

The Almanac

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Holidays come to Menlo Park

Tree-lighting marked start of the holiday season

By Arden Margulis

With the holiday tree now lit in Fremont Park, the festive season has officially arrived in Menlo Park.

“I think just being in Menlo Park for the holidays is truly what it means to be home for the holidays. Like everything about it, the community, the businesses. It’s just amazing,” Menlo Park resident Charlotte Reed said.

“It’s like a Hallmark Christmas movie but without the snow,” added Patrick Reed, a Menlo Park native.

Beyond the community tree, holiday lights have been added to trees lining Santa Cruz Avenue.

Another brightly lit Christmas tree stands at the far end of the

street. That tree wasn’t installed by the city, but by Bistro Vida and Bar Loretta owner Ali El Safy, who partnered with another business owner to bring more holiday spirit to downtown. He said he hoped the gesture would help lift community morale and ease tensions after what many have described as a divisive year in Menlo Park.

“I think it’s really important that no matter what’s going on in the country, no matter what’s going on in the city or the state, that we remember we’re all part of one community, and we should all be working towards some of the same goals,” Menlo Park councilmember Jeff Schmidt said about the holiday season. “So my hope is that everybody realizes that

See **HOLIDAYS**, page 14



Seeger Gray

Menlo Park resident Alese Lindquist holds McKenna Lindquist on her shoulders near a bubble machine at a holiday tree-lighting event at Fremont Park in Menlo Park on Dec. 5.

TIDE Academy parents rally to save school from closure

Students share impact of school that is unlike any other in district

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

Over 30 students and parents stood at the front of TIDE Academy in Menlo Park during a morning rally on Dec. 9 to save the school from a potential closure. The group wore shirts that said “Keep it 100 for TIDE” as they stood shoulder-to-shoulder behind speakers at the podium.

The TIDE Academy community first heard that its school was being considered for closure due to declining enrollment and structural deficits during a Nov. 12 board meeting. A board subcommittee including trustees Mary Beth Thompson and Richard Ginn found that, as a small school, TIDE Academy

has cost the district a “disproportionate amount of resources to operate over time.”

Superintendent Crystal Leach was directed by the Board of Trustees to develop and present a plan to potentially close the school during the Wednesday, Dec. 10, school board meeting, which occurred after Almanac print deadlines. The final vote to consider the closure is scheduled for Feb. 4, 2026.

Ahead of the meeting, parents called for the board to save the school, sharing anecdotes of their children’s success, TIDE’s unique learning environment and data to show the impact the school has on its diverse student population.

Parent and physician Rebecca

O’Brien shared during her speech that the school has a disproportionate number of students who have an Individualized Education Programs and 504 plans — accommodations and specialized instruction plans for students with disabilities.

She added that the graduation rate of TIDE students with Individual Education Programs and 504 plans is 100% while the district’s average is 80%.

“Small schools have been shown overwhelmingly to decrease roots of anxiety, increase a sense of belonging and increase teacher to student connectivity,” said O’Brien in her comments.

Ken Parekh, an alumni parent and current TIDE mentor,

shared that he was involved with the development of the district’s 2024-27 strategic plan last school year. The plan highlights goals to improve student well-being, sense of belonging, academic growth, strong relationship with teachers and college and career readiness, all of which Parekh believes TIDE has met.

“TIDE has created a safe, wellness-centered, inclusive environment with small classes, teacher and parent engagement and a neurodiverse (student) body has created a welcoming environment for my kids and many others in our community,” Parekh said in his speech. “Frankly, the other campuses in the district just can’t replicate that experience.”

TIDE senior Ben, who has a 504 plan, previously attended Sequoia High School for a year. At a larger high school, he said didn’t feel that students with accommodations were getting the necessary support that he needed due to the nature of it being a larger campus.

“At TIDE, they really listen to my 504 plan and they go the extra mile to help me and make sure I succeed,” he said. “It’s not like I’m just another face. The teachers want me to succeed and it feels really good to have that support.”

In addition to increased support from staff, TIDE students also have the opportunity to

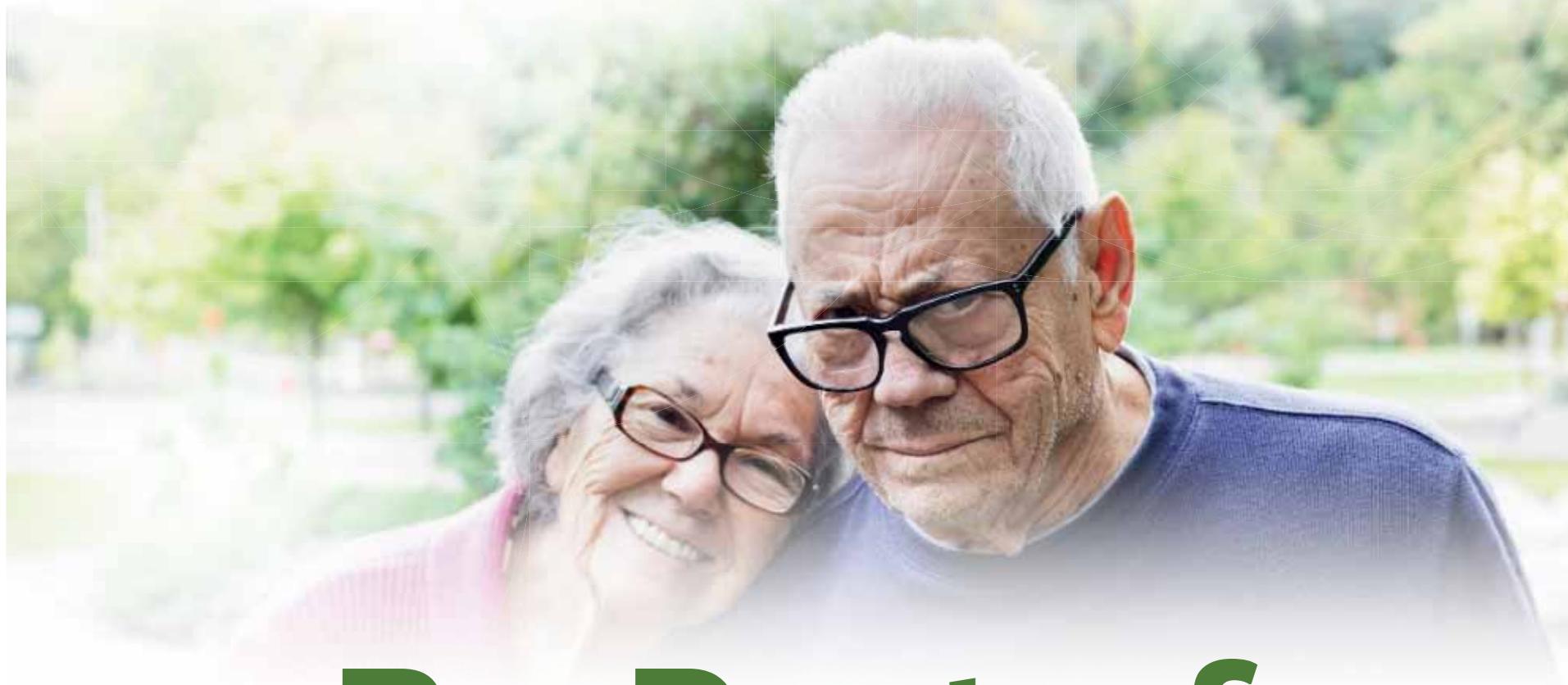
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We sincerely wish you and your loved ones a joyous holiday season and a healthy, prosperous New Year. Cheers to a great 2026!

Ken DeLeon, DRE #01342140 | 650.543.8501 | ken@deleonrealty.com
Michael Repka, DRE #01854880 | 650.488.7325 | michael@deleonrealty.com
中文諮詢請聯繫 Audrey Sun, DRE #01933274 電話: 650.785.5822
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Courtesy Habitat for Humanity Greater San Francisco

Laurel Landing is a proposed development with eight townhomes for families earning less than 80% of the area median income.

Habitat for Humanity advances plan for 8 affordable townhomes

Total cost is upward of \$11 million

By Arden Margulis

Habitat for Humanity Greater San Francisco is moving ahead with a plan to build eight affordable townhomes in Menlo Park's Belle Haven neighborhood. Proponents say it is a chance to own a home in a city where the average price is about \$2.7 million.

The development, called Laurel Landing, would bring

a mix of two-, three- and four-bedroom homes to 335 Pierce Road.

Habitat said in planning documents that it will reserve all homes for households earning under 80% of the area median income in San Mateo County. Most units will be available to households earning between 50% and 80% of the median income, with one home set aside for a family earning below 50%.

In 2025, the San Mateo County median household income for a family of four is \$186,600. The average varies by household size.

Menlo Park contributed \$3.6 million from its below-market-rate housing fund to purchase the site and cover early design costs. Santa Clara County allocated \$1.5 million from its Stanford Affordable Housing

See **TOWNHOMES**, page 8

Menlo Park ballot measure heads to voters in 2026

Future of downtown parking lots to be decided

By Arden Margulis

Menlo Park citizens' initiative to require a vote before the downtown parking lots can be developed into housing will be held on the Nov. 3, 2026, ballot. The Menlo Park City Council settled on the date at its Dec. 2 meeting.

The final decision came after the City Council initially delayed ordering a \$165,000 study of the ballot initiative. The study is allowed under California Elections Code § 9212 and may address any topic the City Council chooses. Since the City Council only ordered the report after the city clerk certified the citizen's initiative, the report had to be completed in under 30 days. State law would have allowed the city to order the report as soon as the citizen's initiative started circulating.

Mayor Drew Combs was the sole City Council member to vote against the report, saying it was "kicking the can down the road." He felt people would use parts of the report they agree with to validate their opinions and discredit other parts of the report.

"I've not had someone come to me and say because of the report, they're looking at this differently. Either people have comments that the report validates what they see or they point to aspects of the report that they think are questionable," Combs said in an interview after the

report was released.

However, some councilmembers disagree.

"I would just say that I found it a very useful report to have all the information in one place and to outline the way it is. I do think that there were pros and cons of each of the various sections, which I don't think was highlighted as much in this presentation, but there, certainly to me, was a very balanced approach," Vice Mayor Betsy Nash said during the meeting.

The city hired M-Group, a well-known Bay Area municipal consulting firm, to complete the report. M-Group made the housing element which proposed affordable housing on the city's parking lots.

"A quick timeline is not a justification for a biased report. The city could have requested a shorter report from an impartial expert," said Alex Beltramo, one of the proponents of the initiative. "For \$165,000, residents deserved an analysis that explored alternatives and brought an independent perspective—not a report that reads like a consultant defending its earlier work."

At the meeting where the City Council decided to hire M-Group, city staff did not present any other consultant to the council and said due to the quick timeline, they recommended the City Council pick a

See **MEASURE**, page 15

Documents detail manhunt ending in West Menlo Park arrest

Police drones, stop sticks and a covert tracker

By Arden Margulis

Around 5 p.m. on Dec. 3, residents in West Menlo Park were briefly ordered to shelter in place after a man with several felony warrants fled from the Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety and later abandoned his car in a Menlo Park neighborhood. Now, a week later, newly released documents detail his alleged crimes and the efforts to apprehend him.

Dublin resident Aidan Davis, 20, was arrested on March 4 after allegedly fleeing police

when caught with so-called "ghost guns." At the time, an Alameda County Sheriff's Deputy saw Davis climbing a fence with a no trespassing sign near Fallon Road and Cydonia Court in Dublin, according to a report by The Mercury News.

For weeks, Davis had allegedly been building ghost guns at his home in Dublin on Newfields Lane.

When Deputy Zachary DeSouza attempted to search a bag Davis was carrying, DeSouza thought he felt a gun and Davis started resisting the

deputy. The two then became entangled in a physical altercation on the ground.

"While on the ground, Davis ignored numerous lawful commands to 'stop resisting' and he continuously assaulted and punched Deputy DeSouza while attempting to access the crossbody bag. Davis was able to stand up and flee again on foot while reaching into the bag that was in his possession," according to a probable cause statement obtained by The Mercury News.

"Despite fearing Davis was attempting to access a firearm

with the intention of shooting Deputy DeSouza, which could cause serious bodily injury and or death upon him, Deputy DeSouza continued to pursue Davis, at which time Davis threw the bag into a bush and continued running, ultimately eluding Deputy DeSouza," the statement continued.

