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Menlo Park faces legal threat over Sunset property plans

Developer calls city's objections 'improper,' 'gamemanship'

By Arden Margulis

After Menlo Park said a proposed development at the former Sunset magazine headquarters does not qualify for exemptions under state law, a pro-development law firm is threatening to sue the city if it does not allow the project to continue.

"Either the city is ignorant about the law or is deliberately misrepresenting the law. Some of this is complicated and there's always going to be some ambiguity and need for argument in the law, but a lot of it isn't," Attorney Jack Farrell said in

an interview with this news organization.

Farrell is a research attorney at YIMBY Law, which advocates for housing developments and improving the process of building housing. YIMBY refers to the "yes in my back yard" movement countering "not in my back yard" proponents. It is also the legal arm of YIMBY Action. YIMBY Law has been following the project for a while and has also threatened to sue the city if it refuses to continue developing affordable housing on Menlo Park's downtown parking lots.

See **SUNSET**, page 6



Courtesy city of Menlo Park

Renderings show what the former Sunset site at 80 Willow Road might look like.

Woodside considers exemptions to gas leaf blower ban

Critics say electric blowers are inadequate for some jobs

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

The town of Woodside continues to navigate the prohibition of gas-powered leaf blowers as it catches up to neighboring towns and cities that have already outlawed the equipment. On Dec. 9, the Town Council voted to introduce a new section of the drafted ordinance that exempts properties

located in special conservation planning and open space zoning districts from the ban.

As of Jan. 1, 2024, California has banned the sale of new gas-powered leaf blowers under Assembly Bill 1346. In response, local jurisdictions such as Portola Valley, Hillsborough, Menlo Park, Burlingame and Atherton have adopted ordinances prohibiting the use of

gas-powered leaf blowers.

The draft is in response to previous comments from residents in the Western Hills neighborhood who expressed their concerns about the ineffective power of electric leaf blowers, which make it difficult to maintain their properties for fire mitigation and cleanup. Parcels in the Western Hills are larger, secluded and located in heavily

wooded areas.

The ordinance would enforce the use of electric leaf blowers in more densely populated areas of Woodside but would not enforce the ban during emergencies and weather-related events.

In Town Manager Jason Ledbetter's presentation, he explained that this ban would support the town's goals to maintain the peace and

tranquility of the town by minimizing noise disturbances. He added that enforcement would be made by the town in a more flexible manner through education and incentives.

"Most of the community probably won't be aware of an ordinance like this and ultimately when complaints come in, it

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Jennifer Yoshikoshi

A TIDE Academy parent takes photos of school community holding signs to save the school during a Sequoia Union High School District board meeting on Dec. 10.

Sequoia Union district faces backlash on potential plans to close TIDE Academy

Standing room only, 52 comment before board

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

It was standing room only at the Sequoia Union High School District's Dec. 10 board meeting, as about 100 TIDE Academy parents, teachers and students showed up trying to protect their school from potential closure.

The school board heard from 52 public commenters, who called on the district to stop its closure process during a tense and contentious meeting.

Last month, a board subcommittee including trustees Richard Ginn and Mary Beth Thompson asked Superintendent Crystal Leach

to develop a plan to consider closing TIDE, citing declining enrollment and the district's structural deficit.

The committee had conducted an evaluation of Sequoia Union's long-term fiscal health and found that TIDE Academy, as a small school, was costing the district more money per student compared to its larger campuses.

During the meeting, parents and students expressed frustration that the closure of TIDE was being considered by the board. They highlighted how the school and its staff positively impacted their learning experience in ways

that larger schools never did.

"TIDE didn't just educate me. TIDE changed my life," said Jesus Chavez, a senior and the student body president.

TIDE Academy opened six years ago in a newly constructed \$50 million campus designed for classes that focus on science, technology, engineering, art and math.

The school was funded by Measure A, a \$265 million bond measure that voters passed in 2014, to meet the district's goal of creating "a new alternative small school to meet the diverse needs of

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Schools sent into lockdown before man dies from self-inflicted gunshot

Police say man was suicidal, not from San Mateo County

By Arden Margulis

Phillips Brooks Elementary School and La Entrada Middle School were placed on lockdown and residents were asked to shelter-in-place on Dec. 16 after two callers reported to the Menlo Park Police Department that they had seen a man with a firearm.

