 miles of trails were damaged, with bridges, retaining walls and other infrastructure needing rebuilding via labor-intensive handwork. The water systems at Butano and Big Basin Redwoods state parks were destroyed, limiting

See **STATE PARKS**, page 14



Magali Gauthier

Will Fourt, a senior planner with State Parks in the Santa Cruz District, stands on a bridge on the Skyline to the Sea Trail that was rehabilitated twice in Big Basin Redwoods State Park in Boulder Creek on Oct. 31, 2024. The bridge was partly rebuilt after it burned in the 2020 CZU fire and was fixed again in 2023 after a large tree fell on it.

## Sequoia district ignored rampant antisemitism by teachers, students, lawsuit says

By Arden Margulis

Jewish families, who filed a lawsuit against Sequoia Union High School District administrators, teachers and board members, say administrators ignored Jewish students' complaints of harassment and antisemitism, failed to intervene when teachers taught historical inaccuracies and broadcasted a student-created call to pro-Palestinian activism.

The lawsuit was filed by the families of six Sequoia district students at Menlo-Atherton and Woodside high schools who are represented by The Deborah Project, a Maryland-based legal group dedicated to addressing antisemitism in educational institutions, with pro bono

assistance from the law firm Ropes & Gray, according to a press release.

The Deborah Project had previously sent a public records act request to the district seeking all instructional materials containing the words “Zionism, Zionists, Israel, Israelis, Palestine, and/or Palestinians” taught since Sept. 1.

Sequoia district spokesperson Naomi Hunter told this news organization she could not comment because the district has yet to be served with the lawsuit. Federal court records indicate administrators were served on Nov. 18.

Superintendent Crystal Leach did not respond to a request for an interview.

The lawsuit cites multiple

examples of antisemitism by teachers and students at Woodside and Menlo-Atherton high schools. The lawsuit also alleges that district administrators “egregiously” failed to address a rise in antisemitism after the Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

“People say ‘oh we’re just criticizing Israel.’ But it isn’t. It’s attacking the Jewish state and demonizing and delegitimizing Jews and the Jewish state,” said Lori Lowenthal Marcus, legal director of the Deborah Project.

The suit, filed in federal court, names Woodside and Menlo-Atherton administrators, district administrators, district trustees and teachers.

One of the lawsuit’s most damaging claims is that teachers often used their position to

spread antisemitism and rarely faced any discipline from school or district administration.

### Woodside history class

The lawsuit claims that Woodside history teacher Gregory Gruszynski “exploited his position of trust to spread antisemitic and ahistorical pro-Hamas propaganda.” It states that Gruszynski repeatedly displayed political pro-Palestine political messages in his classroom, taught biased and inaccurate lessons and singled out the only Jewish student in his class, L.K.

Gruszynski did not respond to multiple requests for an interview.

The lawsuit states that L.K.’s father, Sam Kasle, repeatedly

attempted to obtain the teacher’s curriculum yet Woodside administrators refused to provide the material.

California Education Code 49091.10 states: “All primary supplemental instructional materials and assessments, including textbooks, teacher’s manuals, films, audio and video recordings, and software shall be compiled and stored by the classroom instructor and made available promptly for inspection by a parent or guardian in a reasonable timeframe.”

The material that was eventually released shows that to receive points on assignments and tests, students had to answer multiple choice questions with

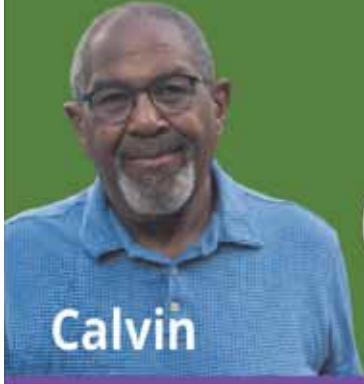
See **ANTISEMITISM**, page 17

INSIDE

Help local families in need 8

VIEWPOINT 18 | ARTS 19 | FOOD 23





Calvin

# Your Generosity Can Change a Senior's Story.

*A Hidden Crisis: Our senior community faces rising costs, hunger, and isolation.*

We wish you a joyous holiday season with family and friends. While we celebrate the season with loved ones, many local seniors face challenges that threaten their well-being.

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*The holiday season intensifies the challenges for Ruth and others!*

Over the holidays, these burdens grow heavier for countless seniors like **Ruth**, who is homebound with a broken hip and cannot shop or cook for herself, or **Calvin**, a widower who lives alone and struggles to afford food. **Joyce** is overwhelmed by her husband's Alzheimer's, while others face loneliness and technology barriers to stay connected with loved ones.

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\* Examples: \$500 provides PVI Meals on Wheels for two at-risk seniors for a month; \$700 supports a week of Adult Day Services; \$1,200 funds an annual premium membership at PVI's Adult Activity Center at Little House; \$2,000 funds 100 round-trip rides for seniors; \$2,500 funds an iPad and training for a year.

  
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# Local News

MENLO PARK | AHERTON | WOODSIDE | PORTOLA VALLEY



Anna Hoch-Kenney

Tyler MacNiven, co-owner of Buck's Restaurant, takes down a painted decorative cow skull as he and a team disassemble the Woodside restaurant's parking lot dining parklet on the morning of Nov. 25.

## Woodside loses outdoor dining spaces for now

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

Woodside's only outdoor dining spaces at The Village Bakery and Buck's Restaurant were taken down indefinitely as rain came down hard on Monday morning, Nov. 25. The parklets popped up in 2020 when outdoor dining gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

An application to construct permanent outdoor dining spaces and to expand the Cañada Corners parking lot has been a contentious topic among residents. In 2021,

Woodside residents voted to approve Measure A, a land use measure that allows for improvement projects in Town Center to promote art and cultural events. The measure also allows improvements to parking, trails and play structures to accommodate new permanent outdoor dining.

The Town Council discussed the application on Oct. 22, but did not take any action to approve or deny it. The council will revisit the application on Dec. 10 with its new council members.

Some customers were shocked to see restaurant staff

working in the rain to deconstruct the outdoor dining spaces. Many thought that it was just for the winter but were sad to find out it was being removed indefinitely.

"This is like the heartbeat of Woodside," said Celestine Schnugg, a Buck's customer. "It's where we all have our special milestone moments and to see it go away in the rain like this is devastating."

According to the owners of Buck's, the landlord of Cañada Corners, Christine Roberts, had to ask the businesses to

See **OUTDOOR DINING**, page 16

## Plans submitted to replace Jeffrey's Hamburgers with 41-unit housing complex

By Eleanor Raab

The city of Menlo Park has received a formal development application for the construction of a 41-unit residential building at 888 El Camino Real, which currently houses Jeffrey's Hamburgers.

Plans published on the city of Menlo Park's website show that the owners of the property, 888 El Camino LLC, propose to demolish the one-story restaurant building and construct a seven-story residential building. According to the city's website, the 41 units in the building would be for-sale condo units, with five of the units (15%) being affordable to those at the very low-income level.

Serge Karanov, the owner of Jeffrey's Hamburgers, said that he plans for Jeffrey's to remain at its current location "to the last moment possible."

"I spoke to (the property owners) a few weeks ago and was told that they anticipate it to be at least three to five years out," he said. "(We) will start looking for another location nearby when we have a better idea of the closing date."

The city's El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan allows up to 24 residential units on a lot the size of 888 El Camino Real, however the developers propose to make use of a 50% state density bonus by including below market rate units to be able to

build the 41 units that have been proposed.

The city is currently reviewing the application for completeness. If the application is determined to be complete, the city will then review the application for consistency with city and state development requirements and environmental standards. If the application is deemed incomplete, the developer can resubmit the application with any pieces of information that were determined to be missing.

Menlo Park's Community Development Director, Deanna Chow, said that the city welcomes feedback from the community at any step of the process.

"Folks can come and review the plans at the city (hall)," she said. "It's nice to have input early on."

Anyone can view the application materials, including architectural drawings, for the two projects in person at the Menlo Park City Hall, 701 Laurel St. Appointments to view the architectural drawings and application materials at [menlopark.gov/appointment](http://menlopark.gov/appointment).

A mixed-use office and retail development had previously been proposed for the site in July 2023. The preliminary application for the current all-residential design was submitted to the city in April 2024. ■

Email Staff Writer Eleanor Raab at [eraab@almanacnews.com](mailto:eraab@almanacnews.com).

## Atherton to explore becoming a charter city

By Eleanor Raab

At its Nov. 20 meeting, the Atherton City Council directed town staff to begin working on a proposed charter for the city and to further study the possible advantages and drawbacks of becoming a charter city. The discussion was spurred by a desire from residents to gain more independence from the state, specifically from certain state housing requirements.

However, as the state has been closing housing loopholes over the past few legislative sessions, it is not clear that charter city status would have a large impact on Atherton's housing requirements, according to City Manager George Rodericks.

"The benefits are getting slimmer and slimmer with respect to becoming a charter city," said Rodericks at the meeting. "In fact the only real significant benefit at this point is probably financial ...

The options that are there with respect to land use decisions and 'home rule' are slowly being eroded by the state, and particularly with respect to housing."

Atherton previously considered becoming a charter city in 2012 and again in 2015 in order to gain the ability to levy a real estate transfer tax to plug a hole in the town's budget.

Atherton's council was

See **CHARTER CITY**, page 12



Courtesy city of Menlo Park

Renderings from LDP Architecture show what the residential building might look like once completed.

# Portola Valley slashes budget amid financial crisis

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

In the midst of a financial crisis, the town of Portola Valley is actively seeking new options to revise its budget and increase revenue. On Nov. 13, the Town Council voted unanimously to approve a new proposed budget with an additional \$20,000 investment to go toward staff development.

Finance Director Tony McFarlane presented the council with a revised budget that would reduce town expenses by \$2.5 million, leaving the town with a surplus of \$97,000 for fiscal year 2024-25.

Due to the town's seven vacant staff positions, it is able to save about \$800,000 on staffing costs. McFarlane also proposed that no investments will be made toward staff development training to cut costs, which council members all rejected.

For a full staff, funding for staff development would cost about \$50,000 but for the current number of staff the town is only investing \$5,000. Council members emphasized that staff development is crucial to solve its issues around recruitment and retention and asked McFarlane to

reassess available funds.

"I think it's important to remember that cutting out development is sort of a drastic thing to do with staff," said Council member Jeff Aalfs. "It's a very small cost, but it's something that contributes greatly to people."

By cutting costs, the town and its residents may also be impacted with delays in services, said McFarlane. Community members may experience delays in permit and plan checks, building inspections, public records requests and town website updates. The current reduced hours for Town Hall and Building and Planning from Monday through Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. may also remain indefinitely, said McFarlane.

Recruitment and retention of town staff will also continue to be an issue while administrative roles remain vacant for a permanent town manager, planning and building director, town clerk and town engineer, according to the presentation.

"Recruitment will be challenging with this budget and lack of development and lack of clear advancement," said McFarlane. "With retention, we should be looking at continued staff

turnover. Also with the reduced staff positions, filling those positions, we're going to have a continued reliance on consultants and contractors"

McFarlane also explained that this revised budget will impact the town's future budgets in staffing and consultant fees. Full-time employees will be reduced from 20 to 15 members. With limited staffing resources, the town will also need to negotiate reduced hours for contractors and consultants to keep costs low.

The town can also expect a \$600,000 increase in the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office contract after fiscal year 2025-26, but the town is attempting to negotiate a cheaper contract. McFarlane estimates that the contract will increase by 10% each year based on trends from previous contracts.

The revised budget will also limit investments in capital improvement projects. Without these investments, facilities maintenance costs and IT issues will increase but the town will invest if necessary, said McFarlane.

Previously, Mayor Sarah Wernikoff introduced the idea of a lease-leaseback as a possible financial option. This would

involve leasing town property to San Mateo County. In McFarlane's example, if the town were to agree to a 5-year lease-leaseback with the county for \$3 million with an interest rate of 3.77%, the annual investment yield would be 4.22%.

Another strongly supported idea was to become a charter town, which would require a ballot measure in the November 2026 election. This would allow the town to impose its own Real Property Transfer Tax rate. Currently the town's rate is \$1.10 per \$1,000 in home sale value.

If the town were to adopt an \$8 per \$1,000 rate, it will generate about \$1.5 million per year, said McFarlane. If voters approve the measure, the rate would be effective in January 2027.

Mayor Wernikoff expressed concerns over the 2025-26 budget with the town's current "Band-Aid solutions" of interim staff and lack of resourcing in departments like Planning and Building.

"We will continue to struggle with getting to the work that's in our housing element that before we know it, in April, we're going to be looking at another annual

See **BUDGET**, page 16

## Constance "Connie" Sutton

July 19, 1955- October 17, 2024

Connie Sutton, a treasured mother, partner, and friend, died at Stanford Hospital on October 17, 2024, after a courageous battle with CNS lymphoma. She is survived by her son, Colin E. Sutton, her partner, Norm MacKay, a beloved doodle, Izzy, and by many, many friends and cousins. She was predeceased by her husband, George W. Sutton, and by her parents, Jack and Alta Shanahan.



Connie grew up in Redwood City, attending St. Pius School and Woodside High School. She met her future husband taking sailing lessons at the yacht harbor. She went to UC Davis, making lifelong friends and graduating in 1977. Later that year she and George were married and made a home first in Redwood City, then Menlo Park. When they weren't working, they traveled and sailed, and with great joy welcomed their son, Colin, in 1993.

In her professional career, Connie was a travel writer for Sunset Magazine, an archivist for the environmental non-profit, Pacific Conservation Center (PCC), and a librarian in Menlo Park. As a children's librarian at the San Mateo Public Library, she delighted children and parents alike at "story time," where she acted out any number of books, with her extensive menagerie of animal puppets and stuffies.

Connie was a beautiful woman, inside and out, genuinely interested in the lives and activities of her friends and relations, keeping up with their children, grandchildren, and even pets. She loved cooking and gardening and was passionate about the natural world and environmental causes.

She is dearly missed, but her spark of beauty and fun remains, to inspire us to treat each other and the earth with gentleness and love. A celebration of life will be held at a future date.

PAID OBITUARY

## Police chief urges precautions for holiday travelers

By Eleanor Raab

A burglary on Frederick Avenue in Atherton was reported on the morning of Nov. 25, according to a bulletin from the Atherton Police Department.

Atherton police arrived at the residence that morning, but according to the release, the burglary could have taken place at any time within the previous seven days. The burglars entered the house by smashing a master bedroom window.