When the bag was eventually searched, police said they found body armor plates, an unserialized handgun and a silencer.

Davis also allegedly texted his mother to have her hide evidence. His mother, Sheila

Taylor, was charged with felony accessory after the fact.

Davis was released but charged later that month with several felonies.

Later in March, prosecutors say a young girl came forward after learning of Davis' arrest and accused him of "continuous sexual abuse" starting from when she was 9 years old, The Mercury News reported.

A warrant was issued for Davis when he did not show up for court in July.

See **MANHUNT**, page 8

Portola Valley philanthropist donates \$7 million for athletics center

8 in 10 Woodside Priory students participate in sports

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

A \$7 million donation made by a Portola Valley family will make a new modern athletics center for Woodside Priory possible. The Greg and Christina Baszucki Athletics Center is a 33,000-square-foot facility that will be completed in August 2026.

Greg Baszucki co-founded Knowledge Revolution with his brother David, Roblox founder and CEO. He's served on Roblox's board since 2008 and is a serial tech entrepreneur and philanthropist. His contributions have supported education, Stanford Medicine cardiovascular research, and veteran support programs. The Baszuckis have three children, all of whom have attended Woodside Priory.

"The things that I love about Priory is it's one of the few schools where it combines academic rigor and personal well being, so it believes in the mind, body and spirit," said Greg Baszucki.

More than 80% of its students participate in the athletics program, and Head of School



Illustration courtesy Woodside Priory

A rendering of the planned Greg and Christina Baszucki Athletics Center reveals a bright and welcoming environment.

Patrick Ruff said this new facility is not just an upgrade for student athletes but also a "manifestation of our values and mission."

The idea for the athletics center has been included in Woodside Priory's master plan since 2006 and is the last building on the plan to be completed, according to Ruff. The current gym was built in the 1960s and is in need of renovation, he added.

The athletics center will be a hub for all students with uses

ranging from basketball games, science fairs and robotics competitions. Ruff described the new facility as a place where students can gather, socialize and connect.

"I hope (the athletics center) gives students a chance to participate, to feel a sense of belonging, to feel a sense of pride and to develop their character through experiences," Ruff said.

The athletics center is being designed by San Francisco-based

architect firm EHDD, which is known for designing the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Exploratorium. Nestled in Portola Valley, the new Woodside Priory building will be a timber building designed to blend into the hillside and bucolic nature of the Portola Valley.

Students were also able to provide feedback on the design of the facility, voicing that they wanted gathering nooks where they can do homework and spend time with friends.

Located next to the existing football field, the new center will include a full gymnasium, weight room and locker room. The facility will also have a two-story area with an outdoor amphitheater and terrace that overlooks the field facing Portola Road. The second story will serve as an office space for coaches and a multipurpose room for staff.

Ruff explained that the intention behind the athletics center is not to produce the next Olympic athlete but to create a space where students can learn about the sacrifices, perseverance, life lessons and connectivity that comes through sports and other school programs.

"We all need to move our bodies. Athletics are not only good for confidence, but fitness and body movement is good for wellbeing," said Baszucki. "(Sports) teach resilience, discipline, respect, stress release, social connection and competing but staying grounded."

The athletic center also offers a safe space for young people to gain an introduction into fitness and learn skills that they can take with them for the rest of their lives. Ruff emphasized the value of being physically active and taking care of your body.

"I would hope it helps encourage healthy habits that stay with kids for their entire lives," said Baszucki.

Menlo Park Monthly Market Report

November 1, 2025 - November 30, 2025

Rossetti Realty Inc.

TOP 10 SALES*			
1. \$9,000,000 455 San Mateo Drive	2. \$8,200,000 520 Berkeley Avenue	3. \$8,200,000 399 Camino Al Lago	4. \$7,950,000 1715 Bay Laurel Drive
5. \$7,298,000 1007 Lemon Street	6. \$7,200,000 1001 Olive Street	7. \$4,850,000 1931 Perry Avenue	8. \$4,540,000 167 Mckendry Drive
9. \$4,400,000 263 Santa Margarita Avenue	10. \$4,150,000 935 Monte Rosa Drive		

ACTIVE LISTING Nov: 31 Oct: 49 -37%	AVERAGE SALES PRICE Nov: \$4,144,500 Oct: \$3,420,356 +21%	AVERAGE SALES PRICE/SQ FT Nov: \$1,610 Oct: \$1,535 +5%
PENDING LISTING Nov: 24 Oct: 36 -33%	AVERAGE SOLD DAYS ON MARKET Nov: 25 Oct: 16 +56%	MONTHS OF INVENTORY Nov: 1.10 Oct: 1.40 -21%
SOLD LISTING Nov: 27 Oct: 36 -25%	SALE/LIST PRICE Nov: 103.80% Oct: 105.30% -1%	30 YEAR MORTGAGE RATE Nov: 6.33% Oct: 6.23% +2%

*Source: NLS Listings for Single Family Properties | Townhomes | Condos

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NEWSROOM

Editor editor@almanacnews.com

Staff Writers
 Arden Margulis, 223-6518
 Jennifer Yoshikoshi, 223-6536

Print & Lifestyle Editor Linda Taaffe, 223-6511, ltaaffe@almanacnews.com

Arts & Entertainment Editor
 Heather Zimmerman, 223-6515, hzimmerman@almanacnews.com

Features Editor Julia Brown, 223-6531, jbrown@almanacnews.com

Food Editor Adrienne Mitchel, 223-6539, amitchel@almanacnews.com

Audience Engagement Lead Zoe Morgan, 223-6519, zmorgan@almanacnews.com

Lifestyle Assistant Editor Karla Kane, 223-6521, kkane@almanacnews.com

Visual Journalist Seeger Gray, 223-6530, sgray@almanacnews.com

Embarcadero Media Foundation Staff Writers
 Hannah Bensen, 223-6527
 Riley Cooke, 223-6524
 Emily Margaretten, 223-6517
 Emma Montalbano, 223-6535
 Miranda de Moraes, 223-6533
 Lisa Moreno, 223-6526

Contributors Kate Daly, Ashwini Gangal, Neil Gonzales, Maggie Mah

DESIGN & PRODUCTION

Design and Production Manager
 Kristin Brown, 223-6562

ADVERTISING

Major Accounts Sales Manager
 Connie Cotton, 223-6571

Multimedia Advertising Sales
 Elaine Ogden, 223-6572

Real Estate Manager Neal Fine, 223-6583

ADVERTISING SERVICES

Advertising Services Manager
 Kevin Legarda, 223-6597

Sales & Production Coordinator
 Diane Martin, 223-6584

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- **Newsroom:** (650) 223-6525
 Newsroom Fax: (650) 223-7525
- **Email news** and photos with captions to: Editor@AlmanacNews.com
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County to get almost \$50 million from opioid settlements

Restructured settlement adds to pot

By Miranda de Moraes

In San Mateo County, over 24 million opioid pills, 43 per adult, are prescribed to and filled by residents in a year, a San Mateo County Health System factsheet states.

The opioid crisis in the U.S. has been sweeping and tangible, and San Mateo County has not been immune. However, as of last week, the county is now poised to receive nearly \$50 million for prevention, treatment and recovery programs.

“In the face of widespread harm, public institutions have a responsibility to act,” said county counsel John Nibbelin. “While no litigation outcome can undo the devastating consequences of the opioid crisis, this resolution ensures accountability and directs resources to the communities that have borne the impact.”

San Mateo County was one of the first government entities to take legal action against Purdue Pharma, the maker of the highly addictive prescription painkiller OxyContin, and the Sackler family, which used to own it. Purdue Pharma generated around \$35 billion from OxyContin since it first hit shelves at the end of the 20th century, according to David and Kathe Sackler at a 2020 congressional hearing.

The county joined this national, multi-district lawsuit in February 2019, which snowballed to include 600 plaintiffs in the years since. Plaintiffs include cities, counties and Native American tribes.

Purdue Pharma filed for bankruptcy in September 2019, and the Sackler family sought immunity from future opioid-related litigation, which San Mateo County opposed. The

U.S. Supreme Court ultimately struck down the immunity plan in 2024, which spurred new negotiations and a \$7.4 billion nationwide settlement that crystallized last January.

A federal bankruptcy judge approved Purdue Pharma’s restructured settlement plan in November, which means San Mateo County will receive about \$3.3 million in long-term remediation payments from the Sacklers and \$1.5 million from Purdue Pharma’s bankruptcy estate. These payments will increase the county’s pot of state and national opioid settlement funds to \$49 million.

Existing settlement funds have already been used to increase access to overdose-reversal medications, strengthen county jail addiction services, expand treatment capacity at San Mateo Medical Center, and provide more resources to the Redwood

City Navigation Center for people experiencing homelessness.

OxyContin first hit the shelves in 1996 and contributed to the more than 800,000 deaths from opioid use in the U.S. from 1999 to 2023, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Considered a major catalyst to the opioid epidemic, OxyContin can become addictive within one week of use, the county health system warns.

While opioids can help with short-term pain, the Health System website states, research shows that opioids are “not an optimal treatment for chronic pain.” Long-term use only increases risk of dependence and subsequent substance misuse. Opioids can be highly addictive even for people who have no history of substance use disorders.

Other kinds of opioids that are commonly prescribed,

according to the county health system, include hydrocodone, oxycodone, fentanyl and codeine, which are commonly known by their brand names, like Vicodin, Percocet, Duragesic, Fentora and Norco.

“While no financial recovery can repair the loss of life,” Health Chief Colleen Chawla said, “these funds will help us deliver essential, life-saving services, and ensure our response remains grounded in compassion, equity, and accountability.”

San Mateo County encourages folks not to start taking opioids without a plan to stop, and to talk to a doctor or call their Behavioral Health and Recovery Services at 800-686-0101 if you or someone you know might be dependent on opioids. ■

Email Staff Writer
Miranda de Moraes at
mdemoraes@almanacnews.com.

Health insurance costs expected to increase sharply in 2026

Costs could double for Covered California enrollees

By Hannah Bensen

For the 1.9 million Californians enrolled in Covered California, monthly insurance premiums could nearly double in 2026 if enhanced federal subsidies expire.

Insurance premiums are projected to increase sharply next year amid various federal policy changes. Those changes include the expiration of federal Enhanced Premium Tax Credits passed during the pandemic in 2021 to lower insurance costs for millions of Americans. The “enhanced” tax credits capped health insurance premiums at no more than 8.5% of a household’s income and eliminated the income threshold so that middle- and high-income households could receive subsidies as well.

The debate around whether to extend the tax credits was the central issue of the recent 43-day federal government shutdown, when Democrats unsuccessfully pushed for a continuation of the credits. Republicans argued that the pandemic-era enhanced subsidies were always intended to be temporary and should be reverted to the pre-2021 levels in which low-income households still receive some support. Without congressional action, the enhanced subsidies will expire at the end of the year.

Covered California is the state’s official health insurance marketplace. Established after the federal Affordable Care Act

in 2010, qualifying California residents can compare plans and purchase private health insurance through Covered California that, until the end of 2025, have been significantly subsidized by the enhanced federal tax credits.

The size of the subsidy depends on an individual’s zip code, family size and income, but can be significant. Covered California estimates that a person making \$63,000 to \$78,000 pays \$358 per month with the subsidized rate and \$871 if the tax credits expire — resulting in savings of over \$6,000 per year. Four out of five people who enroll in Covered California plans receive some form of financial assistance.

According to Covered California spokesperson Noah Glick, there are 33,510 Covered California enrollees in San Mateo County and 79,710 enrollees in Santa Clara County. With the expiration of the tax credits, monthly premiums for these residents are projected to increase by \$201 and \$156 in each county, respectively — increases that could double their monthly insurance bill, Glick said. And Californians from marginalized communities are likely to face the steepest financial ramifications.

“While everyone will feel the impact of rising costs, communities of color throughout California will be disproportionately impacted if Enhanced Premium Tax Credits expire,” Glick said in an email. “We estimate that Latino Californians

will see a 122% increase in monthly premiums, and Black Californians will see a 106% increase in monthly premiums.”

NPR reported Monday that the Senate is expected to vote soon on a Democratic proposal to extend existing Affordable Care Act tax credits for three years. The plan is not expected to get the votes it needs to advance.

Without financial support to pay for their monthly health insurance premiums, millions of Americans and around 400,000 Californians are expected to drop their health insurance coverage, according to a University of Southern California report.