The suspect died at the scene from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, the department told this

news organization, and police lifted the shelter-in-place order at 2:15 p.m.

Police received the first call around 12:27 p.m., with one caller reporting a man in a field near St. Denis Church and another reporting a man inside a vehicle. Officers later located a man matching the description of a missing and suicidal person — 22-year-old Alexis Valverde Ruiz from Riverbank, a city near Modesto — in a vehicle on the

2200 block of Avy Avenue.

Crisis negotiators attempted to make contact but Ruiz did not respond and was seen with a handgun on his chest, the department said in a press release.

Police eventually approached Ruiz using drones from nearby agencies, an armored vehicle and a ballistic shield. Officers confirmed he had a gunshot

See **LOCKDOWN**, page 14

Stanford proceeds with caution on campus growth plan

After getting rebuffed last time, university solicits feedback before filing new application

By Gennady Sheyner

Eager to generate community support for its forthcoming growth permit, Stanford University launched a series of community meetings that it hopes will smooth its path toward a new development plan.

The meetings, which began with an open house on Dec. 10 at the Lucie Stern Community Center, represent a new approach for the university, which opted to withdraw its last expansion plan in 2019 after Santa Clara County officials and community members demanded more housing and stronger transportation measures, including assurances that reverse commutes to and from campus would not increase daily vehicle trips.

At that time, Stanford was looking to add 2.275 million square feet of new academic space, 2,600 student beds and 550 housing units for faculty and staff. To achieve this growth, it applied to the county for a new "general use permit" that would enable the additional campus development and establish mitigation strategies to ensure that the growth won't worsen traffic, exacerbate the regional housing shortage or endanger the open spaces west of the university campus.

This time, Stanford is taking a more cautious approach. It is conspicuously refraining from stating its growth goals and its first foray into the planning process prioritizes listening over talking. The Lucie Stern event didn't have any formal presentations from Stanford. Rather, residents had an opportunity to walk around the room at their own pace, to focus on the topics that are most important to them and to provide feedback on sticky notes.

For Stanford, the meetings are designed to get public feedback before it files a new application, which it expects to do in August 2026. They also give the university an opportunity to make

a case to residents that what's good for Stanford is also good for them.

To that end, the boards that were displayed around the room at the Lucie Stern Community Center touted Stanford University's recent achievements on environmental sustainability, housing and traffic: its adoption of a 100% renewable electricity portfolio; its success in reducing the drive-alone rate on campus from 67% in 2024 to 38% in 2024; the \$3.4 billion that it invested in housing over the past two decades.

The main objectives of the new growth plan are to allow Stanford to increase its undergraduate class and to accommodate its evolving academic and research programs, university officials said during the open house.

"As technology changes or as science changes or academics change, we need to make sure that the space is designed for and can accommodate that science," Whitney McNair, Stanford's senior associate vice president and GUP project executive, told this publication.

She emphasized that the university is currently in "100% listening mode" as it considers its next application. And rather than focusing on raw numbers when it comes to growth, university leaders hope to do a better job explain to residents exactly why the changes are needed.

"I think this time we should really be focusing on the 'Why?' Not just what Stanford is proposing, but why it's needed and really explaining the 'Why?' behind it. I think that was missing before," McNair said.

About 50 people attended to the first Lucie Stern event, where Stanford staff answered questions about its recent efforts on land use, transportation and environmental sustainability. The mood was largely cordial, with numerous residents voicing optimism about potential

See **STANFORD**, page 11

Woodside Mayor Brian Dombkowski will serve another year

Town strays from longstanding tradition

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

The town of Woodside is breaking tradition with its mayoral rotation as Brian Dombkowski takes on his second consecutive term as mayor with Mayor Pro Tempore Paul Goeld at his side. During a Dec. 9 Town Council meeting, Goeld, who was expected to be the town's next mayor, re-nominated Dombkowski to serve for the next year. Dombkowski also served as mayor in 2021, marking 2026 as his third term.

As the town continues to navigate through its Town Center Area Plan and upcoming housing element review, Goeld shared his beliefs that Dombkowski is "more qualified at this moment than anybody else in the room to continue this."

"I think that rather than automatically handing the gavel off to the person sitting on the right, it should be a thoughtful process," said Goeld. "We should think about who's most qualified, who's got the time, the energy and who wants to do it."