No suspects have been arrested in connection with this burglary. It is also unknown exactly what was stolen, according to a community message from Atherton Police Chief Steve McCulley.

Police are asking nearby residents to check their surveillance cameras, and report any relevant information to the Atherton Police Department by calling 650-688-6500.

In response to the burglary McCulley wrote a message reminding residents to take extra precautions this time of year.

"As the holiday season approaches, we want to remind you of an unfortunate trend we've seen in past years—an

increase in residential burglaries during this time," wrote McCulley. "While this is a time of joy and celebration, it is also a time when homes can become targets for criminals."

McCulley also wrote that this particular burglary on Frederick Avenue had the "very same" method as a lot of other burglaries that have taken place in Atherton recently: "rear window smash into the master bedroom, with valuables taken that were kept in the master bedroom unsecured."

Police are encouraging residents to keep valuables out of the master bedroom and in a safe, lock doors and windows, install a security system, use outdoor lights with motion sensors, use timers for indoor lights when away to give the appearance that someone is home, avoid sharing travel plans on social media, and to report any suspicious activity.

McCulley wrote that the Atherton Police Department will be increasing patrols to "deter criminal activity and provide (residents) with peace of mind" during the holiday season. ■

Email Staff Writer Eleanor Raab at [eraab@almanacnews.com](mailto:eraab@almanacnews.com).

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The Almanac

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# New evidence emerges as sheriff's office ex-captain alleges retaliation, resigns over arrest order

Brian Philip alleges he was asked to engage in illegal activity, experienced retaliation

By Eleanor Raab

San Mateo County Supervisor Ray Mueller unveiled new evidence on Nov. 21, in the ongoing investigation into Sheriff Christina Corpus, stating that a forensics company had verified that Corpus had, in fact, sent the homophobic text messages about a city official.

At the press conference on Nov. 21, Mueller also said that San Mateo County Sheriff's Office ex-Capt. Brian Philip has filed a claim against the county after he chose to resign rather than arrest a police union president on Nov. 12.

In the claim against the county, which the county released to the press, Philip said that he experienced retaliation from the sheriff and her executive team after refusing to serve an internal affairs notice that he believed to be illegal and that he was asked to arrest union president Carlos Tapia without "any factual basis," in an "improper and illegal" manner. Philip filed the claim with the county on Nov. 19.

Philip said in his claim that Corpus' second in command, Undersheriff Dan Perea, ordered him "not to report this arrest order (of Tapia) to human resources or the district attorney's office," which left him with "no choice" other than to resign from his captain position with the Sheriff's Office.

Tapia, who is the president of the Deputy Sheriff's Association, was arrested just hours before the county released a 408-page report by Judge LaDoris Cordell, which detailed allegations of retaliation, abuse of power, an affair, illegal possession of silence rifles and more by Sheriff Corpus and her executive team. The union said that the timing of his arrest suggests "whistle-blower retaliation." San Mateo County District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe confirmed that Tapia was arrested by the Sheriff's Office for "felony time card fraud."

Philip's claim names Corpus, Undersheriff Perea and the sheriff's former chief of staff Victor Aenlle as being the employees that caused "injury, damage or loss."

Philip is explicitly claiming that he has lost wages in excess of \$10,000, pension in excess of \$10,000, earning capacity in excess of \$10,000, benefits in excess of \$10,000 and experienced "substantial emotional distress." This is a civil case, and



Eleanor Raab

San Mateo County Sheriff's Office Captain Mark Myers speaks at a press conference held by Supervisor Ray Mueller who stands behind him on Nov. 21.

Philip is asking for monetary restitution from the county.

"All this dysfunction under her leadership and the relationship she has with Mr. Aenlle are undoubtedly going to cost the taxpayers millions of dollars in lawsuits," said Mueller at the press conference. "Money that should have been used to help the hungry and the sick and the vulnerable in this county."

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors has formally called on Corpus to resign and, on Nov. 19, voted to hold a special election in March to grant the board the power to remove Corpus from her position. The board currently does not have that power, as Corpus is an elected official.

Supervisors cited the legal liability facing the county as a reason to push forward the ballot measure so quickly, rather than waiting for a citizen-led recall election to make it to the ballot.

## Illegal rifles

At the press conference, Mueller also revealed that the county is in possession of a memo that was sent to Corpus by Perea on Nov. 14, which details a request that Perea received from Aenlle. A copy of the memo was released to the press. In the memo, Perea recounts Aenlle asking him to change the code on the safe where the Sheriff's Office stores silenced rifles after sending all other employees home for the day.

"He told me he was concerned about the rifles in the safe located in the executive team office," wrote Perea in his memo to Corpus. "He stated, 'this is how they are going to try to get me.'"

In her report, Cordell reveals that she found that Aenlle had access to suppressed (silenced) rifles, as he was confirmed to have the code to the safe in which they were stored. According to the California Penal Code, "any person, firm, or corporation who within this state possesses a silencer is guilty of a felony and upon conviction thereof shall be punished by imprisonment," unless they are "regular, salaried, full-time peace officers," who have been certified and trained to hold such weapons.

Aenlle's position with the Sheriff's Office is civilian in nature, meaning that he is not a regular, salaried, full-time peace officer. Even if Aenlle's status as a reserve deputy were not in question, reserve deputies are not regular, salaried, full-time peace officers by definition.

In the memo, which is marked "confidential," Perea said he refused to comply with Aenlle's request to change the codes to the gun safe where the silenced rifles are stored, and asked Aenlle not to contact him again. Perea said that he was memorializing Aenlle's request as Cordell's investigation included information related to the

silenced rifles.

## A sparse executive team

Mueller was joined at the press conference by two captains in the Sheriff's Office, Captain Mark Myers and Captain Eamonn Allen. The two captains said they were present at the press conference representing the other captains in the Sheriff's Office. All five of the remaining captains in the Sheriff's Office sent Corpus a letter letting her know that they held a unanimous vote of no confidence against her and Perea and calling on both of them to resign.

"I'm here on my own time and fully off duty speaking for the Sheriff's captains," said Myers at the press conference. "We stand here today in appreciation for Supervisor Mueller and the Board of Supervisors who have given a voice to our organization and to show support for the men and women of the Sheriff's Office who continue to show up to work and do a tremendous job every day under difficult circumstances."

Captain Frank Dal Porto is the only captain that was hired by the Sheriff's Office prior to Corpus taking the reins in 2022. All four other captains were hired by Corpus.

Undersheriff Perea is the only member of Corpus' executive team that has not resigned, been fired nor taken a vote of no confidence against her. Her

former Acting Assistant Sheriff Matthew Fox resigned on Nov. 14 after the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors released Cordell's report and formally called on Corpus to resign.

Fox was promoted to his role as acting assistant sheriff, the third in command in the Sheriff's Office, just two months ago, after Corpus fired her former Assistant Sheriff Ryan Monaghan.

At the time, Corpus denied that the firing had anything to do with Monaghan's involvement in Cordell's investigation.

"When the people of San Mateo County elected me as sheriff, they entrusted me to make decisions about who I include on my executive staff," she said at a press conference in September after she fired Monaghan.

The report later revealed that Monaghan was fired just two days after speaking with Cordell in cooperation with the investigation.

Corpus' former Undersheriff Chris Hsiung resigned in June, and was replaced by Undersheriff Perea.

Corpus promoted Aenlle to the position of assistant sheriff at a surprise appearance at the Nov. 13 meeting where the Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to call on her to resign. The board also voted at that meeting to eliminate

See **SHERIFF'S OFFICE**, page 9

## REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman

### Should You Get Flood Insurance?



**Dear Monica: I don't have flood insurance and wonder if I should get it given the big storms we are having. Any advice?**

**Henry G.**

Dear Henry: Many homeowners are asking the same question. If you are in a FEMA flood zone and have a mortgage, you are required to have flood insurance by your lender. Many are not in a FEMA flood zone but are still at risk of flooding for reasons they cannot predict or control. There is an excellent article in the San Francisco Chronicle on this topic. <https://www.sfchronicle.com/california/article/flood-insurance-homes-19926324.php> Contact your insurance agent for more information.

Contact me at [monica@monicacorman.com](mailto:monica@monicacorman.com): Office: 650-465-5971, COMPASS. WSJ Nationally Ranked. Real Trends Bay Area Top 100 Agents

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Contributions to the Holiday Fund go directly to programs that benefit Peninsula residents. Last year, Almanac readers and foundations contributed a record \$350,000 from more than 150 donors for the 10 agencies that feed the hungry, house the homeless and provide numerous other services to those in need.

Contributions to the Holiday Fund will be matched, to the extent possible, by generous community organizations, foundations and individuals, including the Rotary Club of Menlo Park Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. No administrative costs will be deducted from the gifts, which are tax-deductible as permitted by law. All donations to the Holiday Fund will be shared equally among the 10 recipient agencies listed on this page.

**DONATE ONLINE:**  
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The organizations below provide major matching grants to the Holiday Fund.



Rotary Club of Menlo Park

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation

### Boys & Girls Club of the Peninsula

Provides after-school academic support, enrichment, college and career access, and mental health programs to more than 5,000 low-income youth at 29 locations from East Palo Alto to Daly City.

### Ecumenical Hunger Program

Provides emergency food, clothing, household essentials, and sometimes financial assistance to families in need, regardless of religious preference, including Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets for more than 2,000 households.

### Health Connected

Serves over 5,000 students and their families each year through comprehensive sexual health education programs. Students learn to have ongoing communication with parents and to make informed decisions that will apply to their lives, now and in the future.

### LifeMoves

Provides shelter/housing and supportive services across 26 sites in Silicon Valley and the Peninsula. Serves thousands of homeless families and individuals annually on their path back to permanent housing and self-sufficiency.

### Literacy Partners

Supports literacy programs and projects through fundraising and community awareness. Helps community members enhance their reading, writing and related skills and education to improve their economic, professional and personal wellbeing.

### Ravenswood Family Health Center

Provides primary medical and preventive health care for all ages at its clinic in East Palo Alto. Of the more than 17,000 registered patients, most are low-income and uninsured and live in the ethnically diverse East Palo Alto, Belle Haven, and North Fair Oaks areas.

### St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room

Serves hundreds of hot meals six days a week to people in need who walk through the doors. Funded by voluntary contributions and community grants, St. Anthony's is the largest dining room for the needy between San Francisco and San Jose. It also offers take-home bags of food, as well as emergency food and clothing assistance.

### St. Francis Center

Helps low-income, working families become self-supporting members of the community by providing long-term solutions through educational programs for children and parents, as well as after-school programming at Siena Youth Centers. St. Francis Center also provides housing, food and clothing services to address short-term needs.

### StarVista

Serves more than 32,000 people throughout San Mateo County, including children, young people and families, with counseling, prevention, early intervention, education, and residential programs. StarVista also provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services including a 24-hour suicide crisis hotline, an alcohol and drug helpline, and a parent support hotline.

### Upward Scholars

Upward Scholars empowers low-income adults by providing them with financial support, tutoring, and other assistance so they can continue their education, get higher-paying jobs, and serve as role models and advocates for their children.

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# Menlo Park to contribute \$1M to teacher housing project

By Eleanor Raab

At its meeting on Nov. 19, the Menlo Park City Council voted 3-2, with Mayor Cecilia Taylor and Council member Betsy Nash dissenting, to commit \$1 million of the city's Below Market Rate Housing Fund to aid in the construction of 88 units of affordable housing for local educators at 320 Sheridan Ave.

The project, proposed by the Ravenswood City School District, was the center of controversy over affordable housing in Menlo Park, and was the catalyst for the citizen-sponsored Measure V in 2022, which, if it had passed, would have restricted the council's ability to upzone lots in the city.

The city's BMR Housing Fund is dedicated to providing

funding to the preservation, acquisition or construction of affordable rental or ownership housing for residents in the extremely low- very low- and low-income brackets. Revenue for the fund is derived from fees collected from new, non-residential development projects in the city.

The 2.6-acre site at 320 Sheridan Ave., which housed the James Flood Magnet School in the Suburban Park neighborhood until it closed in 2011, is owned by the Ravenswood district. The district began leasing it to Alliant Communities in 2021 for the construction of teacher housing. Most of proposed units will target teacher households at 30-80% of the area median income, according to a staff report prepared for the meeting. At least eight of the

units will be reserved for city anti-displacement measures, and one will be reserved for an apartment complex manager.

Just under 60% of the units will be dedicated to households at the extremely low-income level, or 30% of the area median income. The site was designated in Menlo Park's housing element plans as a housing opportunity site.

Alliant Communities anticipates that the total project will cost \$63.8 million, which amounts to about \$733,000 per affordable unit. According to the staff report, Alliant anticipates obtaining about \$41 million from Low Income Housing Tax Credits, \$3.8 million from a deferred developer fee and \$16 million from a conventional loan.

This leaves a gap of \$2.9



Courtesy Alliant Communities and city of Menlo Park

A rendering shows what the project at 320 Sheridan Dr., which aims to build housing for local educators, may look like when completed.

million to fully cover the housing costs. Alliant requested the \$2.6 million from the city's BMR Housing Fund, the total amount currently in the fund. The city's Housing Commission recommended that the city contribute \$600,000 instead.

Alliant told the City Council

that for the project to receive funding through San Mateo County's housing fund, there needs to be at least \$1 million of city funds committed to the project to demonstrate project viability. Steven Spielberg,

See **TEACHER HOUSING**, page 12

## SHERIFF'S OFFICE

continued from page 7

Aenlle's position as chief of staff.

There are some questions about whether or not Aenlle is qualified for the position of assistant sheriff. Mueller said that as the county sees it, Aenlle is no longer employed by the county.

"There are qualifications that are set forth by the human resources department. ... The county has taken a position that he does not meet those qualifications," said Mueller at the press conference. "We have informed the sheriff as such, and that is not a matter that we understand (to be) under contest at the moment."

Mueller said that it is an ongoing question whether Aenlle remains a reserve deputy with the Sheriff's Office, as the Cordell report alleged that he did not meet the qualifications to remain a reserve deputy.

## Homophobic texts

Mueller also revealed that the county had employed Cellebrite, a forensic technology company, to analyze texts from the witness in Cordell's investigation who claimed that Corpus had referred to an unnamed city official by a homophobic moniker. The company confirmed the texts were sent from Corpus' phone, according to Mueller.

Corpus claimed in a press conference on Nov. 12 that those texts specifically had been fabricated.

Mueller said that he believes that a sheriff who makes homophobic slurs is "not fit for office."

Email Staff Writer Eleanor Raab at [eraab@almanacnews.com](mailto:eraab@almanacnews.com).