In addition to the expiration of federal tax credits, the budget bill President Donald Trump signed on July 4, includes significant changes to Medicaid eligibility, Affordable Care Act marketplace rules and other federal health programs that experts say could further increase the number of uninsured people.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that the changes made in the president’s budget could increase the number of uninsured people by 10.9 million people by 2034.

This exodus from insurance coverage can drive up prices for the system as a whole since younger, healthier people are more likely to go uninsured, Glick said.

“Those who are left with coverage often have chronic or pre-existing conditions that require ongoing health care, leading to increased costs for insurers and the health care system as a whole,” Glick said. “Insurers are preparing for that reality by increasing their monthly premiums.”

See **INSURANCE**, page 10

REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman

Defensible Space Inspections



Dear Monica: My agent told me I need to have the local fire department inspect my property’s defensible space and make recommendations. Is this required? Donna M.

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HEART loan program helps families buy affordable mobile homes

20 loans for San Mateo County families

By Hannah Bensen

After living in a cramped RV for a year with his family of four, 30-year-old William and his family became the owners of a mobile home through a nonprofit program that issues low-interest loans to qualifying San Mateo County residents.

William, who declined to give his last name for privacy reasons, is one of 18 families to receive a mobile home loan from the San Mateo County Housing Endowment and Regional Trust, a nonprofit that aims to increase the supply of affordable housing by providing financing and loans to developers and residents.

San Mateo County real estate is some of the most expensive in the country. Amid a shortage of affordable housing, mobile homes serve as one housing option for residents priced out of traditional rentals and homeownership. In 2024, the nonprofit known as HEART launched a pilot program that offers the loans to residents of mobile home parks in unincorporated parts of San Mateo County.

William lives with his younger sister and his parents. They recently moved into their mobile



Courtesy William

William lives with his family of four in this mobile home near Redwood City. The family received a low-interest loan from a nonprofit to purchase the home.

home at the Sequoia Trailer Park near Redwood City, where they had been living in an RV for the previous year. Before that, they had lived in an apartment that William's father managed until declining health from kidney disease made him too tired to work. The family's new home, William said, is an improvement over the RV because it's much warmer and has a far better bathroom.

"We feel really grateful because the insulation (and) the walls are thicker, so it's less cold in the winter compared to last year," William said. "Having a residential shower, a toilet... it

feels like you're just grateful to God."

Alex Waggoner, a program manager for HEART, said the loan program was created in response to demand from residents seeking to move out of substandard, out-of-compliance housing and into safer units.

"They were cooking meals on a hot plate, where moisture built up," Waggoner said. "They had to have their clothes in specialized bags to avoid having them ruined. (There were) people sleeping (with) many, many folks in one room."

HEART observed that many residents struggled to find

affordable loan options because loans for mobile homes are frequently treated as car loans, which come with significantly higher interest rates. The organization partnered with San Mateo County, which provided \$2 million in Measure K funding to launch the program. The average cost of a new mobile home is \$100,000, meaning the nonprofit could offer 20 loans to families. Through the program, households earning as little as \$40,000 can qualify for loans up to \$100,000, with interest rates between 0.25% to 1% for a 30-year term. The homes can be delivered in as little as two months, Waggoner said.

Besides an income maximum of 80% of area median income, the only other financial qualification for the program is that the family's debt burden — from the mobile home loan, land rent, and any other obligations — could not surpass 30% of their income. While families will own the mobile home once they pay off the loan, they continue renting the space in the park where it sits.

While 18 of the 20 available loans have been issued, two loans are still available. Waggoner said interested families can find out more

information about the program on HEART's website. HEART is also looking to expand the program with additional funding sources in San Mateo County, other municipalities, and some foundations. And as loans are repaid, HEART plans to reissue the funds to other families, creating a revolving loan pool.

For William's family, the new home is not only much more comfortable and home-like, but also provides a respite for his dad, who is still battling kidney disease. Though the home is small, William said it offers a better environment for his dad to rest and for the family to prepare healthy meals in the kitchen. It also includes a larger bedroom that can accommodate his father's catheter.

"The space is incredible. And mentally for my dad, I know that it has helped him with his health as well," William said. "It's a tiny house, but in no way is it tiny to us. It's very spacious and very welcoming." ■

Hannah Bensen is a recipient of the California Local News Fellowship who is a member of the Embarcadero Media Foundation Staff through 2027. She can be reached at hbensen@almanacnews.com.

MANHUNT

continued from page 5

Alameda County Sheriff's Office and District Attorney's Office declined to comment. The Dublin Police Department did not respond to requests for comment. The Alameda County Superior Court would only provide records in-person or via mail, which couldn't be arranged in time to meet this news organization's deadline.

Apprehension

Months later, on Dec. 2, according to court documents obtained by this news organization, the Sunnyvale Police Department was informed by the Alameda County Sheriff's Office that Davis may be

residing in Sunnyvale.

After Davis' car was located at 5 p.m. that day, the Sunnyvale Police Department obtained a warrant at 5:30 p.m. to install a "covert tracking device" on Davis' car.

The following day, the Sunnyvale Police Department tracked Davis' car to Mary Avenue and El Camino Real. When he stepped out of the vehicle at around 4 p.m., officers attempted to conduct a pedestrian stop. Davis allegedly fled, and officers decided not to pursue due to traffic conditions.

Sunnyvale continued to track Davis through several stops in Santa Clara County. Sunnyvale police requested the assistance of the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's Office

attempted to stop Davis at the intersection of Leghorn Street and Independence Avenue in neighboring Mountain View, but he allegedly fled at a high rate of speed.

After the second attempt to elude, the Sunnyvale Police Department decided to use a "tire deflation system" which is sometimes also called "stop sticks."

When Davis eventually parked on Prospect Street, a cul de sac in Menlo Park, police officers set up the tire deflation system at the exit, which immediately deflated his front left tire after he allegedly attempted to flee again.

Since his vehicle was immobilized, he only was able to make it to Harrison Way. There, he abandoned his car and fled into the residential neighborhood.

Officers from the Sunnyvale Police Department, Menlo Park Police Department and Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office responded and attempted to locate Davis.

They first used two drones, however he was not spotted. Menlo Park does not have police drones and court documents do not specify what agency used them.

Police service dogs began to track Davis and quickly located him in the side yard of 20 Harrison Way behind foliage and garbage cans.

Court documents do not say when residents were asked to shelter in place but the Menlo Park Police Department told this news organization that residents were asked to stay inside

for around 10 minutes. Two residents told this news organization they were told by police that there was concern Davis was armed. Menlo Park and Sunnyvale police did not confirm this. Court records indicate no firearm was found.

According to court documents, Davis told police he attempted to flee because he was scared and did not want to go to jail for his outstanding warrants.

He was charged in Santa Clara County with misdemeanor fleeing police and misdemeanor reckless driving. Jail records indicate he is being held in a Santa Clara County jail on a \$330,000 bond. ■

Email Staff Writer Arden Margulis at amargulis@almanacnews.com.

TOWNHOMES

continued from page 5

Fund.

The total cost of the project is estimated at \$11.6 million as of January 2025 and Habitat still needs additional public and private funding. The organization plans to seek state and federal housing grants and pursue philanthropic support to close

remaining financing gaps.

The final purchase price of each home will be set at the time of sale using a formula that accounts for construction costs, market conditions and affordability standards, Habitat told this news organization.

According to Zillow, the average home value in Menlo Park is nearly \$2.7 million, compared with about \$1.2 million

in Belle Haven.

Habitat's proposal includes townhomes averaging roughly 1,255 square feet with attached garages and EV charging. The development is still in the city entitlement process, with construction expected to begin late next year and homeowners moving in by summer 2028.

Habitat is seeking waivers from several Menlo Park

development standards, including minimum land area per unit, minimum setbacks, maximum floor area ratio, driveway and parking requirements, and building profile standards.

Families will be selected for the homes based on need, willingness to partner with Habitat, and ability to pay a mortgage. Applications will be reviewed in the order determined by lottery,

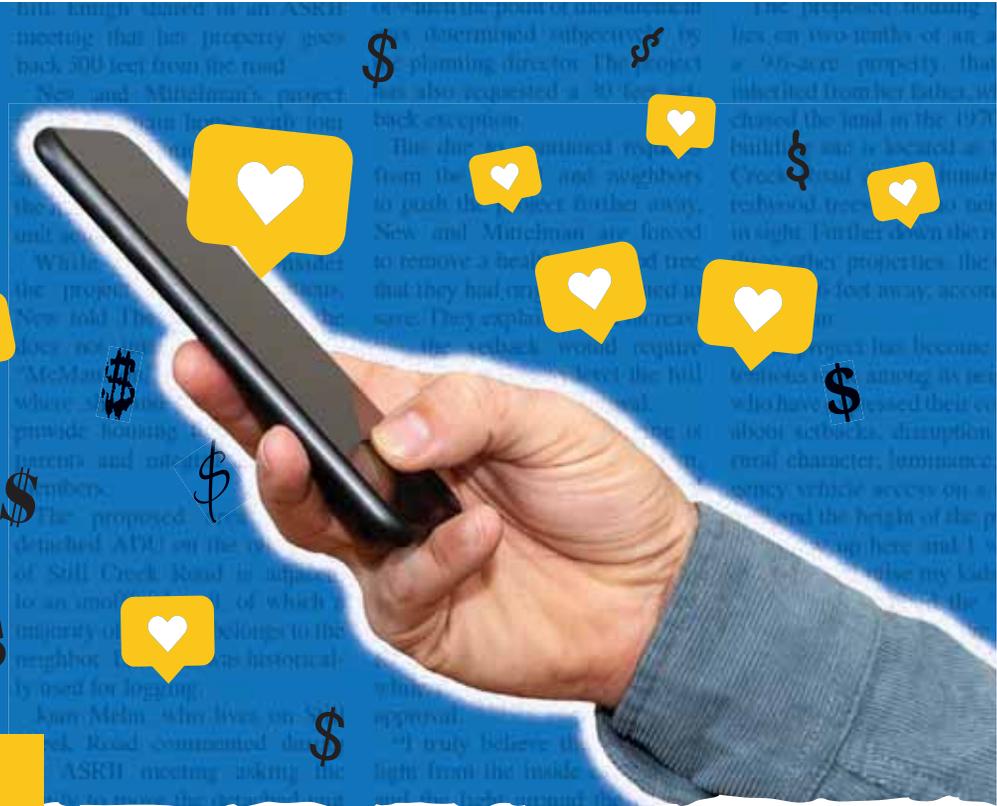
Habitat said.

The site at 335 Pierce Road is located near the new Belle Haven Community Center. The lot was originally owned by MidPen Housing, which operated four affordable units there. MidPen sold the property to Habitat in June 2025. ■

Email Staff Writer Arden Margulis at amargulis@almanacnews.com.

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As 2025 comes to a close, we're reflecting on the stories that made the greatest impact in Menlo Park, Atherton, Portola Valley, and Woodside – stories that sparked public conversations, elevated unheard voices, and led to meaningful change.

Early in the year, reporter Arden Margulis examined how the Atherton and Menlo Park police departments shared sensitive license-plate data with federal and out-of-state agencies. His reporting revealed that the practice did not comply with California law, raising urgent questions about privacy and transparency. The coverage prompted officials to review procedures, strengthen

oversight and begin conversations about better safeguarding community data.

A month later, Margulis reported on one of Menlo Park's biggest challenges: the future of downtown affordable housing. His work explained the city's complex process for inviting development proposals and clarified what's at stake, from workforce housing to long-term economic vitality. By unpacking a technical and often opaque issue, The Almanac helped residents understand how these decisions shape our community.

Jennifer Yoshikoshi chronicled San Mateo County's search for a trustworthy horse-boarding vendor at Wunderlich County Park, a place treasured by equestrians and hikers alike. Her article explored the tensions around stewardship of Folger Stable, balancing historic uses, environmental concerns, safety and the need for dependable management – and sparked conversations about protecting an

essential part of our rural heritage.

These stories, and dozens more published throughout the year, reveal the lasting impact that trusted local reporting has in our community. They inform civic decisions, elevate diverse perspectives, and ensure that power is held to account.

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TIDE ACADEMY

continued from page 1

gain mentorship from local professionals, develop career skills and enroll in college courses through Foothill College.

TIDE students shared that their experiences at the school have allowed them to come out of their shells, gaining confidence through its diverse school programs and small classroom settings.

Cesar, a TIDE senior, served as the Associated Student Body president last school year, but five years ago he said he was too shy to even talk to people in public. Through TIDE's mentorship program, internships and professional skills programs, Cesar has been able to gain leadership skills, he added.