According to the town, no council member has served a two-year mayoral term in the last 10 years. Historically, Woodside has abided by the



Magali Gauthier

Brian Dombkowski photographed in 2022.

rotation of council members in the mayor seat, with an expectation that the mayor pro tem would move up to become mayor the following term.

Council member Jenn Wall questioned Goeld on his decision to stray from tradition.

"I wanted to pause on the tradition point, which is something I take really seriously because I think it goes to the expectations of the voters in Woodside (that) when (they) vote to elect a council member, they're doing that with the expectation that the

tradition that has been followed for years would continue to be followed," said Wall.

Despite her opposition to breaking from town customs, the council unanimously voted to elect Dombkowski as mayor for the next term.

To continue the thread of renomination, Dombkowski nominated Goeld to serve another term as mayor pro tempore.

"Paul is an extraordinary asset to the community. He is highly informed on the issues, he is logical in his approach and I think he's probably the best orator the council's ever had, at least in my time," said Dombkowski.

Wall returned to her concerns about the deviation from traditions. She explained that taking away the vice mayor experience from other council members would prevent more junior members from gaining the training that comes from the position.

Council member Dick Brown, who would have been the next mayor pro temp, shared he did not intend on serving on the council beyond November 2026, when his term ends. Council member Hassan Aburish said he would prefer to wait one more year before serving as mayor pro tem.

Ultimately, the council voted unanimously to elect Goeld as mayor pro tempore.

After the finalization of the council reorganization, Dombkowski received a proclamation from the town for his challenging year working through approval of the housing element, Cañada Corners parking lot expansion, launch of Town Center Area Plan update, the retirement of long tenured Town Manager Kevin Bryant and the selection of new Town Manager Jason Ledbetter.

San Mateo County Supervisor Ray Mueller also presented Dombkowski with a commendation on behalf of the Board of Supervisors highlighting his work over the past year and the town's support for the county through its turbulent time with the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office and the removal of former Sheriff Christina Corpus.

A representative from state Assemblymember Marc Berman also shared a statement commending Dombkowski's work as mayor and that the office is looking forward to working with him in the new year. ■

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Menlo Park determined that the project at 80 Willow Road does not include enough housing to qualify for streamlined review, does not meet objective standards, does not fairly distribute affordable housing and does not meet several required criteria.

While YIMBY law is not necessarily disagreeing with some of the city's findings, for many, it says the city is too late.

"Through the course of several letters, the most recent city letter names a series of issues which were not named in prior letters," Farrell said. "That violates the Permit Streamlining Act, because you can't just bring in new criteria after the fact that weren't mentioned before, because that lets cities either invent new criteria or just add new things to the process."

"So the developers have to take more time, spend more legal fees, respond to new things, make changes to the project, and just delays, beyond the fees and

extra expertise, can kill projects and make financing infeasible," he said.

The developer N17, which has its own attorney, claims that most of the city's most recent objections are moot since the city did not bring them up earlier. This includes the city claiming the project is not considered an affordable housing development because of the percentage of affordable housing.

Even if N17 and YIMBY Law are right, there are still the city's other objections.

One of the city's objections to the project is that it is not surrounded by urban uses and centers on whether the open space protecting the San Francisquito Creek, which borders the project, counts as an urban use. Under state law, for the project to be eligible for some streamlining rights, at least 75% of the surrounding parcels must be urban uses. While part of the creek is not open to the public, Palo Alto's Timothy Hopkins Creekside Park is past the creek next to the development.

Parks are generally considered an urban use.

Further, the city claims that at least some of the development is on wetlands.

The city also says the project would develop protected habitats for the California red-legged frog and California coast steelhead, which are federally protected, and habitats for the Western pond turtle, hoary bat, pallid bat, snowy egret, and salt-marsh common yellowthroat, which are protected under state law.

The developer disagrees with the city's interpretation of the law.

In addition to threatening a lawsuit against the city, YIMBY Law has reported Menlo Park to the California Department of Housing and Community Development and the state attorney general.

Both agencies have the right to sue Menlo Park under state housing law but they could also issue a written determination. If HCD or the attorney general's office issues a written determination and the city later loses a lawsuit against the developer on an issue addressed in the determination, the city could be

on the hook for additional legal fees, Farrell said. A determination can also help the developer in court.

Farrell says that these kinds of legal battles before a development can break ground add cost to housing in California.