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# Holiday Fund: Empowering the next generation: Building healthier communities with Health Connected

By Steven Tsujisaka

Since 1988, Health Connected has been dedicated to empowering young people and supporting families across the Bay Area and beyond. Our mission is to equip young people with information, skills and support to make thoughtful choices about their relationships and sexual health throughout their lives. With our trauma informed sexual health education programs, we reach thousands of students, families, and educators, creating a foundation for healthier communities.

In the 2023-24 academic year, Health Connected proudly served over 14,500 students through our Youth Services, where our trained health educators provide comprehensive puberty and sexual health education directly in schools. Our Training and Technical Assistance program equipped more than 570 education professionals to deliver our curricula to an additional 31,500 students across the United States. Additionally, our Parent Services — through Parent Talk and Family Talk workshops — engaged over 2,800 families, helping them navigate meaningful, open-ended conversations about sexual health at home.

The feedback we received last school year illustrates the impact of our programs. A fifth grade student shared: “My favorite part of [Puberty Talk] was the consent lesson. It really helped me be able to say no when I don’t want to or when I feel uncomfortable to do something.”



Another middle school participant appreciated the practical information, saying: “It was interesting to learn about the different birth control methods that exist. I never knew there were so many, and seeing how they differed was interesting.” These reflections demonstrate how age-appropriate education empowers students with knowledge, fostering a sense of autonomy and respect for themselves and others.

Responses from students across age groups highlight the benefits of our services:

- **85% of Puberty Talk students** (fifth & sixth graders) reported feeling more comfortable reporting inappropriate touching to a parent or trusted adult.
- **69% of Teen Talk Middle School students** (seventh & eighth graders) were able to identify at least one local clinic that provides free and confidential health services to teens.
- **82% of Teen Talk High School students** (ninth & 10th graders) said they felt comfortable starting a conversation about their personal boundaries.

Our programs also support family communication. One parent highlighted how the Family Talk workshop created



Courtesy Health Connected

understanding in their household: “Talking about the opposite sex and having that understanding. While my son may already have some insights into his own body, he may not really fully understand what others may be going through.” Another parent appreciated the structure the program provided, saying, “It’s nice to have the foundation that [our family] experienced together just in case we need to review later.” Parents like these are vital to our work, helping bridge communication gaps and fostering supportive environments for their children’s growth.

Health Connected’s approach goes beyond traditional sexual health education, addressing issues like digital safety, consent,

healthy relationships, and mental health to meet the holistic needs of today’s youth. Our programs are about fostering respect, empathy, and informed decision-making, all essential skills that young people and families carry forward to build stronger, healthier communities.

The Holiday Fund is essential in sustaining our work, enabling us to reach more students and families across the Bay Area and beyond who might not otherwise have access to these life-changing resources. With your support, we can expand our programs and ensure that every young person grows up with the tools and guidance to make healthy, informed decisions. For more information on Health Connected’s programs

and services or to sign up for updates, please visit [healthconnected.org](http://healthconnected.org).

Thank you for supporting our community’s young people and families — together, we’re building a healthier, more empowered future for all.

Health Connected is one of the beneficiaries of The Almanac’s Holiday Fund. Donations are divided equally among this year’s 10 nonprofit organizations and 100% of the funds raised go directly to the recipients. Donations to the Holiday Fund can be made at [almanacnews.com/holiday\\_fund](http://almanacnews.com/holiday_fund). ■

*Steven Tsujisaka is a community engagement manager for Health Connected.*

## COMMUNITY BRIEFS

### M-A Canned Food Drive, Dec. 7

Menlo-Atherton High School is hosting its annual Canned Food Drive Distribution Day from 8 a.m.-noon, on Dec. 7 at Ecumenical Hunger Program at 2411 Pulgas Ave. in East Palo Alto.

Every year, M-A hosts one of the largest high school canned food drives in the nation. Students, staff and community members distribute nearly 300,000 pounds of fresh produce and canned food to over 700 local families over the holiday season.

### Local schools collaborate with Menlo Park Rotary Club

On Nov. 16, Sacred Heart Preparatory, Woodside Priory and Menlo School students joined the Menlo Park Rotary Club in Donating for Dignity, an initiative to raise awareness about local food insecurity. Students and staff volunteered at St. Anthony’s Padua Dining Room in Menlo Park, gaining hands-on experience with providing

food to the community.

The initiative aims to teach students and staff about food disparity. The Rotary Club served as the unofficial sponsor of the initiative and supplemented the students efforts by providing turkeys and financial donations to St. Anthony’s.

The local schools and MPRC donated over 400 turkeys and hams and 750 canned goods to the community.

— Jennifer Yoshikoshi

### Understanding Addiction: A Community Conversation for Parents, Caregivers, and Educators, Dec. 4

Eduardo Torres, a substance misuse expert and founder of Pathways for Prevention, will speak about addiction on Wednesday, Dec. 4, from 5:30-6:30 p.m. on Zoom. He’ll answer questions like: What happens when someone becomes addicted (whether to drugs,

alcohol, vaping, video games, etc.)?

The Parent Venture is putting on the presentation.

Register at [tinyurl.com/Dec4ParentVenture](http://tinyurl.com/Dec4ParentVenture).

### Paws for Tales

Do you have a reluctant reader? You can sign your child up to have their own session to practice reading with a therapy dog at the Portola Valley Library on Dec. 3 and the Woodside Library on Dec. 10.

Studies show that children who may not want to read in front of their peers are much less anxious with an animal present, according to the San Mateo County Libraries system. The dogs are part of the Pet Assisted Therapy teams at the Peninsula Humane Society & the SPCA’s Paws for Tales program. This program is intended for children ages 5 and up.

Space is limited, so the library asks that parents or guardians only register

for one time slot per child per month. If registration is full, contact the library to be added to the waitlist.

Sign up at [smcl.libcal.com/appointments/pawsfortales](http://smcl.libcal.com/appointments/pawsfortales).

### Traffic light shutoffs at Willow Road and Newbridge Street, Dec. 1-2

As part of the Belle Haven Traffic Calming Plan, the city of Menlo Park and Caltrans will turn off the Willow Road and Newbridge Street signal from Sunday night, Dec. 1, at about 9 p.m. to Monday, Dec. 2, around 1 p.m., according to a city newsletter.

The signal will be out temporarily to change the signal operation and equipment upgrades on Newbridge Street to improve pedestrian crossings. These changes are being made as part of the city’s Vision Zero initiative to reduce fatalities.

— Angela Swartz

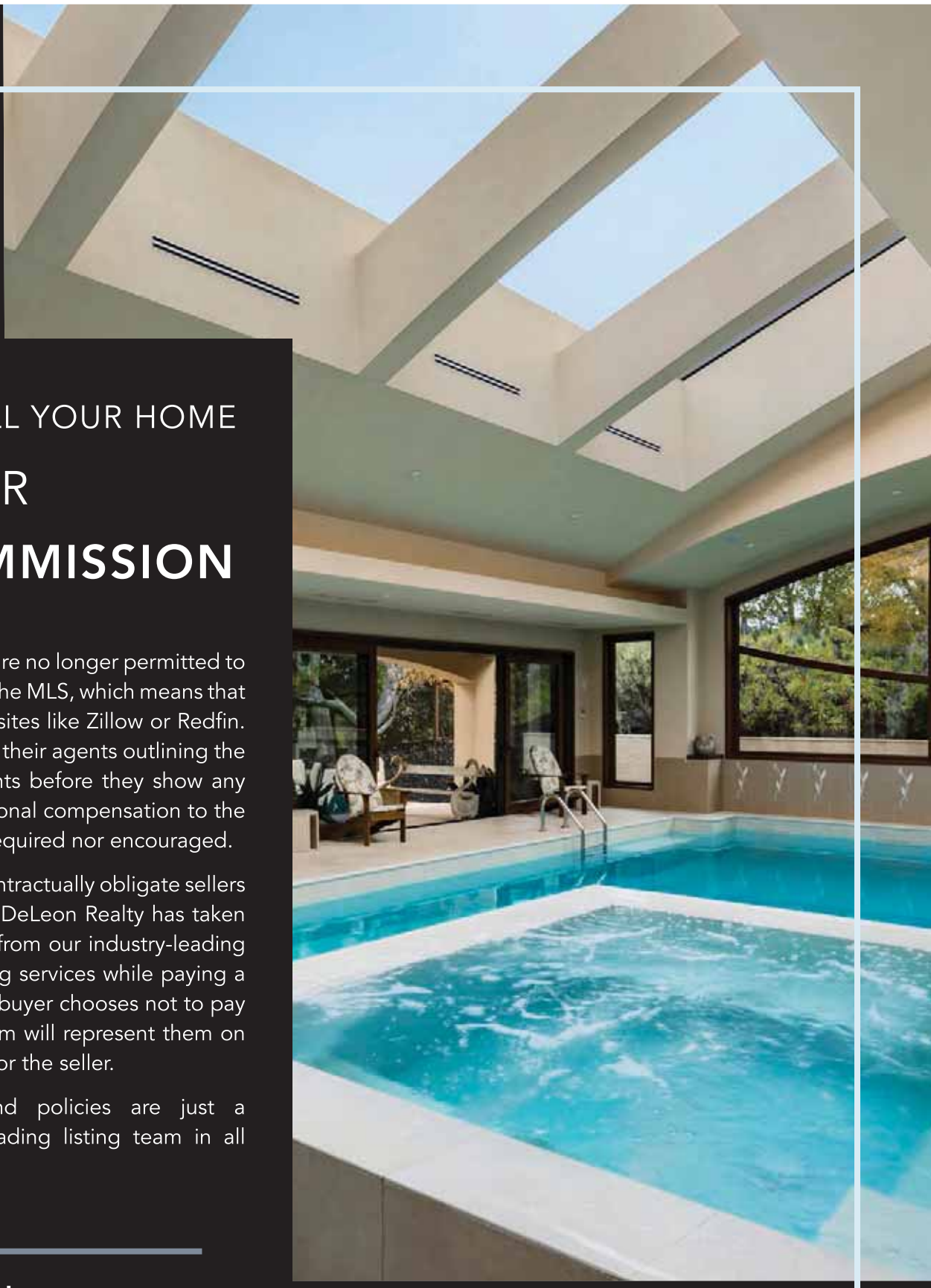


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# Holiday Fund: St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room: A free meal in a safe, friendly place

By Ruth Gilroy

St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room was founded in 1974. We were thrilled to celebrate our 50th anniversary in September 2024. Our mission statement declares that we provide hot, nutritious meals 52 weeks per year. We charge no fees, ask no questions, and turn no one away. All guests are welcomed with dignity and respect and received in a spirit of hospitality. We serve meals six days a week and on average provide around 8,000 meals per month.

We seek to reduce the fear of food insecurity among the less fortunate of southern San Mateo County. We also lessen the fear of where one's next meal might come from for all members of the community because they know that we are a stable organization with a long successful record, and a place where anyone can get a free meal.

The Dining Room's service to the community has twice been publicly recognized by the Menlo Park Chamber of Commerce with a Golden Acorn Award. The accompanying Proclamations



from the city of Menlo Park cited, among other contributions, over 5 million meals served to the community since the Dining Room opened in 1974.

## How we make it work

We are able to accomplish our goal of providing our services with only seven paid staff members, most of whom have been with us for over 20 years, by utilizing the services of around 20 volunteers each day who support the staff in preparing and serving meals. A large number of our volunteers have been with us for many years and find the Dining Room a rewarding place to work.

## Appreciation from those we serve

Over the years many of our guests have shared stories of how they made it through rough times with their family when



Courtesy Rickey Ono

Community members eat at St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room in Menlo Park.

they moved to the area because of the food and clothing shared with them when they were in need. Several of these individuals have returned to volunteer in the Dining Room once they were able to support themselves to repay the kindness they received when they were going through difficult times.

## Christmas for the community

Thanksgiving and Christmas are our busiest days of the year, serving as many as 600 meals

on these holidays. In conjunction with the Menlo Park Fire Protection District, toys are collected during the Christmas season. As many as 2,000 children receive toys during an annual giveaway event held just before Christmas.

## Our services

St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room serves from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. daily (except Sunday). In addition to a full, hot meal, guests may take home a bag full of food items including fresh

produce. We have a clothing distribution center, which is adjacent to the Dining Room, that provides shoes, and clothing for men, women and children, blankets, sleeping bags, baby and infant wear and diapers.

## How you can help

St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room is funded by donations and grants from many individuals and from local businesses and foundations. The cost of serving over 94,000 meals plus take-home groceries each year is huge and additional donations are welcomed and needed.

St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room is one of the beneficiaries of The Almanac's Holiday Fund. Donations are divided equally among this year's 10 non-profit organizations and 100% of the funds raised go directly to the recipients. Donations to the Holiday Fund can be made at [almanacnews.com/holiday\\_fund](http://almanacnews.com/holiday_fund).

Find out more about the organization at [paduadiningroom.com](http://paduadiningroom.com). ■

*Ruth Gilroy is a volunteer at St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room.*

## TEACHER HOUSING

continued from page 9

senior vice president of affordable housing for Alliant, said that if the city committed at least \$1 million, the development would likely get at least an additional \$2 million from the county.

Spielberg urged council members to consider committing the full \$2.6 million in the city's BMR fund to the project, as that amount would take the project nearly to the level of funding needed to receive tax credits. Several public commenters, including housing advocates Ken Chan from Housing Leadership Council of San Mateo

County, and Jordan Grimes from Greenbelt Alliance, urged council members to commit the full amount available to further promote affordable housing in the city.

Vice Mayor Drew Combs said that he was not comfortable with giving \$2.6 million to the project, as there is another affordable housing project at 1162 El Camino Real coming down the pipeline that the city is more involved with that may need funding.

Nash said that she struggled with funding the project at any level, as the Ravenswood district would be getting a large chunk of money back from the developer

once they have obtained construction loans and tax credits as part of its lease agreement with Alliant.

"I am struggling with any funds for a project where we would be giving you (Alliant) money, and immediately, as soon as you get the tax credit and construction loans, you turn around and give money in a greater amount back to the school district," said Nash. "It just doesn't seem like a good use of city funds to me."

Taylor said that she would have supported funding the project at the \$600,000, but that she would not be comfortable with the \$1 million because, despite the fact that the project will be providing

housing for residents of other nearby cities, no other cities have provided funding for the project.

The other three council members supported committing \$1 million to the project.