For senior Emelly, the idea of success felt out of reach due to her background as a first-generation

Latina student growing up in a low-income family, but the support from her teachers changed her perspective.

"It seems that a lot of people with that type of background and I didn't think that I would get far in life, but our community here has been so supportive," said Emelly. "They tell me, 'You're going to succeed in life.'"

TIDE has also served as a change of pace for students who struggled with bullying, anxiety and depression in larger school settings. Sophomore Alihandria described her middle school self as "closeted," but now she's more extroverted and recently became the creative director of TIDE's journalism team.

The district held two listening sessions for parents in November, but TIDE Education Foundation President Andromeda Garcelon

said that none of the parents' questions were answered — despite the meetings being advertised as a Q&A.

Although members of the TIDE community have individually reached out to each of the trustees, Garcelon said none have responded to their requests to meet and discuss the situation. She also told this news organization that the reasons behind the potential closure keep changing between enrollment and a structural deficit, never both. When asked for data, parents are told that numbers will be shared during a board meeting scheduled in January.

"We don't understand why they're starting with a discussion of closure and not starting with a discussion of how to fix whatever the problem is, so we need them to clearly define the problem,"



Jennifer Yoshikoshi

TIDE Education Foundation President Andromeda Garcelon stands at the podium during a rally on Dec. 9.

Garcelon said.

Garcelon said although Leach will be presenting a plan at the board meeting, the trustees do not have to accept it and can decide not to move forward with the potential closure.

The Sequoia Union High

School District board meeting took place after Almanac print deadlines. For an update, see almanacnews.com. ■

*Email Staff Writer
Jennifer Yoshikoshi at
jyoshikoshi@almanacnews.com.*

INSURANCE

continued from page 7

The federal policy changes have also led to confusion for residents navigating the health insurance system, according to Yadira Lopez, CEO of Tezana Insurance Services. The company is an insurance broker that helps Californians

— particularly Hispanic and low-income residents — enroll in health insurance through Covered California. Lopez said that some customers believe that Covered California is going to disappear, so they don't need to re-enroll for the upcoming year.

"That's completely incorrect," Lopez said.

In California, health insurance

is mandatory under the law. Residents who don't carry coverage must pay a penalty of at least \$900 per uninsured adult when filing a state tax return.

But aside from the financial penalty, it's important to have health insurance to avoid expensive hospital bills that could bankrupt a household, Lopez said.

"We don't know what's going to happen to us," Lopez said. "We don't know when we'll get ill (or) when we'll have an accident and we'll need to go to the emergency room."

Open Enrollment is underway for Covered California, meaning that Californians can sign up for health coverage through Jan. 31, 2026. Residents are

encouraged to select a plan by the end of the year to ensure coverage for all of 2026. ■

Hannah Bensen is a recipient of the California Local News Fellowship who is a member of the Embarcadero Media Foundation Staff through 2027. She can be reached at hbensen@almanacnews.com.

COMING DEC. 19

Don't miss our special

**END OF YEAR
DOUBLE EDITION!**

Just like Santa, we're planning to deliver something special later this month.

We will wrap up the year with a special double edition combining the Dec. 19 and 26 issues.

The Dec. 19 edition of The Almanac will be the final newspaper delivered in 2025. We'll be back in print on Jan. 2.

Unlike Santa, though, our journalists will not rest for long after the big day. Just because there will be no paper delivered Dec. 26, our staff will still be working and you can **keep up with the local news on AlmanacNews.com.**

Happy Holidays!

The Almanac

Sidewalk vendor ordinance delayed in East Palo Alto

City seeks to regulate hours, selling locations and food handling

By Lisa Moreno

Facing concerns about inadequate public outreach, East Palo Alto City Council last week postponed adoption of its new sidewalk-vendors ordinance, which would formally enforce state and county laws on business permitting, hours of operation, safe selling locations and citations for non-compliance.

In East Palo Alto, street vending has increased in recent years, from ice cream-vendors, to taqueros to fruit stands. While many support the economic and cultural benefits generated by the small businesses, others have cited concerns over health and safety.

At a Dec. 2 council meeting, a split council gave direction to city staff to return with a more fleshed out ordinance in the future. Vice Mayor Mark Dinan and Council member Webster Lincoln were in favor of passing the ordinance as is, whereas Council members Ruben Abrica and Carlos Romero wanted to further develop it. Mayor Martha Barragan abstained from voting.

"Vendors appreciate having clear rules and generally do want to operate legally," Assistant to the City Manager Denise Garcia said at the meeting. "Their biggest concerns were insurance costs and reduction of hours."

In the new ordinance, street vendors would be required to purchase an initial business license for \$89 in their first year, but subsequent renewal costs would be determined by income.

In addition to the business license, city staff recommended charging \$126 for a sidewalk vending application, which is half of its total cost.

Food vendors would also be required to purchase an \$841 food safety permit from the San Mateo County Environmental Health Division. All vendors would also be required to purchase insurance, ranging from \$30 to \$90 a month.

"The only new fee is really this \$126 fee, which is 50% of the actual cost," said City Manager Melvin Gaines.

The other charges are already enforced by county and state agencies, according to staff.

Under the ordinance, vendors would also be required to operate only from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. in residential areas, and keep a minimum distance away from "sensitive areas" like emergency facilities, intersections, fire hydrants and special events like farmer's markets.

Food vendors would still be required to follow county health regulations, which require hand-washing stations, refrigeration and businesses-provided trash bins, cleaning up within the 15 feet operation radius. San Mateo County prohibits the use of open flames.

Permitted business owners who do not adhere to the ordinance would be fined \$100 for a first time violation, with increases for repeat offenses. For unpermitted vending, fines would range from \$250 for a first violation to \$1,000 for

subsequent ones. Generally, the city plans to provide a verbal warning, then a written warning before fining people, unless the violation is egregious, according to City Attorney John Le.

The violation fees follow state laws.

While the majority of the fees and guidelines are county and state-regulated, some council members and residents said the rates were unreasonable for

small business owners.

"You don't want to drive people out of business," Abrica said.

The city's current vending policies were implemented before Senate Bill 946 took effect in 2019, which created stricter guidelines for California sidewalk vendors. In an attempt to help vendors get into compliance, city staff want to roll out the new ordinance in a one year pilot, focusing on education

rather than punishment.

The city does not plan to impound mobile businesses nor is the action included in the ordinance. Under the first year pilot, staff would not fine people.

While sidewalk vendors have expressed concern over their ability to pay fees, Council member Lincoln said vendors should be held to the same standards as non-mobile business owners.

"I think this is a step in the right direction," he said. "They often do not try to go through permitting. They do whatever

See **VENDOR**, page 15

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Please contact dsuslow@1pvi.org or call (650) 326-2025 For more information & how to register
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Atherton home burglarized after suspects disable power, police say

Latest break-in follows flurry over Thanksgiving weekend

By Arden Margulis

An Atherton home was burglarized when someone turned off the power to the home and broke into the house through a side window earlier this month, the Atherton Police Department said in a press release on Dec. 9.

The burglary happened on the 100 block of Austin Avenue between Dec. 1 and Dec. 8, police said.

Police did not say what was stolen but said the incident was under investigation.

The police department previously warned of a spree of burglaries

after three were reported in the town over Thanksgiving weekend. The department said it identified several recurring issues in the break-ins, including homes left dark inside and out, side gates left unsecured, valuables stored in obvious locations and security cameras or alarms that were turned off at the time of the burglary.

"These are conditions that create opportunities that organized burglary crews look for as they scout neighborhoods," Atherton police Chief Steve McCulley said at the time. ■

Email Staff Writer Arden Margulis at amargulis@almanacnews.com.



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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 \$366,000 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 recipient agencies listed on this page.

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The Almanac



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Haven Family House

Provides interim shelter services and transitional housing in Menlo Park for 23 homeless families with children.

Health Connected

Provides teens and parents with comprehensive sexual health, relationship and digital literacy education programs through local schools.

Literacy Partners

Supports literacy programs that help community members enhance their reading, writing and related skills.

Peninsula Food Runners

Provides food and reduces food waste by picking up from restaurants, caterers and markets and delivering it to nonprofit organizations serving the needs of low-income individuals and families.

Ravenswood Family Health Center

Provides primary medical and preventive health care for low income, uninsured residents of all ages living in Menlo Park, North Fair Oaks and East Palo Alto.

St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room

Serves hot meals six days a week to people in need at its Menlo Park dining room, and provides food and clothing assistance.

St. Francis Center

Helps low-income families become self-supporting through educational and after-school programs, housing assistance, food and clothing at its North Fair Oaks facility.

Upward Scholars

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The Almanac Holiday Fund

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Ravenswood Family Health Network provides healthcare to low-income families

A main community-centered health option in Silicon Valley

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

Ravenswood Family Health Network has been providing quality health care to low-income families across San Mateo and Santa Clara counties for over 20 years. The East Palo Alto-based nonprofit offers family medicine, women’s health, pediatrics, dental and counseling and more.

Established in 2001, the Ravenswood Family Health Network provided a clinic for underprivileged families of East Palo Alto and East Menlo Park so that they might receive medical care. Since then, the organization has grown to open its permanent health facility and expand its clinics to Palo Alto, Sunnyvale and Mountain View through the MayView Community Health Center. It is one of the recipients of The Almanac’s Holiday Fund this year.

“Our mission is to make sure that residents of San Mateo and Santa Clara (counties) have access to quality health care services regardless of their ability to pay for such services,” said CEO Gralyn Jacques.

Ravenswood Family Health Network primarily serves individuals who are “200% and below the federal poverty guidelines,” which is an annual income of \$64,300 for a four-member household. Patients at the health center are predominantly Latino, African-American and Tongan, said Jacques.

Focused on providing community-centered healthcare



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services, Ravenswood Family Health is one of the main service providers for this demographic in Silicon Valley and one of few that are considered a Federally Qualified Health Center.

If the organization was not available to the underserved communities of East Palo Alto and East Menlo Park, many would seek care from county hospitals and emergency rooms, which can be costly, said Jacques.

“We try to ensure that patients have access to preventative services and primary care, so that we keep them out of the more expensive health care systems like emergency rooms,” he added.

The organization currently serves about 20,689 patients of which 7,576 are children, as of 2021. The number of patients has not increased over the past four years due to post-pandemic staffing shortages and costs, Jacques explained.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, many people left the health care profession due to burnout and fatigue and some are pursuing more specialty routes rather than primary care, he said.



Courtesy Ravenswood Family Health Network

Dr. Catherine Raney, a pediatrician at Ravenswood Family Health Network, treats a child.

Now, the recruitment of primary health care providers has become competitive within the Silicon Valley area as hospitals are in need of more staff.

For a community health center, being able to match the income rates of larger hospitals such as Kaiser Permanente and Sutter Health makes it difficult for them to hire more providers and treat more patients.

Ravenswood Family Health is also facing challenges with funding under the current Trump administration.

“The political environment has not been kind to community health centers from a federal and state level, so we are currently navigating that,” said Jacques.

Although the organization is challenged in some ways, it has still been able to succeed in terms of growth and impact. In

September, Ravenswood Family Health Network was recognized by the American Heart Association and American Medical Association for providing quality services for hypertension.

In February 2026, Ravenswood Family Health will open a Redwood City dental clinic in partnership with Sequoia Healthcare District. This clinic will address the need for more dental services that accept Medical patients, said Jacques.

Moving forward, Ravenswood Family Health also hopes it can partner with the Ravenswood City School District to promote health among school age children through its clinics.

For more information on how to support the Ravenswood Family Health Network visit ravenswoodfhn.org. ■

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Prepare for winter storms with sandbags

As the rainy season approaches, local residents can look to their towns and cities to fill sandbags for free. Sandbags can be used to divert water and prevent flooding in homes and business during heavy rain.

In Menlo Park, free sand and empty bags can be picked up yearround at the Menlo Park Fire Station 77 located at 1467 Chilco St. and at the Burgess Park parking lot at Alma Street and Burgess Drive. Residents must bring their own shovels. For more visit menlopark.gov and search “sandbags.”

The town of Portola Valley provides its residents with complimentary sandbags to protect their properties from flooding during storm season. Community members can find the self-serve sandbag station at Town Center across from the basketball courts at the southern driveway.

The station is accessible daily and is available for town residents through the end of

the rainy season.