"Ravenswood City School District is so grateful for the support of Council member Combs, Council member Doerr, and Council member Wolosin in bringing in \$1 million to support 100% affordable housing with a preference for teachers and staff," wrote Will Eger, chief business officer for the Ravenswood district, in an email to this news organization. "While we still have a sizable funding gap to close before we can ... competitively

apply for tax credits, we are hopeful that this will unlock new funding sources."

## Next steps

In his presentation to the council, Spielberg said that Alliant plans to go to the Planning Commission for entitlements in January 2025. Alliant will apply for tax credits for the project in May 2025.

Construction is planned to begin in December 2025, with the goal of completing the project and having units available to lease by August 2027. ■

*Email Staff Writer Eleanor Raab at [eraab@almanacnews.com](mailto:eraab@almanacnews.com).*

## CHARTER CITY

continued from page 5

prompted to look into the matter by a recent court ruling in southern California where five charter cities were declared exempt from California's controversial Senate Bill 9 law, which took effect in 2022. The Atherton Housing Coalition, a group which proposed their own plan for the town's housing element, suggested the conversion to charter city, said Rodericks in a previous meeting on the topic.

There are two kinds of cities in California: general law cities and charter cities. A general law city

is bound to follow the state's general law in all matters, including in matters of municipal affairs. Charter cities operate under a charter, which gives them "home rule," or supreme powers over municipal affairs.

The state has the power to determine whether something is a municipal affair or a matter of statewide concern. If an issue is of statewide concern, the state legislature can override home rule.

A staff report for the meeting states that while there are "no actual legal disadvantages with charter city status," the drafting of a charter and holding

an election will cost the town time, effort and money. The report also states that a local charter will not be a barrier to any matters determined to be of statewide importance, and could instead create extra work for town staff to determine whether matters are municipal or statewide concerns.

Mayor Diana Hawkins-Manuelian said she felt as though pursuing charter city status at this point would be a "waste of time and money." Council member Bill Widmer agreed.

However, the other three council members were in favor of exploring the possibility, and

directed town staff to begin preparing a sample charter for a future City Council meeting, likely in early 2025.

"I do think that home rule is a real issue, and I don't think that home rule is something the state can completely do away with," said Council member Rick DeGolia. "Why wouldn't we want more home rule?"

The council will appoint a subcommittee to continue exploring the possibility of charter city status at that time.

To become a charter city, Atherton would have to put the matter to a vote during a General Municipal Election,

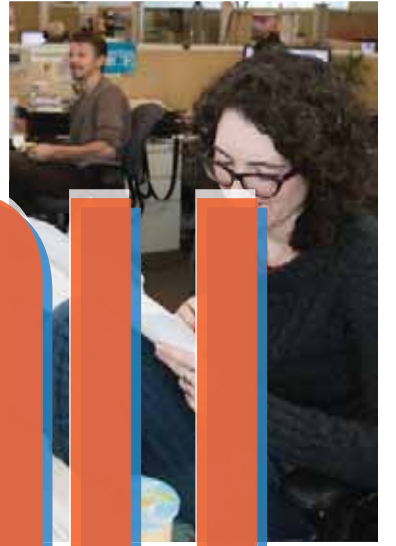
and it would have to be approved by the majority of voters in the town. The town could not put the issue on the ballot until the November 2026 General Municipal Election. Once adopted, the charter could only be changed or repealed by a majority vote.

The final version of the charter to be submitted for voter consideration would have to be written and prepared no later than June 2026, according to the staff report prepared for the meeting. ■

*Email Staff Writer Eleanor Raab at [eraab@almanacnews.com](mailto:eraab@almanacnews.com).*



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## STATE PARKS

continued from page 1

camping to eight backcountry campsites at the Butano Trail Camp and a small interim, walk-in campground on the coast side of Big Basin for the foreseeable future. Big Basin, California's oldest state park, lost its visitor center, museum and store.

All told, over 24,000 acres burned in Butano, Big Basin and Año Nuevo state parks, leaving behind tens of thousands of dead trees and limbs. The redwoods, while still standing, sustained the greatest impact in Big Basin, where the flames were more hot and intense due to weather conditions when the fire hit.

In the midst of all the restoration work, California State Parks and partnering agencies have turned their attention toward strengthening the resilience of forests to wildfires and climate change. In October, California State Parks and Save the Redwoods League released a new plan outlining actions needed to restore and protect Butano, Big Basin and Año Nuevo state parks following the CZU Fire. Known as a Forest Management Strategy, the document calls for ecological restoration by thinning out dense forests to promote the growth of larger trees and using prescribed

burns to mimic natural fire patterns on more than 2,000 acres of parkland.

The plan represents a turn toward a more multi-pronged approach in wildfire prevention in the CZU Fire's aftermath and takes into account a notion that sounds like an oxymoron: the concept of a "beneficial burn."

"There were some very severe impacts in Big Basin because it burned at very high intensity," said Tim Hyland, natural resource program manager for the Santa Cruz District of California State Parks. "But in Butano State Park, the fire was actually hugely beneficial."

**A lightning-quick wildfire**

Hundreds of lightning strikes hit the coastal mountains on Aug. 16, 2020, igniting the Waddell Fire near Waddell Creek along with three other fires on what would become the northern edge of the CZU Fire, according to a 2023 report in California Fish and Wildlife Scientific Journal, a quarterly scientific journal published by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Two days after the fires began, a change in wind conditions caused the three fires to quickly expand and merge with the Waddell Fire.

The end result was a fire that burned at an intensity and



Photos by Magali Gauthier

The understory burns during a prescribed burn in Butano State Park in Pescadero on Oct. 30.

scale not seen in the Santa Cruz Mountains in hundreds of years. While Año Nuevo State Park did not sustain as much damage (the fire for the most part stopped at Highway 1, Hyland said), Big Basin was hit early and hard, the fire stoked by low humidity and high winds. More than 97% of the forest area burned at a state park known for its ancient coast redwoods, some of which are 1,000-2,500 years old.

State Parks senior planner Will Fourt said flames reached higher than the treetops at Big Basin — over 300 feet — "completely altering the forest" and leading to a significant loss of tree canopy.

"That was not a fire that we typically thought of as happening in a redwood forest," Fourt said. "That was a very intense fire, it burned very quickly. So that basically burned the entire park in less than a 24-hour period."

"These trees are able to survive that, but we have lost a lot of canopy," he added. "It's very stressful ecologically."

State Parks ranger Ziad Bawarshi, who manages Butano, Pigeon Point Light Station State Historic Park and the western half of Big Basin, said the relative humidity had increased by the time the CZU Fire hit the forest at Butano State Park, resulting in a loss of understory — small trees, ferns and other ground vegetation.

State Parks interpreter Elexis Padron was living in Half Moon Bay when the CZU Fire started and remembers when the lightning storm hit and how the wildfire forced her family to evacuate from Felton. She said seeing how the blaze burned in Butano State Park "adds a different dimension to understanding that fire."

"The fire was a lot less intense, less hot, and it burned like a

beneficial prescribed burn," she said, referring to the practice of using controlled fires as a form of land management.

The tree canopy at Big Basin is starting to return, Hyland said, and after five to 10 more years the fire's impact on the canopy "won't be quite so noticeable."

"I'm staring at (the) redwood forest right here at Butano. And since it did burn through this stand at low intensity, the canopy is all still intact," he said. "And that was the same fire, right? Except different fire behavior, different response."

**Rebuilding the visitor experience**

Driving in from Saddle Mountain, Big Basin looks a far cry from the shady park it used to be. The dense canopy is mostly gone following the CZU Fire. In its place are bright green furry sprigs crawling all over the blackened trunks and branches of burned redwood trees.

"That's what some of the rangers say," said Fourt. "They say that they're Dr. Seuss trees."

These redwoods pepper the landscape along the 20 miles of reopened fire roads and 8 miles of trails, including part of the Skyline to the Sea Trail and the Redwood Loop Trail. It will be years before the remaining 80 miles or so of trails and fire roads reopen completely.

In both Big Basin and Butano, the fire burned down bridges and stairs, and the two subsequent wet winters damaged retaining walls and downed trees. And trees continue to fall. Since the fire, one bridge connecting the old lodge in Big Basin to the Skyline to the Sea Trail has been repaired twice, once due to fire damage and again after a tree

fell on it.

Crews from the Cesar Chavez Environmental Corps and the California Conservation Corps have been working year-round to rebuild the fractured trail systems. Setting up "spike camps," workers stay in the parks for a little over a week at a time and hike out to trails in need of rebuilding with the necessary equipment and materials.

"If you want the trail to be sustainable, it needs to be engineered," Bawarshi said. "There's a lot of labor involved and it takes time."

At Butano, the majority of trails, including the recently reopened Little Butano Creek Trail, are now accessible to the public. The Gazos and Ray Linder Memorial trails are expected to reopen by the end of the year.

In Big Basin, however, the extensive damage to the trail system means it'll take longer to fix it all. Some of the new trails are being rebuilt to allow more water to remain in the park, Fourt said. Currently, a drainage system in Big Basin diverts water away to avoid flooding. That's a problem because redwoods need a lot of water.

"One of the big goals for rebuilding the park is to allow that natural hydrology to occur as well, and that means retaining stormwater," said Fourt.

One trail in the old-growth forest has already been rebuilt with this in mind. The trail is completely flat, but raised on a bed of rocks that allows water to flow under and pool next to it.

Both parks' utilities and water treatment systems were also damaged in the fire, meaning restrooms remain closed and there is no running water. Visitors



Young sprigs regrow on redwood trees in Big Basin Redwoods State Park in Boulder Creek on Oct. 31.

should plan on bringing water, especially when visiting Big Basin, Fourt said, with the canopy gone, it's a lot warmer and drier.

And with the water systems out, all campgrounds at Butano and Big Basin remain closed except the Butano Trail Camp and one small temporary site at Rancho Del Oso. At Big Basin, there is no timeline for when utilities and campgrounds will come back. At Butano, the campground's 39 sites didn't burn, but they aren't expected to reopen until at least 2028. Restoring the water systems and utilities is a multiyear process to get the permitting and work done.

Construction is also limited to avoid disturbing marbled murrelets, an endangered seabird that nests in old-growth forests.

Down in Big Basin's old growth, which was once the epicenter for visitor resources, all historic buildings were lost in the blaze. A black shipping container serves as an information center, and all that's left of the historic lodge is its stone fireplace and chimney. The old stage is also gone.

There are no plans to rebuild any structures in the forest. Having structures near old trees simply isn't good for them, Fourt said. The heat emanating from burning buildings during the fire severely impacted some of the old redwoods in close proximity. There's the other concern of needing to have defensible space around structures, which will alter the forest floor and its ecology, Fourt said. Having to protect buildings also complicates the process of prescribed burns — an essential tool in maintaining a fire-resilient forest.

State Parks plans to rebuild a visitor center at the Saddle Mountain entrance. By next summer, a finalized version of the Facilities Management Plan will outline specifics on the visitor center, a tribal facility at Little Basin, new campgrounds and the shuttle system.

How visitors access the park will change. Much of the parking in the old growth will be reduced. Reservations are highly encouraged, especially on busy weekends, with few first-come, first-served spots planned.

"This is the reason this park exists, because (of) this old-growth redwood forest here. It has a very significant ecological value," Fourt said. "And having a lot of paving that's needed for parking vehicles has a lot of effects on that redwood forest. ... And so reducing that in the heart of this area is going to be much better for the health of the forest."

Visitors have the option to catch the Scotts Valley bus or the free Saddle Mountain shuttle, where paid parking will be readily available once the visitor center is rebuilt. Alternatively, visitors



California State Parks Ranger Ziad Bawarshi looks up at the trees on the newly reopened Little Butano Creek Trail in Butano State Park in Pescadero on Oct. 30.

can leave their cars for free in Scotts Valley and pay a bus fare to ride into the park. The bus runs through December and returns in the spring of 2025.

"We're moving forward as quickly as we can with it, but it will take several years to rebuild the park," Fourt said, emphasizing that there is no timeline for when the work will be completed in Big Basin. "During that time, we will continue to have access to the park and (are) expanding that access as areas are made safe and accessible."

#### Fighting fire with fire

Prescribed burns aren't a new tool for forest management — they've been a part of Indigenous practices in maintaining land for thousands of years. And according to Hyland, they were the main tool State Parks used to manage its open spaces before the CZU Fire, but they weren't doing it enough.

After the CZU Fire, State Parks and a forestry consulting firm found the forest was too concentrated. Trees were logged at the turn of the century and they grew back denser than prehistoric times, Hyland said.

"It kind of gives us the rationale for more actively managing these forests to thin them in order to make them more resilient to an increasingly drying and warming

climate," Hyland said.

Successful prescribed burns are weather-dependent and need the right amount of grasses, needles and little sticks, known as fine fuels, to move the fire over the forest floor safely. A warming climate and over 100 years of fire suppression have made it difficult for these conditions to be met.

Four years after the blaze, prescribed burns won't work in Big Basin because there aren't enough fine fuels. With the canopy burned, there's no more pine needles dropping to the forest floor. Instead, large ceanothus bushes have taken over the park due to the extra sunlight streaming in.

Hyland said it'll be years before State Parks does controlled burns

**'They are literally supporting each other and holding each other up through storms. If that isn't a beautiful example of community I don't know what is.'**

ELEXIS PADRON, STATE PARKS INTERPRETER

in Big Basin due to that lack of fine fuels.

"I really want to get in there and burn and take those fuels. But I can't because they won't burn," he said.

And the concern is that the ceanothus will die off in 10-15 years and there will be "a crazy amount of fuel" for a wildfire to spread, he added.

"And by the time (the fuels) will burn, they will be just very, very scary," Hyland said. "So introducing mechanical techniques to dig ourselves out of this hole is really critical."

Crews will need to use machinery to manage the fuel buildup — targeting dead, dying, diseased and dense vegetation — before they can go in and burn. Hyland said they'd like to work through 200-400 acres a year in Big Basin for the next few years. In Butano, hundreds of acres of land have already been mechanically treated. They'll continue to use mechanical techniques in both parks and follow up with prescribed burns regularly as conditions permit.

#### 'Why not leave it alone?'

While many may feel that it's best to let nature be, that notion goes against historical precedent. A sign near the Butano visitor center detailing the forest management work addresses that sentiment under the heading "Why not leave it alone?"

"Indigenous people managed this land for over 10,000 years using low-intensity fires, and before that the land was grazed by large herbivores," an excerpt from the sign reads. "By the turn of the 20th century, humans were extinguishing fires and clear cutting the forest. This has left us

with smaller and weaker trees that are more vulnerable to disease and wildfires."

Thinning unhealthy Douglas fir trees, understory and overly dense vegetation gives redwoods and oak trees more space and less competition, reducing fuels and making the forest more resilient to fire amid a changing climate.

While the smoke from prescribed burns sometimes triggers complaints and health concerns, mechanical removal of trees can be a particularly polarizing subject because, to some people, "as soon as you cut a tree down you're a logger," Hyland said. (State Parks is prohibited from selling or profiting from resources on parkland.)

"I think we're learning that we can't just put a fence around something and walk away and expect it to function the way it did before," he said. "That's why State Parks' focus is on functions, on natural processes and fire being one of them."

While officials believe ongoing forest management in the wake of the CZU Fire will better prepare parklands should fire ever return, the cherished California redwoods' resilient nature also helps them withstand wildfires. Redwoods are naturally resistant to fire because they're high in tannin and don't produce resin, and their thick bark protects and insulates them.

It was a point State Parks interpreter Padron underscored in the first guided hike she led with the agency at Butano in January 2022, months after the park reopened following the fire.

"I got to take people through a part of the park where you could see the effects of the fire," Padron said. "I got to connect the resilience of redwoods to the human experience in a way that I hope was hopeful and maybe inspiring in some way, or helping people see fire in a new perspective — that it's not inherently bad or destructive."

She also shared another key to redwoods' resilience — their shallow root systems intertwine with the roots of other redwoods to increase their stability.

"They are literally supporting each other and holding each other up through storms," Padron said. "If that isn't a beautiful example of community I don't know what is." ■



The temporary information center in the old growth forest of Big Basin Redwoods State Park in Boulder Creek on Oct. 31.



## Town of Atherton

Planning Commission, December 11, 2024  
REGULAR MEETING, 6:00 P.M.

This meeting is held virtually and in-person at  
the Council Chambers 80 Fair Oaks Lane

### NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that the **Atherton Planning Commission** will hold a public hearing to consider the items listed below during their regular meeting.

**NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN** that said application is set for hearing by the Planning Commission at its meeting on **December 11, 2024, at 6:00 PM** in-person and via teleconference accessible through the information provided below, at which time and place all persons interested may participate and show cause, if they have any, why the projects listed in the public hearing section should or should not be approved. This meeting will be held via teleconference pursuant to Government Code section 54953(e) to provide the safest environment for staff and the public while allowing for public participation. The public may participate in the Planning Commission Meeting via Zoom Meeting or by attending in-person in the Council Chambers at 80 Fair Oaks Lane, Atherton, CA 94027.

**Topic:** Atherton Planning Commission Regular Meeting

**Time:** December 11, 2024, 06:00 PM Pacific Time  
(US and Canada)

**In person Option:** 80 Fair Oaks Lane, Atherton, CA 94027

**Zoom Meeting Option and Details:**

<https://ci-atherton-ca.zoom.us/j/84150249099>

**Meeting ID:** 841 5024 9099

**One tap mobile:**

+13017158592 (Washington DC)  
+13052241968 (US)

**Find your local number:**

<https://ciathertonca.zoom.us/j/84150249099>

**Remote Public Comments:**

Meeting participants are encouraged to submit public comments in writing in advance of the meeting. The following email will be monitored during the meeting and public comments received will be read into the record.

**Email:** [planningcommission@ci.atherton.ca.us](mailto:planningcommission@ci.atherton.ca.us)

#### Projects under Public Hearing:

- A. Review of the 2024 Master Plan Report (MPL24-0001) for Sacred Heart Schools**, located at **150 Valparaiso Avenue** (APN 070-390-010) and within the Public Facilities and Schools (PFS) zoning district. Pursuant to Atherton Municipal Code Section 17.36.050, the Town Planner shall report annually to the Planning Commission at a regular meeting on the status of school master plans, their availability, and contents. Each private school in Atherton shall also report to the Planning Commission meeting to provide input on the status of master plan preparation and implementation. The 2024 Master Plan Report for Sacred Heart Schools does not include a request or approval for any actions that have the potential to cause a direct or indirect physical change to the environment. Therefore, this review is not a project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). If you have any questions on the item please contact If you have any questions on the item, please contact Radha Hayagreev, Senior Planner, at [rhayagreev@ci.atherton.ca.us](mailto:rhayagreev@ci.atherton.ca.us) or (408)-796-4370
- B. Consideration for a Tree Protection Zone Exception (PTPZ24-00010) for an addition to an existing residence at 232 Oak Grove (APN 061-290-010)** an approximately 44,682 square foot site within the R1-A zoning district and developed as a single-family dwelling. Atherton Municipal Code (AMC) Sections 8.10.050 (Request for exceptions to the Tree Protection Zone (TPZ)) and 8.10.020 (Definitions) outline the requirements for construction activities within the TPZ. The Town of Atherton Heritage Tree Preservation Standards and Specifications describe that the Planning Commission may grant a Tree Protection Zone Exception (PTPZ) in the R1-A Zoning District for projects that are closer to a heritage tree than 8 times the diameter of the trunk at breast height, noted as 8x. The PTPZ requests Planning Commission consideration for an addition to and remodel of the existing main residence that is 3x from one (1) Coast Redwood and 4x from one (1) Coast Redwood. This proposal has been determined to be categorically exempt from further environmental review pursuant to AMC Section 15.32.100 and CEQA Section 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land). If you have any questions on the item please contact Brittany Bendix, Consulting Town Planner, at [bbendix@ci.atherton.ca.us](mailto:bbendix@ci.atherton.ca.us) or (408) 688-2432.
- C. Consideration for a Tree Protection Zone Exception (PTPZ24-00009) for a pool at 88 Linda Vista Avenue (APN 070-161-150)** an approximately 44,394 square-foot site within the R1-A zoning district and developed as a single-family dwelling. Atherton Municipal Code (AMC) Sections 8.10.050 (Request for exceptions to the Tree Protection Zone (TPZ)) and 8.10.020 (Definitions) outline the requirements for construction activities within the TPZ. The Town of Atherton Heritage Tree Preservation Standards and Specifications describe that the Planning Commission may grant a Tree Protection Zone Exception (PTPZ) in the R1-A Zoning District for projects that are closer to a heritage tree than 8 times the diameter of the trunk at breast height, noted as 8x. The subject PTPZ requests Planning Commission consideration for a pool that is 6x from three (3) Coast Redwoods. This proposal has been determined to be categorically exempt from further environmental review pursuant to AMC Section 15.32.100 and CEQA Section 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land) and 15311 (Accessory Structures). If you have any questions on the item please contact If you have any questions on the item please contact Brittany Bendix, Consulting Town Planner, at [bbendix@ci.atherton.ca.us](mailto:bbendix@ci.atherton.ca.us) or (408) 688-2432.

The agenda for this meeting with links to related staff reports can be found online by **Friday, December 6, 2024**, here: <https://www.ci.atherton.ca.us/641/Agendas-Minutes>

**IF YOU CHALLENGE** the listed projects in court, you may be limited to raising only those issues you or someone else raised at the public hearing described in this notice, or in written correspondence delivered to the Planning Commission at, or prior to, the public hearing. Planning Commission decisions are appealable by any aggrieved person to the City Council within 10 days of the date of the decision. If you have any questions on an item, please contact the Planning Commission Contact: [planningcommission@ci.atherton.ca.us](mailto:planningcommission@ci.atherton.ca.us)

Any attendee who wishes accommodation for a disability should contact the Building Division at (650) 752-0542 at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.

ATHERTON PLANNING COMMISSION

/s/ Brittany Bendix  
Brittany Bendix, Consulting Town Planner

### OUTDOOR DINING

*continued from page 5*

take down its parklets while its application to expand the parking lot was still under review. The outdoor dining is currently not compliant with the existing Conditional Use Permit, according to the town.

“We feel extremely grateful to be here in the center of the community, but with the current parking restrictions, it just is not a long-term solution for us,” said Tyler MacNiven, co-owner of Buck’s. “We’re taking it down for now. It’s possible it will come back and if it does, we’ll be grateful for that too.”

The shopping center has always struggled with its limited parking spaces even before outdoor dining took over some parking spaces, explained MacNiven. Cañada Corners currently has 155 parking spaces and the project would add 34 spaces into a designated open space area behind Roberts Hardware.

The Village Bakery had initially built the outdoor dining space during the COVID-19 pandemic and took financial risks to expand the parklet into the parking lot, said Gary Madden, who comes to the bakery almost every day. The bakery was the only open restaurant during the beginning of the pandemic, he added.

He believes that the town should reallocate the parking spaces among tenants based on square footage.

“I’m going to miss it,” said Woodside resident and equestrian Diane Garcia. She and her friends at the Los Viajeros Riding Club ride their horses to Cañada Corners where they hitch their horses while they dine at Buck’s.

Despite the rain, Buck’s Restaurant co-owners Tyler and Rowan MacNiven shared one

final breakfast on the outdoor picnic tables before completely clearing its former outdoor dining space.

### Divided sentiments on parking lot expansion

Community members have started campaigns in support and against the parking lot expansion.

Woodside resident Don Pugh has been diligently sending letters to town committees urging them to vote against bulldozing open space for additional parking. The open space includes an existing Safe Routes to School trail behind Roberts Hardware.

Pugh has created a website called “Save Rural Woodside,” which aims to “alert residents of threats to our rural environment and provide information on helping to respond.” The page includes information on the application plans and history of permits at Cañada Corners.

“Why should we give up the trees and trails on our community land to allow a private business to expand? We can keep outdoor dining without bulldozing the open space with good planning without the need to expand the parking lot,” states the website.

In contrast, a flyer supporting the project is circulating in Woodside and Portola Valley to “save outdoor dining.” It urges the community to email Woodside council members with a prewritten note that can be accessed through a QR code. The email asks the council to approve the project without modifications or delays.

The flyer also encourages residents to attend the Town Council meeting on Tuesday, Dec. 10. ■

*Email Staff Writer  
Jennifer Yoshikoshi at  
[jyoshikoshi@almanacnews.com](mailto:jyoshikoshi@almanacnews.com)*

### BUDGET

*continued from page 6*

review of the housing element,” said Wernikoff.

If the town is going to pursue a measure to become a charter town, Wernikoff recommended that it take action now to educate and build confidence in the community about why it’s necessary and how it will benefit the town.

During the public comment, the Open Space Committee recommended the town allocate \$65,000 from the 2% User Utility Tax this year to “maintain the primary town owned open spaces and areas that have been designed for open space purposes,” said Nona Chiariello, vice chair of the Open Space Committee. This is 1.5 times the amount of the committee allocation of \$44,000 in 2023 which was used

for maintenance of Spring Down Equestrian Center, Ford Field and Frog Pond Park.

Chiariello’s report also recommends against the town using the UUT funds for trail maintenance outside of town owned open space and to have stronger coordination with joint subcommittees and staff to best use tax dollars.

Council member Craig Taylor said he believes that with the Open Space Committee’s recommendations and allocations, there may be available funds to put toward staff development rather than cut costs.

“Retention of employees in my mind right now is paramount. Without that, sort of none of the rest of this works,” said Taylor. ■

*Email Staff Writer  
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[jyoshikoshi@almanacnews.com](mailto:jyoshikoshi@almanacnews.com)*

**ANTISEMITISM**

*continued from page 1*

controversial answers. On one quiz, students were required to define Hamas as a “political party continuing to fight against Israel” and say that all of Palestine is occupied by Israel.

Hamas is designated by the United States as a terrorist organization.

“Gruszynski forced L.K. ... to condemn Israel and disavow her beliefs in order to receive a passing grade,” the lawsuit claims.

The lawsuit alleges that Woodside Principal Karen van Putten refused to discipline him. After sending at least 17 emails about the teacher to administrators, Kasle filed a formal complaint.

An investigation substantiated parts of the complaint.

**Woodside student-produced video**

On March 21, 2024, Woodside’s student-produced TV program, Woodside Live, aired a segment as part of KQED’s Call for Change project. The segment encourages students to take a stand against Islamophobia.

In an email from Jewish parents to van Putten, they claim: “Airing this video to the entire school implies that the faculty and administration endorse this particular movement. ... This is ... part of the ‘Free Palestine’ movement that is seemingly being force-fed to the entire school.”

Van Putten said that administrators do not review or censor the program’s materials.

Woodside Digital Filmmaking instructor Joshua DeBets did not respond to a request for comment. Van Putten did not respond to a request for an interview.

**Swastika-like symbols at Woodside**

After the Oct. 7 attack, two swastika symbols appeared on Woodside’s campus. The lawsuit claims that despite van Putten’s statement that an extensive investigation was conducted by school administration and the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office, administrators quickly accepted the student’s claim that they were not Nazi symbols but spiritual symbols from Japanese Buddhism. The lawsuit claims the Sheriff’s Office has no record of receiving any report relating to the incident.

Sheriff’s Office Director of Communications Gretchen Spiker said in a statement to this news organization, “After a thorough review, we were unable to find any record of the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office being contacted regarding this matter.”

The lawsuit claims that in a private meeting with one of the parents who filed the lawsuit,

Woodside administrator Wendy Porter admitted that the student likely was aware of the symbol’s connection to the Nazi party.

Porter and van Putten did not respond to requests for comment.

**Claims of antisemitic teachers**

The lawsuit says a substitute teacher at Menlo-Atherton, after learning a student, who the lawsuit refers to as W.K., was Jewish, proceeded to tell Holocaust jokes to a group of students; when concerns were brought to Menlo-Atherton Principal Karl Losekoot, he said that the student could either receive an apology or transfer to another substitute. W.K. chose to receive an apology but the lawsuit claims it was insincere and the substitute continued to work at the school.

The lawsuit claims Woodside math teacher, Abdulhadi Kaddoura, approached a Jewish student after class and asked her what she was doing. When she said she was waiting for friends, the lawsuit claims Kaddoura acted surprised and said, “You have friends?” He then said he could tell she was Jewish by her nose.

Kaddoura did not respond to a request for comment.

The lawsuit claims a teaching assistant told a Jewish student, S.B, that she should stop wearing her Star of David necklace “to avoid becoming a target of antisemitism, and that she would ‘get what she deserved’ if she continued to wear it.”

**Suit claims administrators fail to respond**

The lawsuit claims that Kasle emailed the superintendent and board multiple times but never received a response.

Eventually, Kasle and seven other Jewish parents, filed a formal complaint against Woodside about multiple antisemitic incidents. The lawsuit claims that Associate Superintendent of Human Resources Todd Beal confirmed he received the complaint on April 23, 2024.