Atherton has a self-service sandbag station located at the rear parking lot of Holbrook-Palmer Park, 150 Watkins Ave. The city limits five sandbags per residence.

Woodside offers sand and sandbags at Town Hall for residents and local businesses. Visit the town website at woodsidedca.gov/375/Sandbags-Available-at-Town-Hall for more information on how to fill bags, dispose and reuse sandbags.

Ravenswood Family Health Network coat drive

Ravenswood Family Health Network is hosting its annual coat drive through Dec. 19 to collect winter clothing for children and adults. The organization is accepting donations for gently used coats, hats, gloves, scarves, new pairs of socks and new undergarments.

The donated items will be distributed to Ecumenical Hunger Program, WeHOPE and

Hope’s Corner. Donations can be dropped off at Ravenswood Family Health Center and MayView Community Health Centers:

- Ravenswood Family Health Center, 1885 Bay Road, East Palo Alto
- MayView Community Health Center, 270 Grant Ave., Palo Alto
- MayView Community Health Center, 900 Miramonte Ave., Mountain View
- MayView Community Health Center, 785 Morse Ave., Sunnyvale

Portola Valley and Woodside Hanukkah Festival

The Village Chabad is hosting its fifth Hanukkah Festival from 2-4 p.m. on Dec. 14 at Portola Valley Town Center. The event will feature a giant ice menorah, live music played by Jewish rock band Shir Soul, hot latkes, crafts, donuts and more. The mayor of Woodside will also be joining to light the menorah.

— Jennifer Yoshikoshi



‘I love the small town feel of Menlo Park. Not only the lights here in the park, but up and down Santa Cruz Avenue and along El Camino, it’s just really festive shopping local here.’

JEN MOSSO, MENLO PARK RESIDENT



HOLIDAYS

continued from page 1

we all have good intentions, and we’re all kind of trying to make this community a better one.”

On Dec. 5, many residents gathered to share hot chocolate, cider and watch outgoing Mayor Drew Combs light the holiday tree. Poems and stories were read by kids from around Menlo Park, in addition to light-up games and artificial snow. The event was one of many Jen Mosso plans.

“It’s very rewarding: I used to bring my kids to these events and I’ve been working for the city for a year-and-a-half now, and have the honor of planning these events. It’s just so fun to see kids that were my kids’ age now enjoying the event that I planned,” said Mosso, who

has lived in Menlo Park for 20 years and now coordinates city events.

“We try to think of what would be fun for the kids in the community, and we always try to add something new every year. The snow was added a couple years ago and LED games were added this year,” Mosso said. She said photos with Santa and the library’s winter reading program are among her personal favorites.

The holiday tree lighting marked the start of a month filled with local events, many of them aimed at families. On Dec. 13 at 8:30 a.m., Menlo Park will host photos with Santa Claus at the Belle Haven Community Center, one of several long-running traditions.

“I love the small town feel of Menlo Park. Not only the lights here in the park, but up

and down Santa Cruz Avenue and along El Camino, it’s just really festive shopping local here,” Mosso added.

Combs said supporting local shops is especially important during the holidays, as businesses continue navigating pressures and housing debates over the future of downtown.

“They are such a key part of the community. Community is made up of city government, schools, and social clubs, but businesses are a really important part. I mean, as you know, we’re having this big, intense debate in this city and a lot of it has to do with the best ways to preserve and enliven the downtown strip and ensure the viability of the small businesses that are there,” Combs said. ■

Email Staff Writer Arden Margulis at amargulis@almanacnews.com.



Photos by Seeger Gray

Clockwise from top: A holiday tree lighting event at Fremont Park in Menlo Park on Dec. 5; Bistro Vida owner Ali El Safy stands for a portrait in front of a Christmas tree outside the restaurant in downtown Menlo Park; Mayor Betsy Nash attends the tree lighting event; Lights on trees along Santa Cruz Avenue in downtown Menlo Park.

Redwood City police name officers in fatal shooting

Investigation continues into November incident

By Arden Margulis

The Redwood City Police Department has released the identities of three officers involved in a Nov. 11 shooting that left a 48-year-old man dead, according to information released to this news organization.

The shooting is now the focus of independent post-incident investigations by the San Mateo County District Attorney's Office and the Redwood City Police Department's Internal Affairs division.

According to a public records request submitted to the Redwood City Police Department, the city said it would not provide investigative records but would provide an update on Dec. 29. However, it agreed to identify the officers involved.

Officers named

On the day of the shooting, police arrived at the 200 block of Hemlock Avenue in the Redwood Oaks neighborhood after receiving reports that a man had fired a gun into the sidewalk. Police officers said they used a drone to locate the man, identified as Redwood City resident Jose Reynaldo Lombera, who was found on a residential property. Police said they formed a contact team equipped with both lethal and less-lethal weapons.

According to police, Lombera

"pointed" a gun at officers. In response, Redwood City police officers, who have been identified as Officer Jake Granado, Officer Carlos Ordaz and Sgt. Ruben Orozco, fired a combination of lethal rounds and less-lethal munitions. According to police, officers provided medical aid at the scene before Lombera was taken to a hospital, where he later died. Granado, Ordaz and Orozco have been placed on administrative leave, the department said in a statement.

Granado joined the city in February 2020 and Ordaz in July 2020, according to posts on the department's Instagram account.

The Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training has not yet responded to a records request for all disciplinary files related to the involved officers.

In 2024, Officer Ordaz was honored by the Redwood City Elks Lodge after he and another officer rescued a gunshot victim who was in an area too dangerous for medical personnel to render aid. Hospital staff later told the police department that the victim would have very likely bled out if it weren't for Ordaz's actions.

In the public interest

Under the Right to Know Act of 2018 and subsequent legislation, the Redwood City

Police Department is required to release a wide range of records because the incident involved a fatal shooting. The law requires disclosure of all investigative materials related to police use of force that results in death or great bodily injury once the investigation is complete.

This includes internal affairs reports, police reports, witness statements and expert analysis. The public will also be able to review audio and video materials such as body-worn camera footage, evidence photos, 911 recordings and transcripts or recordings of interviews.

While state law allows these records to be released, Redwood City would still be able to make some redactions. The main redaction allowed is related to the expectation of privacy of individuals in the records. Redwood City could redact or withhold any document where the public interest in withholding the recording "clearly outweighs" the public interest in disclosure because the release of the recording would violate someone's reasonable expectation of privacy.

Some examples include removing Social Security numbers, personal emails or officers' home addresses. When the city makes redactions, it must provide a written explanation of the privacy issue. Entire documents may be withheld only when

the privacy concerns cannot be addressed through redaction alone.

Waiting game

But obtaining the records could take some time. Under state law, Redwood City must provide the records within 45 days unless one of many specific exemptions applies.

During an active criminal or administrative investigation, disclosure may be delayed for up to 60 days after the incident or until the District Attorney's Office decides whether to file criminal charges against a party involved, whichever comes first. If the records could "reasonably interfere with a criminal enforcement proceeding" against either an officer or member of the public, the police department may delay disclosure by no more than

18 months and must provide updates every 180 days.

In cases where the enforcement proceeding is against a member of the public, the department may be able to extend the time to respond past 18 days.

Disclosure can also be delayed by no more than 180 days during an administrative investigation.

Finally, disclosure may also be delayed during a criminal trial.

The District Attorney's Office is leading the investigation into the use of force, with support from the police department and the county Coroner's Office. The District Attorney's Office declined to provide additional information until its investigation is complete and deferred to the Redwood City Police Department.

The police department will provide an update on the disclosure timeline on Dec. 29. The department indicated that the District Attorney's investigation may last 14 weeks. ■

Email Staff Writer Arden Margulis at amargulis@almanacnews.com.

OBITUARIES

Local residents who died recently include:

Alonzo Ramirez, 86, of Palo Alto, who was born in El Paso, Texas, who served in the U.S. Air Force, who received a bachelor's degree from University of Texas, El Paso, and who enjoyed a 40-year-career as an aerospace engineer at McDonnell Douglas, died on Nov. 2, 2025.

Waltraut Charlotte Elsbeth Otilie Monroe, 99, of Portola Valley, who was born in Germany, whose mother fled from the advancing Russian army and relocated the family to a small farming village, who later lived in Hamburg, Germany, and in Switzerland before settling in the United States in 1967, and who taught German at the German-American school in Palo Alto, died on Oct. 16, 2025.

Gail Robbins Schwettman, 89, of Palo Alto, who was born in Ohio, who graduated from the University of Cincinnati and taught grade school, who was active in various women's groups and activities, including choir and musical theater, and who loved playing with her grandchildren and creating personal homemade cards, died on Oct. 8, 2025.

Earl Gene Kershner, 97, of Palo Alto, who was born in Defiance, Ohio, who served in the Korean War before earning a degree from the School of Architecture at Ohio State University, and who then spent 34 years at Stanford University, retiring in 1991 as associated director of facilities project management, died on Nov. 30, 2025.

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

MEASURE

continued from page 5

group familiar with Menlo Park.

Nash and Councilmember Jeff Schmidt said they were appreciative of the engagement the citizen's initiative represented.

"It's clear that residents on both sides of the topic want to have a vote, so it's important to me that residents continue to have that voice. I think that in all of our decisions and that we hear what they're saying as part of a democratic dialog. I fundamentally agree that that is really important," Schmidt said.

"I do think it's important we talk about like, well, this is the democratic process. But to a degree, I think the fact that we have ended here also speaks to

something being broken," Combs said. "I hear you vice mayor when you say this engagement could have happened some time ago during this process. But I also pause with the thought that to some degree: was the council blinded by a sense of its own righteousness?"

"I do think that there were projects or proposals connected to the downtown parks that could have been received better than what we ended up with here," Combs added. He was a member of the city council at the time the housing element was approved.

Nash, who was also on the city council, disagreed.

"First of all, it's very easy to poke holes in any process, and it's hard to come up with solutions. And I do think everything

can always be improved," she said. "But I think given the circumstances, we did the best we could and came up with a viable — well I guess I don't know if I should call it viable — but came up with a viable housing element that eventually worked."

The city is expected to get proposals for the downtown parking lot developments later this month. While the city awaits the results of the November election, it may still be able to at least start the process of developing the parking lots in case the measure fails.

Nash is hopeful that once the city receives the proposals, it may have a better idea of how to proceed in the meantime. ■

Email Staff Writer Arden Margulis at amargulis@almanacnews.com.

VENDOR

continued from page 11

they want."

Council members Abrica and Romero wanted greater direct input from street vendors and asked city staff to further develop

financial assistance programs and citation payment processes.

"We don't always have to agree and we don't always agree, but when we're talking about the public process, I think it's important to wait a little longer and allow the public, in this case the people

affected by it, to have an opportunity to come up here," Abrica said.

City staff will return in the future to pitch a second draft of the ordinance. ■

Email Staff Writer Lisa Moreno at lmoreno@almanacnews.com.

Employment

The Almanac offers employment advertising.

The deadline is Sunday at 11:59 pm.

Visit [AlmanacNews.com/employment_ads/](https://www.almanacnews.com/employment_ads/).

For assistance email LegalNotices@AlmanacNews.com.

Menlo Park resident accused of trying to set fire to Saratoga winery

Police say he barricaded himself in Tesla

By Arden Margulis

A Menlo Park man was arrested on Dec. 6 after Santa Clara County sheriff's deputies said he tried to start a fire at a Saratoga winery, threw a wine bottle at staff and then intentionally crashed a Tesla into two parked cars while fleeing the scene.

Deputies responded Saturday

afternoon to Garrod Farms Estate Winery & Stables after employees reported that a man had attempted to ignite a fire on the property, according to the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office. When confronted, Menlo Park resident Vikram Beri, 42, allegedly threw a wine bottle at staff and sped off in his Tesla.

The Sheriff's Office said Beri

intentionally rammed two parked cars as he fled, sending one vehicle over an embankment. Beri then drove his Tesla down the same embankment, where he refused to surrender.

Deputies said they made several attempts to de-escalate the situation, but that Beri barricaded himself in the car. Deputies used pepper ball and pepper spray to force him to

crawl out of the vehicle before he was taken into custody.

Beri was transported to a hospital for evaluation. He was booked into the Santa Clara County Main Jail on suspicion

of assault with a deadly weapon and resisting arrest

The incident remains under investigation. ■

Email Staff Writer Arden Margulis at amargulis@almanacnews.com.