State law requires districts to finish an investigation and write a report within 60 days of receiving the complaint unless the complaining parties agree to extend that time. The lawsuit says the families have yet to receive the report and the district has yet to take action despite over 200 days passing.

The lawsuit asks the court to order the district to fire staff members who were engaged in antisemitic actions, conduct a comprehensive review of all course material, implement policies to address antisemitism and appoint a special master to oversee and monitor the district’s progress. ■

*Email Contributing Writer Arden Margulis at amargulis@almanacnews.com.*

**Public Notices**

PLACE4NAILS  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-299003  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:  
1.) PLACE4NAILS, located at 218 PRIMROSE ROAD, STUDIO #18, BURLINGAME, CA 94010, San Mateo County. Mailing Address: 2848 Canyon Road, Burlingame, CA 94010.  
Registered owner(s):  
PLACE4NAILS LLC  
2848 CANYON ROAD  
BURLINGAME, CA 94010  
State of Incorporation/Organization: CA  
This business is conducted by: a Limited Liability Company.  
Registrant has not yet begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above.  
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on November 07, 2024.  
(ALM Nov 29, Dec 6, 13 and 20, 2024)

PACIFIC SHORES LANDSCAPING  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-298679  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:  
1.) PACIFIC SHORES LANDSCAPING, located at 303 Twin Dolphin Drive Suite 600, Redwood City, California 94065. Mailing Address: PO BOX 1029 Redwood City, CA 94064.  
Registered owner(s):  
PACIFIC VISTAS GROUP, INC.  
303 Twin Dolphin Drive Suite 600  
Redwood City, CA 94065  
State of Incorporation/Organization: CALIFORNIA  
This business is conducted by: a Corporation.  
Registrant has not yet begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above.  
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on October 02, 2024.  
(ALM Nov 15, 22, 29 and Dec 6, 2024)

RED WHALE  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-298995  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:  
1.) RED WHALE, located at 123 Escalona Ave, EL GRANADA, CA 94018. Mailing Address: PO BOX 1541, EL GRANADA, CA 94018  
Registered owner(s):  
NICHOLAS GOLDSWORTHY  
PO BOX 1541  
EL GRANADA, CA 94018  
This business is conducted by: an Individual.  
Registrant has not yet begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above.  
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on November 06, 2024.  
(ALM Nov 22, 29, Dec 6 and 13, 2024)

TUTTI MANAGEMENT SERVICES  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-299040  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:  
1.) TUTTI MANAGEMENT SERVICES, located at 1141 Whipple Avenue, Suite 201, Redwood City, CA 94062.  
Registered owner(s):  
CLARISSA ANN NICOSIA PRENTICE  
1141 Whipple Avenue, Suite 201  
Redwood City, CA 94062  
This business is conducted by: an Individual.  
Registrant has not yet begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above.  
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on November 14, 2024.  
(ALM Nov 22, 29, Dec 6 and 13, 2024)

COCOLAB  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-298981  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:  
1.) COCOLAB, located at 2335 Skyfarm Dr, Hillsborough, CA 94010. Mailing Address: 548 Market Street, PMB 77304, San Francisco, CA 94104.  
Registered owner(s):  
COCOFLOSS, INC.  
548 Market Street, PMB 77304  
San Francisco, CA 94104  
State of Incorporation/Organization: Delaware  
This business is conducted by: a Corporation.

Registrant has not yet begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above.  
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on November 05, 2024.  
(ALM Nov 29, Dec 6, 13 and 20, 2024)

EXPRESS CARWASH  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-298740  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:  
1.) EXPRESS CARWASH, located at 339 Dumbarton Ave, Redwood City CA 94063.  
Registered owner(s):  
ISELA GARCIA  
339 Dumbarton Ave  
Redwood City CA 94063  
NOE GARCIA  
339 Dumbarton Ave  
Redwood City CA 94063  
This business is conducted by: a Married Couple.  
Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 09/02/2019.  
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on October 09, 2024.  
(ALM Nov 15, 22, 29 and Dec 6, 2024)

TEA FRIENDS  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-298783  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:  
1.) TEA FRIENDS, located at 993 El Camino Real, Menlo Park, CA 94025.  
Registered owner(s):  
EIFFEL DONUTS & CAFE LLC  
993 El Camino Real  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
State of Incorporation/Organization: CA  
This business is conducted by: a Limited Liability Company.  
Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 10/10/2024.  
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on October 11, 2024.  
(ALM Nov 22, 29, Dec 6 and 13, 2024)

LAVINIA RECORDS  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-299008  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:  
1.) LAVINIA RECORDS, located at 520 Midway Ave, Colma, CA 94015.  
Registered owner(s):  
TATIANA BOOKBINDER  
520 Midway Avenue  
Colma CA 94015  
This business is conducted by: an Individual.  
Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 5/4/2019.  
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on November 07, 2024.  
(ALM Nov 15, 22, 29 and Dec 6, 2024)

FIFTH SUN VETERINARY IMAGING PC  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-299005  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:  
1.) FIFTH SUN VETERINARY IMAGING PC, located at 1265 Eaton Ave, San Carlos, CA, 94070. Mailing Address: 1401 21st St STE R Sacramento, CA 95811  
Registered owner(s):  
FIFTH SUN VETERINARY IMAGING PC  
1401 21st St STE R  
Sacramento, CA 95811  
State of Incorporation/Organization: CA  
This business is conducted by: a Corporation.  
Registrant has not yet begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above.  
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on November 07, 2024.  
(ALM Nov 15, 22, 29 and Dec 6, 2024)

WELCH ROAD APARTMENTS  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-298925  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:  
1.) WELCH ROAD APARTMENTS, located at 3603 Alameda de las Pulgas, Menlo Park, CA 94025.  
Registered owner(s):  
ROBINSON FINANCIAL CORPORATION

3603 Alameda de las Pulgas  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
State of Incorporation/Organization: CA  
This business is conducted by: a Corporation.  
Registrant has not yet begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above.  
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on October 28, 2024.  
(ALM Nov 8, 15, 22 and 29, 2024)

ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE FOR CHANGE OF NAME SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA FOR THE COUNTY OF SAN MATEO COUNTY  
Case No.: 24C1V04198  
TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS:  
Petitioner: Bertha Alicia Arreguin filed a petition with this court for a decree changing names as follows:  
BERTHA ALICIA ARREGUIN to BERTHA ARREGUIN CONTRERAS  
THE COURT ORDERS that all persons interested in this matter appear before this court at the hearing indicated below to show cause, if any, why the petition for change of name should not be granted. Any person objecting to the name changes described above must file a written objection that includes the reasons for the objection at least two court days before the matter is scheduled to be heard and must appear at the hearing to show cause why the petition should not be granted. If no written objection is timely filed, the court may grant the petition without a hearing.  
NOTICE OF HEARING: 1-9-2025, 9:00AM, MC of the Superior Court of California, County of San Mateo County located at 400 County Center, Redwood City CA 94063.  
A copy of this ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE shall be published at least once each week for four successive weeks prior to the date set for hearing on the petition in the following newspaper of general circulation, printed in this county:  
ALMANAC  
Date: 11-15-2024  
Elizabeth K. Lee  
JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT  
(ALM Nov 29, Dec 6, 13 and 20, 2024)

ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE FOR CHANGE OF NAME SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA FOR THE COUNTY OF SAN MATEO  
Case No.: 24CIV07026  
TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS:  
Petitioner: Sally Louise Slate Lee filed a petition with this court for a decree changing names as follows:  
SALLY LOUISE SLATE LEE to SALLY LOUISE SLATE  
THE COURT ORDERS that all persons interested in this matter appear before this court at the hearing indicated below to show cause, if any, why the petition for change of name should not be granted. Any person objecting to the name changes described above must file a written objection that includes the reasons for the objection at least two court days before the matter is scheduled to be heard and must appear at the hearing to show cause why the petition should not be granted. If no written objection is timely filed, the court may grant the petition without a hearing.  
NOTICE OF HEARING: 01/21/2025, 9:00am, Southern Branch of the Superior Court of California, County of San Mateo located at 400 County Center, Redwood City, CA 94063.  
A copy of this ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE shall be published at least once each week for four successive weeks prior to the date set for hearing on the petition in the following newspaper of general circulation, printed in this county:  
ALMANAC  
Date: 11/18/2024  
Hon. Elizabeth K Lee  
JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT  
(ALM Nov 29, Dec 6, 13 and 20, 2024)

**The Almanac is adjudicated to publish in San Mateo County.**

- Fictitious Business Name
- Abandonment of Fictitious Business Name
- Name Change
- Partnership Withdrawal or Dissolution
- Petition to Administer Estate - Probate Hearing
- Notice of Bulk Sale
- Legal Summons
- Trustee Sale

**The deadline is Sunday at 11:59 pm. Visit [AlmanacNews.com/legal\\_notices/](http://AlmanacNews.com/legal_notices/) For assistance email [LegalNotices@AlmanacNews.com](mailto:LegalNotices@AlmanacNews.com).**

## Woodside's ADU ordinance: A missed opportunity for smart growth

By David Mittelman

### GUEST OPINION

On Dec. 10, the town of Woodside will consider amendments to the Municipal Code to fulfill the promises outlined in the approved housing element. The town committed to this in our certified housing element. These amendments, as written, need to align with the town's Residential Design Guidelines, be less restrictive, and leave potential ADU capacity untapped when the town should be building as many ADUs as possible.

Woodside's historical constraint of its ADU production with its code has directly resulted in its position of being required by the state to build multifamily housing. This restriction has resulted in the town of Woodside only being able to utilize ADUs for a much smaller portion of the housing element than it potentially could. History will only repeat itself if the town fails to take aggressive early steps to stimulate more production. The California Department of Housing and Community Development would not allow us

to forecast more ADUs in our plan than our historical average. We are entering the third year of the RHNA cycle, passing our housing element this summer. We only have three-quarters of the cycle left to boost our ADU production and avoid potentially being tasked with more multifamily housing in the next cycle.

We committed to allowing more ADUs on larger parcels in our housing element. This is a good thing, as it will tap some of the untapped potential for ADUs. However, as a town, we should endeavor to increase our housing production while respecting the Design Guidelines and General Plan.

The Woodside Design Guidelines state that on hillsides, living areas should be close to grade, and the building should be stepped with the slope. Smaller footprints should be utilized to preserve natural features and limit bulk (ref. GP LU1.3).

This comes from the General Plan (LU1.3) section on maintaining

Community Aesthetics:

*Structures should be designed to be subordinate to the natural environment, responsive to site constraints, and compatible with the rural character of the community. Large, bulky structures should be discouraged, particularly if they are visible from the road. All building designs should conform to the topography and scale of the land and should not be silhouetted against the skyline as viewed from any town or state scenic road. The visual impact of the structure should be mitigated either through minimizing building bulk or increasing setbacks. In general, hillside structures should be designed to step down the natural hillside in order to achieve a low building profile and minimize grading.*

The ordinance, as it stands, would allow only two detached ADUs, along with a barn and other accessory structures, on lots greater than two acres while requiring the other two ADUs to be attached to the primary residence. This policy is directly at odds with the General Plan and the Design Guidelines. Ideally, a large hillside parcel would

be fully utilized, comprised of many smaller structures that follow the site's topography. However, this change would require adding up to 2,000 square feet to the main dwelling.

Moreover, large lots before this ordinance were allowed to develop their ADUs either attached OR detached. However, this new ordinance would require two of them to be attached and restrict one of the ADUs to be a Junior ADU. Government Code § 66313 defines a JADU as "a unit that is no more than 500 square feet in size and contained entirely within a single-family residence." This new requirement would require properties that wish to build additional ADUs to remodel their existing homes, adding undue expense to what could be a straightforward expansion of the housing element.

The ordinance makes an additional amendment to development within a 35% slope to align with San Mateo County, allowing ADU development and ADU septic development to occur in slopes greater than 35%. However, it only

applies to detached dwelling units, not attached. The increased ADU allowance allows for more ADUs as long as the attached are built first, but in the same motion, it restricts septic for that expansion. These restrictions are non-sensical and do not allow for more ADU development in ways accessible to the typical Woodside Resident.

The ordinance can be corrected with some simple amendments:

- Allow ADUs to be attached or detached without requiring a Junior ADU to "unlock" the total ADU allowance.
- Allow development on slopes less than 50% without stipulation or restriction. There is no reason to constrain a primary residence to a 35% slope if you allow ADUs on a 50% slope. The county allows it, and Woodside should as well.

These two changes will allow large lots to plan more housing on their lots in line with the town's Design Guidelines without undue restrictions. ■

David Mittelman is a Woodside resident.

## Immersive technology calms kids' fears of shots

The Stanford Chariot Program uses VR and other immersive technologies, such as the Space Burgers game, to distract children from pain and anxiety during medical procedures. Tools like Buddy Base and Buddy Guard offer engaging VR experiences, calming needle fears and reducing discomfort.

In one instance, these tools helped ease children's anxiety during a flu clinic, with apps keeping kids engaged and still. Pharmacists noted reduced fidgeting and tears, and parents praised the program's positive impact. **SCAN TO READ THE SPOTLIGHT**



PRESENTED BY



# Artscene

PEOPLE AND PERFORMANCES IN ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

## The year's best books by local authors

Grace Lane of Linden Tree Books shares her picks for some of the best reads by local authors published in 2024

By Grace Lane

Another year, another round of amazing local authors releasing phenomenal books for every age! There's something special about reading a book by an author who is your neighbor, whose kids go to your kids' school; authors who went to high school with your siblings or your cousins; whose people you happen to know because they're your people too. It brings the stories that they write, which can cross eras and oceans and countries and entire realms, right back to your doorstep.

### Picture books

**"Juneteenth Is"** by Natasha Tripplett, Chronicle Books, \$17.99

This book illustrates Juneteenth with both seriousness and joy. It explains the history, and the darkness, while continually shining the light of celebration across its pages. I genuinely had a wonderful time reading it!

**"Roar-Choo"** by Charlotte Cheng, Rocky Pond Books, \$18.99

Between the relatable story — we all know that one person

who refuses to slow down when they're sick — and the amazing illustrations by multi-award winning Dan Santat, Cheng's wonderful story about friendship and self-care makes for a fantastic read-aloud for story-time or at bedtime.

**"Bao's Doll"** by Bo Lu, Abrams Books For Young Readers, \$18.99

This is one of those picture books that will stay with you; great for kids, and it might be even better for adults. Bao is a little girl who doesn't understand her mother, and whose mother doesn't understand her, and the weight of their inability to truly talk is gut-wrenching until, at last, they make a doll out of memories and hopes.

Lu's illustrations as well as her words will leave you wanting to read this book over and over again.

**"We Who Produce Pearls: An Anthem for Asian America"** by Joanna Ho, Orchard Books, \$19.99

Between Ho's lyrical anthem, a call to arms moving through major and minor keys, and Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya's absolutely stunning art, everyone who reads this book comes

away inspired and ready to stand up for what's right, and ready for the fight ahead.

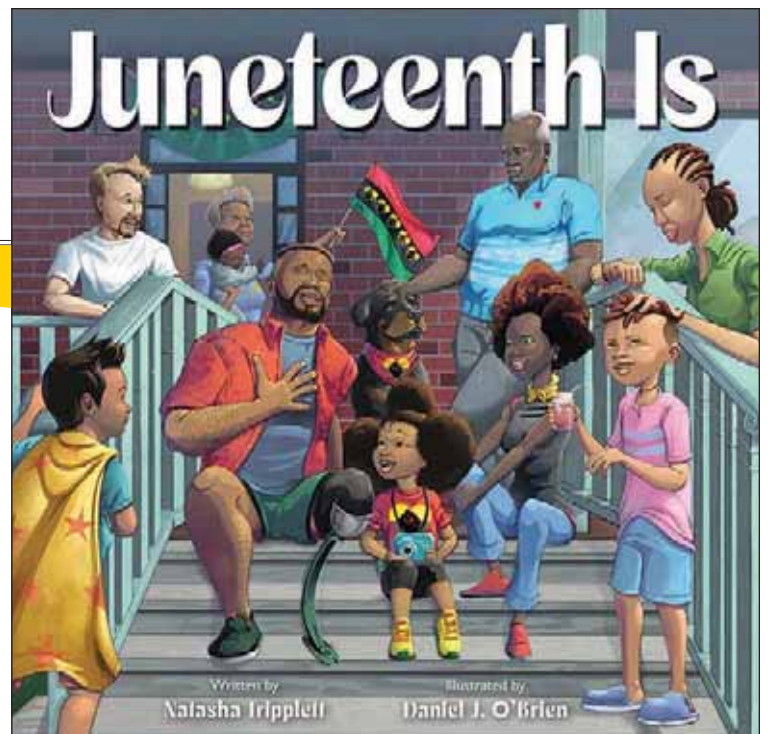
Although this is very much a picture book, and an excellent gift for kids, I would definitely recommend it for teens and adults as well.

**"Touch the Sky"** by Stephanie Lucianovic, Carolrhoda Books, \$18.99

This one has been doing the rounds as a favorite for many people this year, and rightfully so. This is a very accessible and relatable story about how learning something new can be scary and difficult, but sometimes all you need is a little push and a friend full of encouragement, teaching you with kindness and warmth.

**"The Night Market"** by Seina Wedlick, Random House Studio, \$18.99

This is a gorgeous book about the night market in Lagos and all the sights, sounds, and smells you might find there. Wedlick's story and illustrator Briana Mukodiri Uchendu's amazing art will transport you to Nigeria in such a way that you will immediately want to buy plane tickets so you can experience it in person.



Courtesy Chronicle Books

### Novels for kids

**"Lily Xiao Speaks Out"** by Nicole Chen (ages 10+, can be read younger), Quill Tree Books, \$19.99

Chen's second novel for kids is contemporary historical fiction (I regret to inform you that the 1990s are now, gulp, historical) about how hard it can be to move to a new country whose language you don't speak — or read — and the choices kids sometimes have to make in the face of deciding what's right and what's wrong. It's also a wonderful celebration of '90s rock and grunge — time to introduce the kids to some of the best music!

**"The Truth About Triangles"** by Michael Leali (ages 10+, can be read younger), HarperCollins, \$19.99

Lambda Award finalist Michael Leali's latest novel will make you hungry — it takes place in a family pizzeria — but its heart will also bring such a smile to your face. Being 12 is hard when your parents are having problems, your family business might be failing and your best friend and your crush might have eyes for each other.

This book is perfect for kids who are just on the cusp of that beautiful something: moving out of childhood and into teenagerdom and all the emotions that come with it.

**"The Wrong Way Home"** by Kate O'Shaughnessy (ages 10+), Knopf Books for Young Readers, \$17.99

A couple of months ago, one of my co-workers walked into Linden Tree and would not stop talking about this book to literally all of us. O'Shaughnessy has managed that amazing feat of the literary world: a serious novel that is absolutely for kids but adults love just as much.

Main character Fern has lived in her community for most of her life. She loves it and she believes in it but one night, her mom sneaks them out into the

world, telling her that the leader of the community is dangerous. Fern isn't sure she believes her mother, but she learns so much at her new school and from her new friends, including so many things that she thought were ... wrong.

**"The Everybody Experiment"** by Lisa Moore Ramée (ages 9+, can be read younger), HarperCollins, \$19.99

Ramée's latest novel is about Kylie, who thinks that her friends are all so much more mature than she is, and who is about to enter middle school and doesn't want her friends to leave her behind. She figures that she can put her scientific mind to use and experiment over the summer with how to be just like everyone else.

This book is a great one to hand off to kids who are trying to figure out fitting in while staying true to themselves, and I would especially recommend it for any 5th or 6th grader.

### Novels for teens and adults

**"Everything We Never Had"** by Randy Ribay, Kokila, \$18.99

This is, genuinely, one of my favorite books that was published this year, I even talked about it on an NPR podcast. This book follows four generations of Filipino American fathers and sons, and it is, at times, a tough read (it covers the Watsonville riots). Of course, complicated father-son relationships are often difficult to read, but it's such an important book for California and American history. This one is especially great for the teen boys and the men in your life, but absolutely everyone should read it.

**"Kill Her Twice"** by Stacey Lee, G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers, \$18.99

I love everything Lee has written, to be honest. She does



Courtesy Knopf Books for Young Readers



Courtesy Kokila

See **BOOKS**, page 22

# Worth a Look



Courtesy Dave Lepori

Los Altos Stage Company presents a musical adaptation of the holiday film favorite about young Ralphie Parker and his quest for the ultimate Christmas present: a Red Ryder BB gun.

## 'A Christmas Story: The Musical'

Los Altos Stage Company presents the musical stage adaptation of the beloved 1983 film "A Christmas Story" — the 1940s-set holiday comedy classic about young Ralphie, his quirky family, and his fervent Christmas wish for a toy BB gun (despite the risk of shooting his eye out). The musical features music and lyrics written by the team behind "Dear Evan Hansen," "La La Land" and "The Greatest Showman" (Benj Pasek and Justin Paul) and preserves many of the film's most iconic elements, such as the prize "leg lamp," the freezing flagpole and those pink bunny PJs.

Nov. 29-Dec. 22, 97 Hillview Ave., Los Altos; \$28-\$51; losaltosstage.org.

## Hike at Picchetti Ranch Preserve

Docent naturalists from the MidPeninsula Regional Open Space lead a moderately-paced 4.5 mile hike to learn about adaptations of various local plants and to observe the effects of changing seasons on local plant communities. If weather permits, hikers can have a picnic lunch with the option for wine tasting on their own at Picchetti Winery. Hike will go ahead in light or moderate rain.

Nov. 29, 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Picchetti Ranch Preserve (meet at preserve parking lot on Montebello Road); free; openspace.org.

## Grapes and Giggles

Looking for a good laugh? Domenico Winery in San Carlos hosts monthly comedy shows, featuring a variety of stand-up comedians. According to Domenico's Instagram post, the post-Thanksgiving event will feature two headliners. Attendees can order wine, beer, cocktails and dessert via QR code to be delivered to their table during the show. Limited reserved seating for groups is available for those booking ahead.

Nov. 29, 8:30 p.m., Domenico Winery, 1697 Industrial Road, San Carlos; \$33.85 general admission; eventbrite.com.

## Polyphony Ensemble

Founded in 2006 as the first classical music conservatory in the Arab-Israeli city of Nazareth, Polyphony "shortens the distance between Arab and Jewish communities in Israel through music, while serving as a worldwide model for cooperation based on

cultural exchange, dialogue, and partnership," according to the event description. The Polyphony Ensemble's upcoming concert at the Oshman Family JCC. Violinists Yuval Shem Tov, and Loor Jabareen, violist Yoav Yatsken, cellist Butrus Selrh, harpsichordist Gordon Haramaki and vocalist Doreen Saasine will perform selections including Haydn's String quartet Op. 76, No 2 ("Quinten"), arias by Vivaldi and Handel, a selection of Maya Belsitzman's hits and more. The ensemble is making a return visit to the Peninsula.

Dec. 5, 5 p.m., Oshman Family JCC, 3921 Fabian Way, Palo Alto; \$33.85; eventbrite.com.

## Chatbots Decoded: Exploring AI

Get a chance to interact with chatbots past and present and learn about their potential future at the Computer History Museum's new exhibit, "Chatbots Decoded: Exploring AI." The exhibition, designed in collaboration with AI experts, traces the history of chatbots from their earliest days to ChatGPT and invites attendees to consider important questions, such as the possible impacts of AI-human interaction on society. "We wanted to create a fully immersive and interactive exhibit that not only traces the evolution of chatbots but also invites visitors to think critically about AI's growing role in our lives," Chief Curatorial and Exhibitions Officer Kirsten Tashev stated in a press release.

The Computer History Museum is open Wednesdays-Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., 1401 N. Shoreline Blvd., Mountain View; \$6-\$19.50 depending on ticket category (children under 7 free); connect.computerhistory.org.



Courtesy Mottl Family

Valentina Mottl is performing in a world-premiere production with A.C.T. in San Francisco.

## Young Palo Alto actor performs in A.C.T.'s new spin on holiday classic

Valentina Mottl, age 12, is creating the role of Bethel in 'A Whynot Christmas Carol,' starting previews this week in San Francisco

By Heather Zimmerman

At 12 years old, Palo Alto actor Valentina Mottl has already garnered some impressive credits on stage, and now she's adding a world premiere to her résumé. That show, about a smalltown production of a holiday classic that goes comically wrong, is "A Whynot Christmas Carol," which began previews at A.C.T. in San Francisco this week.

Peninsula audiences may have seen Valentina in some productions with Palo Alto Children's Theatre and girls' choir iSing Silicon Valley. She has been studying singing since age 7, which sparked her interest in being on stage.

"I've always been interested in acting at a really, really young age. I've always loved just to perform, but I feel like

when I got into choir, I just fell in love with performing and singing, even more than I already was, and then I already knew that that was what I wanted to do with my life," she said.

Valentina has also studied at The Groundlings in Los Angeles, Stella Adler Studio of Acting in New York and with faculty at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Her credits include performing at Alvin Ailey Studios with Broadway Artists Alliance and at the Strand Theater with A.C.T.'s Young Conservatory.

For her latest turn on stage with A.C.T., Valentina is appearing in playwright Craig Lucas' new spin on Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." Lucas' show aims to be more inward-looking and less moralizing than many adaptations

of Dickens' tale of how ghostly visitors lead cruel miser Ebenezer Scrooge to reconnect with his humanity, according to the show's program. The play urges audiences to reflect on the Scroogely tendencies within us all. He frames the story as a play-within-a-play about the Whynot Players, a small theater troupe trying to stage their new version of the Dickens classic with a tiny budget while members struggle to get along — and avoid numerous mishaps along the way.

As Valentina notes, the Whynot Players' production is the kind of show where the traditional good luck wish for performers to "break a leg" might accidentally come true.

Valentina plays the character of Bethel in the show. "She's probably the best behaving of all the kids. She's not the oldest, but she is definitely a force to be reckoned with. She's just really outgoing and bright, and she's the choreographer's sister, so she's basically in charge of all the kids. ... I'm just so grateful to be playing her," Valentina said.

The fact that the show is a world premiere makes the role even more exciting.

"It's so amazing, the idea of it, that I'm the first person to perform this character in the entire world. It's super special," she said.

"A Whynot Christmas Carol" is directed by ACT's Tony Award-winning artistic director Pam MacKinnon. "The kids are integral to the story. They are the energy, curiosity and community that Scrooge must return to by play's end. Our kid company is learning a lot about how to seize a featured moment and also be a part of something bigger than any one person. We are building something new together for an intergenerational audience. The kids are a way in for those younger and young at heart audiences," MacKinnon said.

We spoke with Valentina as the show entered its final week of rehearsals, with sets, costumes, lighting and sound all coming together on stage during "tech week."

"Tech started last Friday, and the first time I walked into the theater on Friday, it was just like a dream come true, the theater is gorgeous, but I also love all the actors that I'm working with. They're just so funny, and they make everything so fun," she said. "Also, my director, Pam MacKinnon, is absolutely amazing. And I want to give thanks to all the A.C.T. crew and staff. Definitely, I just love working with the other actors, and I'm not the only kid in this production, which is really fun. All the

other kids are so fun, they're just so hilarious."

Taking part in a professional production is a labor-intensive endeavor, and although the show double-casts the roles of most of the younger characters, the rehearsal schedule has still been demanding.

"Well, it's obviously a lot of work, a lot of time like that you have to put into this, especially now that we're in tech. Sometimes I'm in the city until like, 10, and then I get home. It's a lot of working, but it's totally worth it. And we have to do a lot of stuff over and over again to perfect it. But again, it's completely worth it," she said.

While many tellings of "A Christmas Carol" highlight the perpetually timely theme of trying to bridge the chasm between haves and have-nots, Lucas' new framing of the tale aims to bring some additional nuance and thoughtfulness to it. So what does Valentina hope audiences take away from seeing the show?

"I think every actor's focus is that the audience really connects with the show I want, and I feel like the classic 'Christmas Carol' lesson is not to be greedy and self-serving like Scrooge. But I think there's more to it than that. I also feel like (there's a) message about effort and

compassion and having friends. Christmas is the time to rejoice and be with your family, and, you know, just enjoy." ■

Email Arts & Entertainment Editor Heather Zimmerman at [hzimmerman@almanacnews.com](mailto:hzimmerman@almanacnews.com).

"A Whynot Christmas Carol" is in previews through Dec. 7, opens Dec. 8 and runs through Dec. 24 at A.C.T.'s Toni Rembe theater, 415 Geary St, San Francisco. [act-sf.org](http://act-sf.org).