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Public Notices

STATEMENT OF ABANDONMENT OF USE OF FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME

File No. M-300012

The following person(s)/registrant(s) has/ have abandoned the use of the fictitious business name(s). The information given below is as it appeared on the fictitious business statement that was filed at the County Clerk-Recorder's Office. FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME(S):

RG GOLFING

235 Westlake Center #215

Daly City, CA 94015

FILED IN SAN MATEO COUNTY ON: 03/05/2025

REGISTRANT'S NAME(S):

GO CLR, LLC

235 Westlake Center #215

Daly City, CA 94015

THIS BUSINESS WAS CONDUCTED BY A

Limited Liability Company.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk Recorder of San Mateo County on November 04 2025.

(ALM Nov 21, 28, Dec 5 and 12, 2025)

AVENT DECOR

FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT

FILE NO.: M-302039

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

1.) AVENT DECOR, located at 3745 Fleetwood Dr, San Bruno, CA 94066.

Registered owner(s):

YURY MALYKIN

3745 Fleetwood Dr

San Bruno, CA 94066

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 October 29, 2025.

(ALM Nov 28, Dec 5, 12 and 19, 2025)

BALLOONS DECOR

FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT

FILE NO.: M-302050

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

1.) BALLOONS DECOR, located at 2108 N ST STE N, Sacramento, CA 95816. Mailing Address: 1051 Beach Park Blvd #314 Foster City, CA 94404

Registered owner(s):

BALLOONS DECOR

2108 N ST STE N

Sacramento, CA 95816

State of Incorporation/Organization: California

This business is conducted by: a Corporation. Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 01/31/2023.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on October 30, 2025.

(ALM Nov 21, 28, Dec 5 and 12, 2025)

SHILO

FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT

FILE NO.: M-302283

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

1.) SHILO, located at 350 Sharon Park Dr. H102, Menlo Park, CA 94025.

Registered owner(s):

SHIORI KIRIAKE

350 Sharon Park Dr. H102

Menlo Park, CA 94025

This business is conducted by: an Individual.

Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 11/26/2025.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on November 26, 2025.

(ALM Dec 5, 12, 19, 2025 and Jan 2, 2026)

PURPOSE MADE DESIGN

FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT

FILE NO.: M-301890

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

1.) PURPOSE MADE DESIGN, located at 1259 El Camino Real, Unit 1336, Menlo Park, CA 94025.

Registered owner(s):

SEAN MCCUSKER

1259 El Camino Real, Unit 1336

Menlo Park, CA 94025

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 October 09, 2025.

(ALM Nov 21, 28, Dec 5 and 12, 2025)

X DRIVE

FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT

FILE NO.: M-3022422

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

1.) X DRIVE, located at 1383 Laurel Street, San Carlos, CA 94070.

Registered owner(s):

NADER HADIZADEH RAEISSI

1383 Laurel Street

San Carlos, CA 94070

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 20, 2025.

(ALM Dec 12, 19, 2025, Jan 2 and 9, 2026)

DESIGNS BY DOW

FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT

FILE NO.: M-302007

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

1.) DESIGNS BY DOW, located at 864 15th Ave, Menlo Park, CA 94025.

Registered owner(s):

LIAM DOW

864 15th Ave

Menlo Park, CA 94025

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 October 27, 2025.

(ALM Dec 5, 12, 19, 2025 and Jan 2, 2026)

ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE FOR CHANGE OF NAME SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA FOR THE COUNTY OF SAN MATEO

Case No.: 25-CIV-06910

TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS:

Petitioner: Pei-Yu Chi filed a petition with this court for a decree changing names as follows:

PEI-YU CHI to PEGGY CHI

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: 1/12/2026, 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: 11/13/2025

Hon. Stephanie G. Garratt

JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT

(ALM Dec 5, 12, 19, 2025 and Jan 2, 2026)

ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE FOR CHANGE OF NAME SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA FOR THE COUNTY OF SAN MATEO

Case No.: 25CIV07998

TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS:

Petitioner: Amie O'Connor filed a petition with this court for a decree changing names as follows:

AMIE O'CONNOR to AMIE O'SULLIVAN

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: 01/20/2026, 9:00am, Civil 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: 11/19/2025

Rachel Holt

JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT

(ALM Nov 28, Dec 5, 12 and 19, 2025)

SUMMONS Case No. 25-CIV-04034

(CITACION JUDICIAL)

NOTICE TO DEFENDANT (A VISO AL

DEMANDADO): **RENNA J MCNAB, DOES 1 to 10**

YOU ARE BEING SUED BY PLAINTIFF: (LO ESTÁ DEMANDANDO EL DEMANDANTE):

BANK OF AMERICA, N.A.

NOTICE! You have been sued. The court may decide against you without your being heard unless you respond Within 30 days. Read the information below.

You have 30 CALENDAR DAYS after this summons and legal papers are served on you to file a written response at this court and have a copy served on the plaintiff. A letter or phone call will not protect you. Your written response must be in proper legal form if you want the court to hear your case. There may be a court form that you can use for your response. You can find these court forms and more Information at the California Courts Online Self-Help Center (www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp), your county law library, or the courthouse nearest you. If you cannot pay the filing fee, ask the court clerk for a fee waiver form. If you do not file your response on time, you may lose the case by default, and your wages, money, and property may be taken without further warning from the court. There are other legal requirements. You may want to call an attorney right away. If you do not know an attorney, you may want to call an attorney referral service. If you cannot afford an attorney, you may be eligible for free legal services from a nonprofit legal services program. You can locate these nonprofit groups at the California Legal Services Web site (www.lawhelpcalifornia.org), the California Courts Online Self-Help Center (www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp), or by contacting your local court or county bar association. NOTE: The court has a statutory lien for waived fees and costs on any settlement or arbitration award of \$10,000 or more in a civil case. The court's lien must be paid before the court will dismiss the case. ¡AVISO! Lo han demandado. Si no responde dentro de 30 días, la corte puede decidir en su contra sin escuchar su versión. Lea la información a continuación. Tiene 30 DIAS DE CALENDARIO después de que le entreguen esta citación y papeles legales para presentar una respuesta por escrito en esta corte y hacer que se entregue una copia al demandante. Una carta o una llamada telefónica no lo protegen. Su respuesta por escrito tiene que estar en formato legal correcto si desea que procesen su caso en la corte. Es posible que haya un formulario que usted pueda usar para su respuesta. Puede encontrar estos formularios de la corte y más información en el Centro de Ayuda de las Cortes de California (www.sucorte.ca.gov), en la biblioteca de leyes de su condado o en la corte que le queda mas cerca. Si no puede pagar la cuota de presentación, pida al secretario de la corte que le dé un

formulario de exención de pago de cuotas.

Si no presenta su respuesta a tiempo, puede perder el caso por incumplimiento y la corte le podrá quitar su sueldo, dinero y bienes sin mas advertencia. Hay otros requisitos legales. Es recomendable que llame a un abogado inmediatamente. Si no conoce a un abogado, puede llamar a un servicio de remisión a abogados. Si no puede pagar a un abogado, es posible que cumpla con los requisitos para obtener servicios legales gratuitos de un programa de servicios legales sin fines de lucro. Puede encontrar estos grupos sin fines de lucro en el sitio web de California Legal Services, (www.lawhelpcalifornia.org), en el Centro de Ayuda de las Cortes de California, (www.sucorte.ca.gov) o poniéndose en contacto con la corte o el colegio de abogados locales. AVISO: Por ley, la corte tiene derecho a reclamar las cuotas y los costos exentos por imponer un gravamen sobre cualquier recuperación de \$10,000 mas de valor recibida mediante un acuerdo o una concesión de arbitraje en un caso de derecho civil. Tiene que pagar el gravamen de la corte antes de que la corte pueda desechar el caso.

The name and address of the court is (El nombre y dirección de la corte es):

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF SAN MATEO, UNLIMITED CIVIL CASE, 400 County Center, Redwood City, CA 94063-1655

The name, address, and telephone number of plaintiff's attorney, or plaintiff without an attorney, is

(El nombre, la dirección y el numero de teléfono del abogado del demandante, o del demandante que no tiene abogado, es):

NELSON AND KENNARD, LLP, Robert Scott Kennard, SBN 117017, 5011 Dudley Blvd, Bldg 250, Bay G, McClellan, CA 95652-1020, P.O. Box 13807 Sacramento, CA 95853. Telephone: (916) 920-2295; Facsimile: (916) 920-0682.

DATE (Fecha): **5/22/2025**

Chad L. Peace, Clerk,

by /s/ Kimberly Claussen, Deputy Clerk (Secretario) (Adjunto)

NOTICE TO THE PERSON SERVED: You are served as an individual defendant.

(ALM Nov 28, Dec 5, 12 and 19, 2025)

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/ For assistance email LegalNotices@AlmanacNews.com.

Viewpoint

IDEAS, THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS ABOUT LOCAL ISSUES

Leadership is real problem downtown

Other downtowns have been refurbished through the years

By Sloane Citron

GUEST OPINION

While the opinion piece by Mr. Beltramo hit on some important aspects of our downtown situation (Dec. 5), I'm afraid that his passion to stop the conversion of our parking lots into housing has caused him to obfuscate the real issues.

When visitors come to see me in my offices in downtown Menlo Park, they often remark that they're surprised to see how rundown Santa Cruz Avenue has become. I'm not. For a generation, the city council has occupied itself with national and international events but never with its own backyard. It's a pity.

I love Menlo Park. I've had a home and an office here for 35 years, and I've watched what has taken — or rather — not taken place. While almost every downtown area around

us — Burlingame to Los Altos — has been updated and beautified, Menlo Park's downtown has languished. Pitiful attempts to spruce it up — remember the pop-up park? — have done little and now the city and shop owners are paying the price of ineptitude and indifference.

Downtown is unkempt, the infrastructure is old and failing, the sidewalks are broken and filthy, the town is a growing magnet for transients and homeless, news boxes are dirty and broken, the plantings are amateurish and trite, "temporary" plastic store signs have become the norm. All in all, it's a mess.

The disinterest in the care of our downtown creates a cycle: As the quality of the area falls, fewer people come to downtown. As fewer people come downtown, more stores fail, and as more stores fail and are replaced by

empty storefronts, even fewer people want to make the trip downtown. I'm worried that we are headed for oblivion.

That there is now a frightening and growing number of empty storefronts should therefore not be a surprise. While other downtowns are bustling, ours is failing.

Menlo Park city councils are famous for studying things to death and then making the wrong decision. Recently, members spent over \$165,000 for one more survey to tell them what is wrong with downtown. I could have told them, for no charge whatsoever, what is wrong: our city council.

Sloane Citron
Menlo Park

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THE PARENT'S GUIDE FOR SUMMER FUN FOR KIDS

Artscene

PEOPLE AND PERFORMANCES IN ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Bryant Street Gallery celebrates a silver anniversary

Offering a variety of services is the key to downtown gallery's success

By Sheryl Nonnenberg

A 2023 survey by the Art Dealers Association of America found that 60% of small, independent art galleries in the United States close within five years of opening. The Bay Area has seen its share of galleries that have come and gone, including Pace in Palo Alto and Gagosian in San Francisco.

That same survey stated that the best way for a gallery to survive was to “diversify income” and that may be why Bryant Street Gallery in Palo Alto has defied the odds and is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. Known as both an art gallery and a frame shop, Bryant Street is the brainchild of Karen Imperial, its founder and sole owner.

Imperial was born and raised in Elmsford, N.Y., and was educated at Parsons School of Design and the State University of New York at Purchase. Her studies included illustration, textiles, painting and printing, and her original intention was to become an artist. Her first job after college was in a frame shop in New York City. She really enjoyed designing frames but when the opportunity arose to go out onto the gallery floor and interact with customers, she jumped at the chance.

When she moved to California in 1995, she found a job at a gallery and frame shop in San Francisco. While she was very knowledgeable about art trends in New York, especially the predominant style of Abstract Expressionism, she was less familiar with regional California artists. She set out to quickly rectify that. After five years, she made two important decisions: she would open her own gallery and she would not work for anyone else again. “I realized early on that I just liked being the boss,” she said.

Thanks to a loan from a client, she was able to open a very small gallery just down the block from her current location. “I came from New York so the space didn’t have to be big, it just had to be good,” she explained. She showed art and did framing and the business took hold. Several

years later, a rent increase forced her to look elsewhere and, as luck would have it, the current gallery location was available and she moved in. “We didn’t even have to change our name,” she said with a laugh.