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## The Almanac Holiday Fund



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[AlmanacNews.com/holiday\\_fund](http://AlmanacNews.com/holiday_fund)

THE LADERA COUNTRY SHOPPERS  
MERCHANT

# Holiday Fair

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7TH  
11:00AM - 12:30PM

- KONDITOREI: PHOTO WITH SANTA, 20 GIFT CARDS FOR THE FIRST 20 CUSTOMER AND GOODY BAGS.
- UPS STORE: FIRST 5 PEOPLE GET A GIFT CARD FOR 100 COPIES
- ALPINE OPTOMETRY: SNOW GLOBE ORNAMENTS
- LADERA GARDEN & GIFTS: HOLIDAY PLANTING
- CHASE BANK: COOKIES, DRINKS, & GIFTS
- AMIGOS GRILL: PINATA
- LADERA CLEANERS & DIANE'S BEAUTY: HOLIDAY CANDY
- ALPINE PHYSICAL THERAPY: PROTEIN COOKIES

## BOOKS

continued from page 19

wonderful, well-researched historical fiction from a Chinese American perspective and I could talk to you about why her books are important all day. But I really, really liked this one because it's also a very well-written mystery, so I recommend it for any mystery fans on your list. It takes place in 1930s Los Angeles Chinatown, which no longer exists as they razed it to build Union Station, so it's for my fellow history nerds, too.

**"Kisses, Codes, and Conspiracies"** by Abigail Hing Wen, Feiwel & Friends, \$19.99

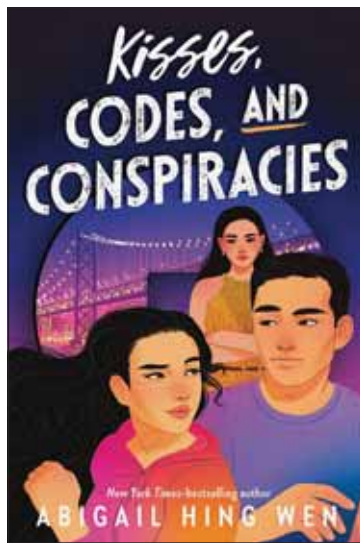
A fun one for your mystery-loving family and friends, and this one takes place in the right here and now in Palo Alto (and the rest of the Bay)! Wen wrote such a fun romp with this one that I've already re-read it twice, just because I had so much fun the first time. There is also a

charming love story, an excellent little sister and, because it's Wen, a moral heft in a crazy story, because that's just how life is.

**"We Shall Be Monsters"** by Tara Sim, Nancy Paulsen Books, \$19.99

Sometimes, what you really need is a fun fantasy novel and this is it. Inspired by both Indian mythology and "Frankenstein," Sim's latest novel is about a girl who can bring people back from the dead. People like her sister, who comes back wrong and oh-so-angry, and also the crown prince, who made a very attractive corpse, and who, whoops, wasn't the right man at all. Now she — and her undead dog and the attractive no-longer-a-corpse, not-the-prince guy — need to find the prince, so she's not executed for bringing back her sister, who is trying to kill her.

**"This Ravenous Fate"** by Hayley Dennings, Sourcebooks Fire, \$18.99



Courtesy Feiwel &amp; Friends

Also a fun fantasy, but this time with vampires and set in Harlem in the Jazz Age. It's a lushly illustrated world that manages to feel real and escapist at the same time. I especially loved the way Dennings plays with real history here, and the queer romance was wonderful.

**"Shut Up, This Is Serious"** by Carolina Ixta, Quill Tree Books, \$19.99

Like "Everything We Never Had," this is a book I can't stop talking about to people. I just love it. Ixta's characters jump off the page at me as people I went to school with, friends and classmates I've known my whole life. It also makes me, as an adult, want to hold Belén and Leti and tell them that they're going to be ok. The world is big and the terrors are real and depression is such a beast and school doesn't always go the way you want it to or think it should — but teenage girls are so much stronger than anyone gives them credit for, and they're gonna save themselves and the rest of us.

#### Four special mentions

**"Ava Lin, Best Friend!"** by Vicky Fang, Candlewick, \$5.99

This early chapter book is about a brand-new first grader

and it's specifically aimed at kids ages 5-8, so perfect for your child who is learning to read, or for you to read to your kid who has just started elementary school. Ava is a charming, funny and very determined 6 year old who knows what she wants (a best friend) but is somewhat unclear on how exactly to go about getting that.

**"The Chair and the Valley"** by Banning Lyon, The Open Field, \$29

Full disclosure: Banning is a friend of my sister's, but I have it on good authority (my co-workers, our grown-up book club members, random people off the street) that I am not biased when I say that this book is spectacular. When Banning was a teenager, his parents were convinced that he was suicidal (he was not) and he was committed to an adolescent psych ward. What followed were months of horror and trauma and, years later, discovering that the for-profit hospital where he'd been committed had been for years perpetrating extensive insurance fraud: keeping teenagers locked up and abusing them without helping them and bilking their parents' insurance companies for as much as possible. Amazingly, this story has a happy ending, but the journey there is very long. Younger teenagers can definitely read this, but I would recommend it for ages 16+.

**"A City Full of Santas"** by Joanna Ho, HarperCollins, \$19.99

Yes, Joanna Ho makes this list again! This absolutely adorable book is inspired by her own adventures with her children in San Francisco during Santa Con. The story is both charming and relatable (must find the REAL Santa!) and Thai Phuong's accompanying illustrations are absolute perfection. So grab some cookies and hot chocolate and have yourself a cozy storytime!

**"Magnolia Wu Unfolds It All"** by Chanel Miller, Philomel Books, \$17.99

This is technically cheating as Miller is no longer local, but she's a born-and-raised Palo Alto kid like me, and Linden Tree loved this book SO much I felt like I had to include it. Magnolia helps her parents run their laundromat and one summer she and her new best friend decide they're going to return all the lonely lost socks to their owners. What follows is fun romp through New York as they solve the mystery of each missing sock. This book is perfect for kids ages 7+ but can be read to them younger. ■

Grace Lane is the store manager of Linden Tree Books in Los Altos. She can be reached at [grace@lindentreebooks.com](mailto:grace@lindentreebooks.com).

**Holiday Events  
at Ladera Community Church**

PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR HOLIDAY EVENTS

EVENT	DATE	HOUR
LCC 70th Anniversary Celebration	Dec 7	2:00-5:00 PM
Madrigals Holiday Concert	Dec 8	10:15-10:45 AM
Christmas Music Concert	Dec 15	9:30-10:30 AM
Lunch Serving @ Redwood City Navigation Center * Registration required	Dec 15	11:45 AM-1:00 PM
Blue Christmas Service	Dec 21	10:00 AM
Christmas Eve Service	Dec 24	5:00 PM
Redwood Symphony Messiah Sing	Dec 28	6:00 PM

\*ALL EVENTS AT LADERA COMMUNITY CHURCH UNLESS NOTED

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FOR MORE  
INFORMATION

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PORTOLA  
VALLEY

CRAFTS      LIVE MUSIC  
SLAVIC FOOD      GIFTS

**CHRISTMAS  
FESTIVAL**

**DECEMBER 7  
10AM-3PM**

at the  
**Nativity of the Holy Virgin Church**  
1220 Crane Street, Menlo Park

# Food & Drink



NAGAI EDOMAE SUSHI SHOWCASES TRADITIONAL EDOMAE OMAKASE IN REDWOOD CITY

## Sushi Simplicity

By Adrienne Mitchel

You won't find trendy ingredients like blowtorched wagyu or caviar at the Peninsula's newest omakase spot. Instead, you'll find masterfully marinated hikarimono (silver-skinned fish), akami (bluefin tuna) and even dry-aged fish using a custom-made himuro, a piece of equipment utilizing a traditional method of refrigeration that brings out the umami in the fish.

"Simplicity, elegance, minimalism, is what (chef Tomonori Nagai is) pursuing," said Sunny Noah, co-owner and senior consultant at Nagai Edomae Sushi, which opened Oct. 2 in downtown Redwood City. His previous experience includes Michelin-starred Chez TJ, Omakase SF and Sushi Yoshizumi as well as three-starred Benu.

The team behind Nagai Edomae Sushi is star-studded — chef-owner Nagai previously worked at Michelin-starred Sushi Kanesaka in Tokyo and Shinji in Singapore, and co-owner and general manager Kim Quach worked at Chez TJ, Manresa, Omakase SF, Bird Dog and Selby's.

But despite all their Michelin experience, the team isn't aiming for stars — their goal is to provide a wholly traditional and authentic edomae sushi experience highlighting Nagai's techniques and mastery of marination, the most important facet of edomae sushi. Unlike other omakase restaurants, Nagai Edomae Sushi does not utilize fusion techniques or trending ingredients.

"People think sushi is like a California roll," Nagai said. "Sushi is Japanese culture, food culture. I want to protect (it), and I want to teach other generations about traditional sushi."

Nagai Edomae Sushi offers two reservation-only seatings per night, Wednesday through Sunday, with a cap of eight diners per seating. Omakase translates to "I leave it up to you" or "to entrust," so the menu is prix fixe and the amount of courses is variable — the current menu includes six appetizers, 10 nigiri, plus miso and dessert. The restaurant is unable to accommodate gluten-free or vegetarian diets.

The meal is \$270 per person, increasing to \$292.50 upon its grand opening on Dec.

11. Even with its future price increase, Nagai Edomae Sushi is less expensive than the two other Peninsula edomae omakases, Sushi Shin and Sushi Yoshizumi.

Nagai's sushi style is heavily influenced by the sushi culture of Tokyo in the late '90s and early 2000s, said Noah, when edomae sushi, a style of preserved sushi that arose in the Edo period (1603-1868), had a resurgence in popularity. Made with seafood and ingredients found in and near the Tokyo Bay, edomae sushi emerged as a way to allow merchants to carry sushi with them as they attended to business. To preserve the fish, marination was essential, using a combination of salt, vinegar and kombu (sea kelp), which creates edomae's distinctive flavor.

"All the ingredients that (Nagai) uses can be traced back to hundreds of years ago," Noah said.

In terms of appetizers, don't expect a fancy kaiseki-style plate. Instead, Nagai prepares a simple dish rooted in seasonality.

"We are just doing the appetizer in a traditional Japanese way to celebrate the season and to invite the guests to feel the beauty of each individual season," Noah said. "Each distinct season has its own specific ingredient, specific interpretation."

### MASTERING EDOMAE SUSHI

For nigiri, one of Nagai's specialties is hikarimono, or silver-skinned fish, which is small, shiny and oily. What differentiates Nagai's preparation of hikarimono is his expert use of marination, Noah said, creating the perfect equilibrium of salt and vinegar, a technique difficult for many sushi chefs to master.

"If (hikarimono is) mishandled or prepared improperly, it smells really fishy," Noah said. "However, if the quality (of the fish) is good, and then the technique is just perfect, then the combination will bring out the most umami and unique taste of that edomae sushi."

Nagai sources bluefin tuna, known as the "black diamond" of tuna for its rare and expensive nature, from Aomori and Nagasaki in Japan and uses a secret preparation for akami, the back muscle of

bluefin tuna.

"So far, no such preparation (in the Bay Area) has existed, as far as I know," Noah said, declining to divulge additional information on the preparation.

Another of Nagai's specialties is his ability to use a himuro, an ancient refrigeration and dry-aging tool that brings out the umami flavor of fish.

"Only the top chefs who are very skilled in monitoring aging and the techniques (are) able to use this type of equipment," Noah said.

The custom-built Japanese cypress himuro has two levels: The top is for a large ice block, and the bottom is for fish. The ice both cools the fish and circulates moisture so it retains its supple nature. The chef has to continuously monitor the fish and determine when the fish is at its peak umami flavor, at which point the fish will be taken out to trim the exterior. Because only the inside is eaten, this method of preparation does yield significant food waste, which is one factor as to why the himuro will not always be in use.

While the restaurant doesn't currently have the permits required to sell fugu, or blowfish, Nagai is certified and licensed to prepare it. If mishandled, fugu can result in paralysis or death, but it is a delicacy in Japan that the Nagai Edomae Sushi team hopes to eventually bring to their restaurant.

Nagai imports a special shari, or sushi rice, that is his custom blend from Japanese cities Chiba and Toyama, seasoned with red vinegar for fragrance and acidity.

"It's a bit sour, but not too sour to overpower, but just has enough acidity to complement the flavor of the fish," Noah said. "Some of the fish, it can elevate the flavor to make you feel, 'Wow, this is the taste of, for example, tuna. Wow, this is the real taste of the sardine.'"

Not only is the seasoning of the rice important, but the texture, portion and temperature are also key.

Without a scale, Nagai must pull the "the exact right amount (of rice), not even 0.1 gram higher or lower," Noah said, which traditionally is 8 grams for women and

From left clockwise, aji (horse mackerel), kohada (gizzard shad), Nagai Edomae Sushi executive chef and co-owner Tomonori Nagai, anago (wild caught sea eel) and maguro (bluefin tuna). Courtesy Nagai Edomae Sushi.

**Nagai Edomae Sushi**, 2074 Broadway, Redwood City; 650-281-4528, Instagram: @nagaireredwoodcity. Open Wednesday to Sunday from 5:30-8:30 p.m.

slightly more for men. The sushi rice must be at body temperature (98-98.5 degrees Fahrenheit), and the fish must be at room temperature.

"The room-temperature fish, when combined together (with the body-temperature rice) at that particular moment, gives the optimum umami," Noah said.

The service is fast-paced — and that's on purpose. Sushi must be eaten right away and taken in one bite to enjoy its optimum quality, he said.

"Nowadays, people take pictures. It's OK. They can get it ready and then take (the) picture and then eat it right away," Noah said.

Nagai was born and raised in Japan, first studying French cuisine before transitioning into sushi. He worked as a sushi chef at Michelin-starred restaurants in Tokyo and Singapore before becoming executive chef at a new omakase restaurant in San Francisco in 2019. While he wasn't an owner and not all the recipes were his own, the restaurant was named after him: Sushi Nagai.

Nagai recruited Noah to become a manager at Sushi Nagai, where the two became friends. When Sushi Nagai closed during the pandemic, the pair knew they wanted to open a traditional edomae omakase together.

In 2021, Noah opened his first restaurant, Tancho in Castro Valley, with the intention that Nagai would take on the role of executive chef. Nagai was apprehensive about the location, so the pair continued to look for a new spot. In January 2023, they found the perfect spot "just by accident," Noah said, at the former site of Galette in downtown Redwood City. (Since then, Noah has also opened Iki Omakase in Palo Alto.)

"We have the experience already, but the passion keeps us going forward. I think that is something that I value most, the passion that we have in fine dining to make both the menu and the service better every day," Noah said. ■

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