Since then, the business has grown to include gallery exhibitions, framing, art consulting and art staging. “We’re kind of a one-stop shop,” said Imperial, who now employs two people in the gallery and three in the frame shop, which is located in Mountain View.

The gallery installs around eight shows a year, usually pulling from the 30 artists that Imperial represents. She finds artists at art fairs, M.F.A. student exhibitions and studio visits. Imperial curates the exhibitions with the help of long-time assistant, Jeanne Vadeboncoeur. Exhibitions, which vary in media, are usually solo or two-person shows with a few thematic group shows mixed in. “I love it when we open a new show,” said Imperial, “and I get excited about showing new artists.”

With the decline of foot traffic in Palo Alto, recent economic downturns and the pandemic, it was clear that just presenting art would not be enough. Imperial established a relationship with a construction company that builds large homes in Menlo Park and Atherton. She draws upon her design background and the roster of artists she represents to stage the homes for viewing. Often,



Seeger Gray

Paintings by Diane Williams are displayed near a sculpture by Inger Nova Jorgensen at Bryant Street Gallery in Palo Alto.

buyers will purchase staged art or Imperial will serve as an art consultant in helping them to find art that fits their taste and budget.

“You have to work very hard in this kind of business,” Imperial said. Her clients include prominent Silicon Valley millionaires as well as people who “just need art in their homes but don’t know how to find it.” Using Photoshop templates, she can place art throughout a home, while listening carefully to the owner’s reactions. “You have to be willing to understand the clientele and know what their needs are,” she said.

She doesn’t feel that there are many bona fide art collectors in this area (“true collectors are people who buy a piece of art and put it under a bed”) mainly because of the demographic of younger, newly wealthy people in Silicon Valley. “They need artwork in their homes and we really want to place good, affordable

artwork.” Imperial said that, because of the longevity of her business, she is now also helping the children of former clients.

Her biggest challenge? “The internet,” she said, acknowledging that people can easily find art online and deal directly with an artist, rather than a gallery as finder/middleman. She takes heart, however, in the fact that “people usually need to see gallery credentials before spending a lot on art.” And this is where the gallery comes into play, offering an imprimatur, especially for young, upcoming artists.

Noting that she has given first-time shows to many artists, she cites this as one reason why she plans to continue the gallery side of the business. “I want to keep the gallery because it gives my artists opportunities and experience that they can put on a resume.”

Numerous artists offered input about the gallery for this story, including Zoya Scholis, who wrote, “Without an audience my paintings are incomplete. When a gallery owner takes the time to see, guide, curate and show your work they are actually completing it. For that I am most grateful to Bryant Street Gallery.”

Sarah Morejohn said that her solo show in 2024 resulted in more gallery representation and several artist-in-residence awards. “It was wonderful to have been given a chance at Bryant Street Gallery and the successes that followed.”

Elena Zolotnitsky wrote a lengthy testimonial noting, “Not everybody understands what a hard job it is to be an artist. The only job that is even harder

to create masterpieces daily is to sell them. And to be doing it for 25 years is a great fantastical achievement.”

Imperial reflected about the many changes she has witnessed in Palo Alto and the businesses that have come and gone. She said that there is a marked decrease in the number of people who attend openings or even stop by the gallery to look at a show. She is hopeful that things will change. “We need galleries in Palo Alto or else it will just be rug stores and restaurants.” She added, “We need to keep the downtown flourishing and a place where people want to see different things.”

The gallery has a full calendar of exhibitions planned for next year, including solo shows of long-standing artists Elise Morris and Michael Shemchuk. Imperial also plans to feature the work of two new artists, Ruth Shively and Diane Williams. There will be several group shows, including a continuation of the current exhibition, “Organic Chemistry.”

When asked why she thinks the gallery has endured, Imperial said, “Because we do so many different things. And because I don’t know anything else and I love what I do.” ■

Email Contributing Writer
Sheryl Nonnenberg at
nonnenberg@aol.com.



Courtesy Karen Imperial

Karen Imperial, seen here during a recent show, founded Bryant Street Gallery 25 years ago.

“Organic Chemistry,” a group show of abstract paintings by Jane Burton, Karl Pilato, Paula Valenzuela and Diane Williams will be on view through Jan. 21 at Bryant Street Gallery, 532 Bryant St., Palo Alto. bryantstreet.com.

Review: 'Pride & Prejudice' sequel offers abundance of sibling revelry

Romantic duo's sisters take the spotlight in TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's 'Georgiana and Kitty: Christmas at Pemberley'

By Michael J. Vaughn

During an early scene change at this Jane Austen-inspired production, I could swear the orchestral interlude was a 19th-century version of "The Fate of Ophelia" by Taylor Swift. The third of a trilogy of "Pride and Prejudice" sequels, "Georgiana and Kitty: Christmas at Pemberley," by Lauren Gunderson and Margot Melcon, celebrates the tropes of Austen's work (witty dialogue, social intrigue) but like that interlude, contains mysterious and surprising bonuses.

The trilogy actually began at a TheatreWorks writers' retreat in 2014, so there's a sense of it coming full circle, and it couldn't be in better hands. The ensemble work under Artistic Director Giovanna Sardelli is impeccable, a seminar in comic timing and gestures. Watching the bon mots fly is half the fun.

The story opens in the home of the famous "Pride and Prejudice" Darcys, Elizabeth (née Bennet) and Fitzwilliam, who are hosting the Bennet sisters for Christmas, plus one additional Darcy, Fitzwilliam's sister Georgiana, a talented pianist and composer.

The neglected Bennet sister, Kitty, has become besties with Georgiana, who tells her an exciting and treacherous secret. After meeting an admirer, Henry Grey, at a London recital, she and he have carried on a year-long correspondence and become very attached to one another. The terrifying part is that she's been too afraid to mention this to her overprotective brother, and Henry has decided to visit her for Christmas.

Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for the continued popularity of Austen is the place of propriety and honor in her stories, which tends to magnify what today would seem no more than uncomfortable situations into full-blown disasters. Not to mention the British reluctance for expressing feelings. Thus, the second in-person meeting of Georgiana and Henry turns into a Hugh Grant festival of awkward silences and misdirection. Fortunately, they get onto their favorite subject, music, and can't stop talking.

As for the brother-sister element, well that's destined for full-blown conflict from the start, and it's pretty juicy stuff. Especially when Darcy discovers some unflattering things about



Courtesy Kevin Berne

Kitty (Kushi Beauchamp, center), encourages her bestie, Georgiana (Emily Ota, left), in pursuing a secret romance with Henry (Nima Rakhshanifar, right).

Henry's family.

As Georgiana, Emily Ota does a masterful job of portraying a woman who is fearless behind a keyboard yet utterly unable to look her beau in the face. As Kitty, Kushi Beauchamp has a delicious way of blurting out exactly what she means and

making a face that says, "Did I just say that?" She is soon matched up with Henry's playful pal Thomas O'Brien (William Thomas Hodgson), who says exactly what he means and doesn't care what anyone thinks.

Jenny Nguyen Nelson achieves a fine balance with Bennet sister

Lydia, who is desperately lost after her own marital scandal and eager to participate in (and sometimes initiate) everyone else's messes. The marriage between the famous Darcys, meanwhile, bears

See **THEATREWORKS**, page 20

New children's book shines light on Christmas Eve tradition

Peninsula author publishes Nochebuena story that highlights Mrs. Claus as a leader

By Angela Swartz

Most Christmas Eve stories told to children focus on Santa's journey to deliver presents, but a new book aims to showcase the Christmastime tradition of Nochebuena, while putting Mrs. Claus front and center of the story.

"Merry Claus and the Holiday Dash" is San Carlos resident Ellen Hohbach Scheetz's first book. Published in November, it follows Mrs. Claus, whose first name is Merry, as she readies presents for delivery while celebrating Nochebuena. During the holiday, celebrated in Latin American, Filipino and Spanish cultures, family and friends spend the night before Christmas listening to music, eating a late-night dinner and playing games like Loteria, which is similar to bingo.

Hohbach Scheetz, an Atherton native, wanted to write a book with a "fun, dynamic" Mrs.

Claus to share with her children, while teaching people about other cultures. Although the book is primarily in English, it is peppered with key words bolded in Spanish — tamales, pozole (Mexican stew) and polvorones (shortbread cookies).

"Stories tell children who is important and why, and past stories have left a lot of people out," said Hohbach Scheetz, who was previously a copywriter but now works as a life coach and helps manage diversity, equity and inclusion programs. "And I want my children to know that all types of people make excellent leaders. ... Merry Claus is a collaborative leader."

Other themes in the book include the idea that everyone has important ways to contribute.

"There are 11 elves, and they're all different — different heights ... skin colors ... everybody's wearing their own elf outfit," she said. "The idea of diversity as a positive, and everybody's

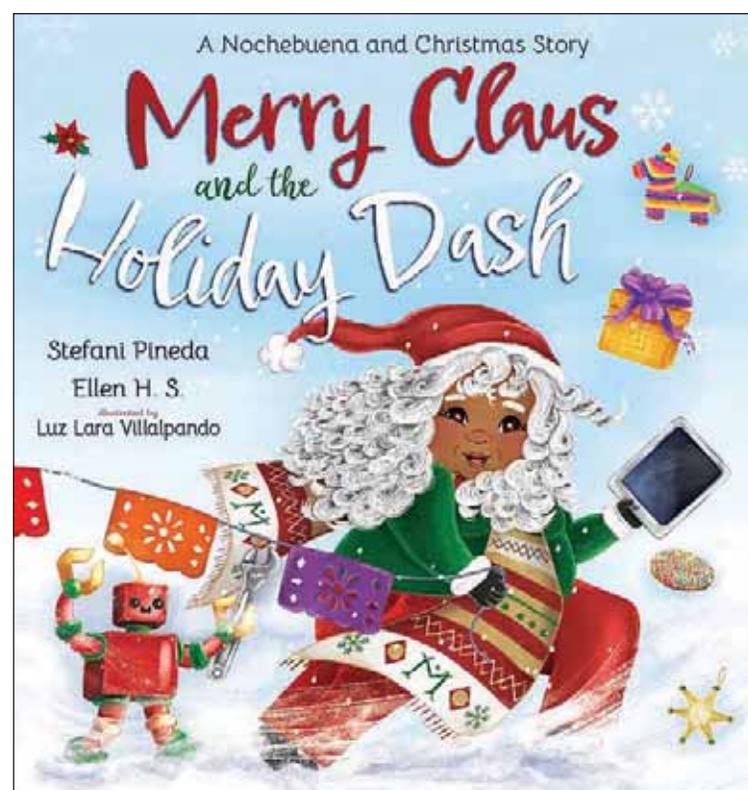
uniqueness is welcome here, and everybody has an important role to play on this team."

To ensure that she depicted the Mexican culture's Nochebuena traditions accurately, she found co-author Stefani Pineda using Indeed.com. Pineda helped her shape the story with her own Nochebuena memories. Hohbach Scheetz's publishing consultant helped her connect with Mexico City-based Luz Lara Villalpando to illustrate the book.

"It always just comes back to family and friends, and the warmth of just the food and cooking," said Pineda of Nochebuena. "Bonfires outside of my grandma's house. I really look forward to it (the holiday), even more than New Year's."

Pineda is pregnant with her first child and excited to share family traditions with her daughter through the book. She noted the book is not just another "cookie-cutter" holiday story.

Pineda said society needs more



Courtesy Ellen Hohbach Scheetz

The cover of Ellen Hohbach Scheetz's children's book "Merry Claus and the Holiday Dash."

stories like "Merry Claus" to represent Latina culture as immigrants face mass deportation efforts by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

"It's very tough times," she said. "We (Mexican Americans) are still part of California. We have always been the backbone

and make up a huge percentage of the population."

Hohbach Scheetz recommends aspiring children's book authors use Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators resources and to pay attention to writers

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MERRY CLAUS*continued from page 19*

who are doing similar work. She names Jessica Spanyol (author and illustrator of “Carlo the Giraffe”), Rafael López (who wrote “We’ve Got the Whole World in Our Hands”) and Vivian Walsh and

J. Otto Seibold (who authored “Olive, the Other Reindeer”) as her prime influences.

To order the book and accompanying materials, such as a Lotería-inspired board game, go to followmerry.com. ■

Angela Swartz is a Contributing Writer.

THEATREWORKS*continued from page 19*

familiar markings of power couples everywhere, an alpha male paired with a woman who feigns accommodation while mysteriously always getting her way. Amanda Pulcini is delightful as Elizabeth, while Jordan Lane Shappell gives us a truly layered Darcy, desperate to protect his sister even at the cost of her happiness. In fact, this sibling dynamic is probably more crucial than the friendship of the title.

Fortunately for us, the play takes an unexpected turn. Not to give anything away, but the emphasis soon shifts to Georgiana’s musical talent, and the prejudice she faces as a female creative. At times, in fact, it seems that Georgiana succeeds a little too well, but in consideration of the female writer who inspired the trilogy (who did pretty well for herself), I’ll let that pass. Perhaps an even more radical idea is a 19th-century man, Henry, giving such whole-hearted support to an artistic woman. Nima Rakhshanifar plays the part with an affable sweetness.

The accoutrements are divine. Andrea Bechert’s set, an interior of crown mouldings,

*Courtesy Kevin Berner*

Mr. Darcy (Jordan Lane Shappell, far left) watches his sister Georgiana (Emily Ota, center), open presents with his sisters-in-law, Mary (Maria Marquis, right) and Kitty (Kushi Beauchamp, far right).

blue-on-blue wall inserts and elegant draperies, could be shipped off post-run and installed in some Atherton mansion. Cathleen Edwards’ Regency costumes are graceful and meticulous.

A fun game is to listen for the artful placements of the words “pride” and “prejudice” in the dialogue. And also to the post-applause exit music, a 19th-century orchestral arrangement

that seems to resemble Chappell Roan’s “Pink Pony Club.” ■

*Email Contributing Writer
Michael J. Vaughn at
michaeljvaughn@hotmail.com.*

TheatreWorks Silicon Valley presents “Georgiana and Kitty: Christmas at Pemberley” through Dec. 28 at the Lucie Stern Theatre, 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto. \$34-\$115. theatreworks.org, 877-662-8978.

*Courtesy Ellen Hohbach Scheetz*

Ellen Hohbach Scheetz reads from her book to young students during a November event at Sequoia Parents Nursery School.

Changing diet to improve gut health, live longer

Discover how two Stanford microbiologists are uncovering the hidden power of the gut microbiome — and why their findings could change the future of human health. Justin and Erica Sonnenburg share the pivotal moments that shaped their careers, from breakthrough discoveries about diet and microbe loss to the personal lifestyle changes their research inspired.

They also make a compelling case for why universities, not industry, are uniquely positioned to tackle long-term scientific challenges. Their story reveals how curiosity, collaboration and sustained federal support can spark innovations that help people live healthier, longer lives. **SCAN TO READ THE SPOTLIGHT**



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Food & Drink

Cookie connoisseurs

Expert bakers share holiday cookie crafting tips

By Stephanie Lam

The rich scents of butter, sugar, cinnamon and chocolate waft from kitchens all around the Peninsula during the holidays as cookies by the dozen make their way out of ovens for cookie swaps, family get-togethers and to accompany a glass of milk left out for Santa on Christmas Eve.

Whether you're crafting your own holiday cookies or splurging on goodies from local bakeries, Silicon Valley has no shortage of cookie connoisseurs brimming with tips and expertise that's particularly helpful this time of year.

We spoke with the owners of three baking-focused businesses — Redwood City's La Biscotteria, San Carlos home-based bakery After-School Snack Attack and San Mateo cooking school Baking Arts — to learn what they're baking over the holidays and get their advice for your cookie decorating and baking endeavors.

La Biscotteria

Tucked into every nook and cranny of La Biscotteria are bundles of crunchy Italian cookies and pastries. Baked fresh by owner Augustine Buonocore, the bakery is known in the Redwood City community for its biscotti, twice-baked cookies shaped into small loaves.

The recipe was created by Buonocore's grandmother, and it has remained mostly the same since La Biscotteria first opened 37 years ago. In addition to regular and chocolate-dipped biscuits, the business offers unique flavors like blueberry and white chocolate, cranberry and hazelnuts and even a lemon verbena and papaya.

"I took these small home recipes and developed them to large-scale production," Buonocore said. "We use essential oils for flavoring. That's why they taste so good and don't lose their flavor when they bake."

December marks the return of the bakery's famous non-biscotti cookie, the cuccidati.



'We use essential oils for flavoring. That's why they taste so good and don't lose their flavor when they bake.'

AUGUSTINE BUONOCORE

These softer cookies are stuffed with a mixture of figs, dates, raisins, walnuts, citrus and a number of other warm spices and aromatics.

"They are so rare, nobody makes them anymore," said Angela Buonocore, Augustine's wife.

Panettone, Italian bread filled with raisins and candied fruit soaked in liquor, is also a popular option. The bakery rolls out a special 38-ounce size during



Magali Gauthier

Above: Jo Anne Smoot dips a cookie into royal icing during a cookie decorating class at Baking Arts & Coffee in San Mateo on Dec. 7. Top: Cookies decorated during a class at Baking Arts & Coffee.

See **COOKIE**, page 22



Seeger Gray

Above: La Biscotteria owner Augustine Buonocore stands for a portrait at the bakery in Redwood City on Dec. 5. Top right: Biscotti for sale at La Biscotteria in Redwood City. Bottom right: La Biscotteria employee Alberto Barrios dips biscotti in chocolate at the bakery.



COOKIE

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Christmas time that is wrapped in bright metallic red paper for gift-giving.

When a customer comes into La Biscotteria, they are treated just like family, Angela said. Their Redwood City store has been around for more than 30

years, a feat the Buonocores credit to their loyal customers and a generous community.

“It’s not like you’re a number when you walk into our bakery,” Angela said. “We get to know you and catch up on things.”

Those new to baking should try making a classic oatmeal cookie, Angela said. The dough is easy to make, and it can

smoothly be spooned or rolled into a round shape.

The Buonocores advise bakers to carefully measure their wet and dry mix-ins and use the “freshest and best” ingredients available. They said it’s also important to not overwhelm the final product’s natural flavors and texture by adding too much frosting.

La Biscotteria, 2747 El Camino Real, Redwood City; 650-366-4888. Open Wednesday to Friday from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturday from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m.

After-School Snack Attack

After 20 years of working in education and research, Michelle

Nayfack in 2023 launched After-School Snack Attack, a small business where she creates reimagined childhood desserts out of her San Carlos home kitchen.

The lengthy menu is filled with every kid’s favorite sugary treat: chocolate chip cookies, fudgy brownies, pop-tarts, Rice Krispies bars and tie-dyed cupcakes. But Nayfack also likes to incorporate fun flavors and toppings, crafting combinations like a miso butterscotch Rice Krispies treat, a Neapolitan cookie or a seasonal honey persimmon pop-tart.

“I wanted my products to be really high-quality, really whimsical and what you might have eaten as an after-school snack,” Nayfack said.

In December, Nayfack offers a gourmet holiday cookie box filled with several different flavors, including ginger molasses, chai spiced snickerdoodles and red velvet crinkles. Locals can order all her products on After-School Snack Attack’s website and arrange a pickup time.

As a busy mother of teenagers, Nayfack would bake treats for her family as a way to decompress after work. It wasn’t until the COVID-19 pandemic, when she was working full time from home and taking care of her kids, that Nayfack decided she needed a break.

Eager for a more creative job, Nayfack chose to put her recipes to the test and become a full-time baker and small business owner. While the daily hustle of running a home bakery can be challenging, Nayfack said



Courtesy Rebecca Hodges

Michelle Nayfack is the owner of After-School Snack Attack, a home-based bakery specializing in homemade twists on kids’ favorite classic treats.



Courtesy Michelle Nayfack

The cookies in After-School Snack Attack’s annual holiday box for 2025 include (from top left) chocolate mint chip cookies, ginger molasses, Merry Cherry Swirl, dark chocolate and orange shortbread, chai-spiced snickerdoodle, red velvet crinkles and peanut butter and oat goods.

she enjoys getting the chance to make people happy with her baked goods.

"It's really great to see people smile," she said. "If someone is having a bad day and needs a delicious cookie from me to be happy, that's awesome."

Nayfack recommends novice bakers try a recipe for chewy ginger molasses cookies. Ingredients like butter and eggs should be at room temperature before mixing, she said. To intensify flavors, a quarter cup of candied ginger or candied orange peel can be added to the dough. To help cookies keep their shape and deepen flavors, Nayfack advises bakers to refrigerate the dough anywhere from two to 24 hours before baking.

After-School Snack Attack, Instagram: @afterschoolsnackattack.

Baking Arts & Coffee

Creating show-stopping desserts from scratch can be intimidating. That's why one San Mateo business is on a quest to make the process more approachable.

Every week, locals can sign up to join Baking Arts & Coffee's hands-on baking classes. Inside a classroom equipped with baking supplies, participants can learn how to make French macarons, croissants, cakes and cookies.

For the holiday season, their class offerings include ones teaching attendees how to make a chocolate Yule log cake and classic buttery cookies like Viennese swirl and linzer. (Classes through the end of December are largely sold out.)

The classes are designed to be relaxing, with a friendly teaching style that mixes theory, demonstration and hands-on participation. People of any skill level are welcome to join, said store owner and baking instructor Laura Tyson. Classes are also available for private groups and corporate events.

"We have people who have been baking all their lives and we've got people who never stepped into a kitchen before," she said. "We're meeting you where you are. You get that hands-on experience, and hopefully feel more empowered to replicate that at home."

Baking Arts' classes have been around for a decade and were started by a former owner. Tyson, who specializes in making and selling cold brew coffee, took over in 2023 in an effort to expand her business. A proficient baker, Tyson decided she had the technical baking skills to continue offering classes. She still sells her specialty spiced coffee in Baking Arts, and baking students can occasionally sip on a cup while they take a class.

'I wanted my products to be really high-quality, really whimsical and what you might have eaten as an after-school snack.'

MICHELLE NAYFACK

As one of the few businesses in the city that offer baking classes, Tyson said she feels fortunate to do what she loves every day.

"I describe the store as my playground; we're constantly testing new recipes," she said. "We love being able to see that look on someone's face, the 'Oh you made this? I don't know if I can,'" she said. "And then they're like, 'Oh my word, I can.'"

For those decorating cookies over the holidays, Tyson suggests prepping icing beforehand by placing the mixture in tipless

pipng bags that can be tied off to prevent the icing from drying out. That way, she said, people can decorate their cookies without having to stop to make or color the icing.

Tyson added that less is more when it comes to decorating, and she advises against overcomplicating the design with lots of different colors. For a simple and sophisticated look, Tyson recommends baking snowflake shortbread cookies, dipping them in white royal icing and sprinkling them generously with white sanding sugar.

Baking Arts & Coffee, 18 E. 3rd Ave., San Mateo; 415-706-7112, Instagram: @bakingartsandcoffee. Open Tuesday to Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Monday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. ■

Email contributing writer Stephanie Lam at stephanieclam.journo@gmail.com.



Courtesy Michelle Nayfack

Golden graham s'mores cookies by Michelle Nayfack, owner of After-School Snack Attack.



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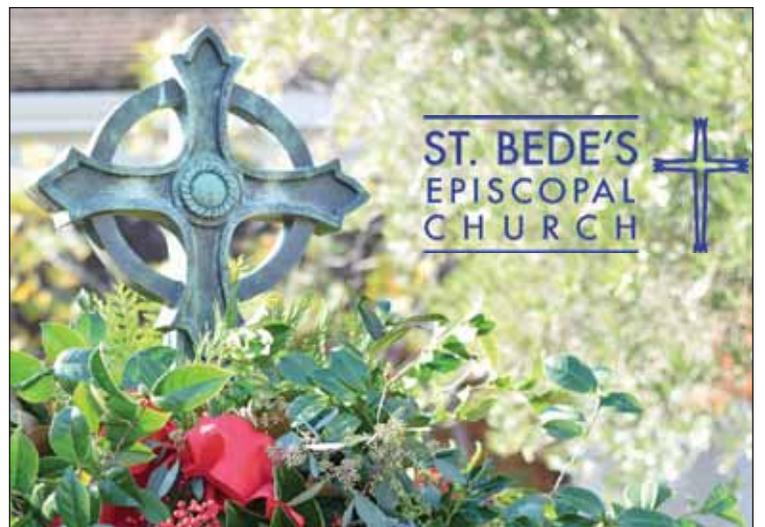
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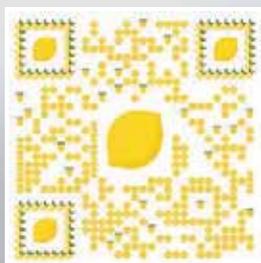
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