"There is so much of a history and practice of game playing by cities to do things that are close to illegal or outright illegal," Farrell said. "One of the earliest stages of the process is just legal arguments back and forth over whether it even is the thing that the project applicants are trying to apply for... before anybody is able to actually construct housing and get people living in it."

"This is not something that just affects market rate development. It's also adding cost to every type of development, whatever the density, whatever the affordability, whatever the type of project, all of these rules and expenses makes it difficult especially for affordable developers," Farrell claimed. ■

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Menlo Park City Council selects Nash as mayor, Wise as vice mayor

Combs reflects on mayoral experience

By Arden Margulis

Following a year marked by passionate debates over housing in Menlo Park, the Menlo Park City Council completed its annual reorganization, selecting Betsy Nash as the city's new mayor. She succeeds Councilmember Drew Combs, who has served as mayor since December 2024.

In Menlo Park, the mayor's role is largely procedural. The mayor presides over City Council meetings, helps guide discussion and works with the city manager to set meeting

agendas. The position does not carry veto authority or additional voting power.

Beyond running meetings, the mayor serves as the city's official representative for ceremonial purposes and is typically consulted when the city issues press releases that include City Council statements, according to the city's procedures manual. The mayor also signs ordinances and other official documents adopted by the council. Nash, who served as vice mayor before her new role, was the mayor in 2022 as well.

The vice mayor typically becomes mayor at the conclusion of their term. The council selected Councilmember Jennifer Wise as vice mayor for the coming year during the reorganization meeting on Dec. 9. Wise is one of two new councilmembers and represents District 5. The mayor and vice mayor are selected by a majority vote of the City Council each December and serve one-year terms.

The other new councilmember is Jeff Schmidt, who represents District 3. While the City Council did not publicly

discuss its reasoning for selecting Wise over Schmidt, Nash noted that a District 5 representative has not served as mayor since Ray Mueller in 2019, while the most recent mayor from District 3 was Jen Wolosin in 2023.

Combs said highlights of his term included traveling to Galway, Ireland — Menlo Park's sister city — and presiding over impassioned meetings during discussions of the city's housing element implementation.



Magali Gauthier

Betsy Nash in Palo Alto in 2022.

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LEAF BLOWER

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gives the opportunity for the residents to complain to the town and the town takes the steps of educating and 99% of the time, we gain compliance in that fashion," Ledbetter explained.

Woodside resident David Discher, who lives on a one-acre lot, suggested that exemptions

also be made for suburban residential properties just as the draft exempts special conservation planning districts that are five acres or larger.

"The electric leaf blowers are just not as efficient. Let alone they run out of power," Discher said. "If you have a property like an SR-1 property of an acre and you have enough trees, they take a lot of time to do the job."

Council member Paul Goeld

pointed out that with the state ban, gas-powered leaf blowers will "go away organically by natural attrition."

Council member Wall added that other jurisdictions have moved forward in banning gas-powered leaf blowers and Woodside has been an outlier in not adopting a prohibition yet. She expressed her support for adopting the ordinance to address concerns about the

noise and air pollution produced by the equipment.

Mayor Brian Dombkowski shared that this ban had been in consideration for seven years — since he first joined the council.

"I get that not everybody will be perfectly happy but I think after seven years of iterations on this, this does move the ball down the field pretty substantially and we can take a look at it over a couple of years," he said.

The Town Council unanimously voted to move forward with the consideration of this ordinance and plans to adopt it during the Jan. 13, 2026, meeting, according to the staff report. If adopted, the ban on gas-powered leaf blowers will go into effect on July 1, 2026. ■

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Craig Taylor to serve as Portola Valley mayor

'Big challenges' ahead, Taylor says

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

During its annual mayoral rotation, the town of Portola Valley selected Craig Taylor as its mayor and Mary Hufty as vice mayor for 2026. During a Town Council meeting on Dec. 10, outgoing mayor Judith Hasko was recognized by the community for her work during a challenging year.

Hasko reflected on the progress the town made over the last year in managing its financial crisis, amending its housing element, welcoming interim Town

Manager Mark Linder, hiring permanent Town Manager Darcy Smith and navigating staff vacancies.

As the town moves forward into the new year, Hasko encouraged the community to continue to be engaged with the Town Council on issues around selecting revenue enhancement measures, improving long-term planning for the town's finances, refining approach to wildfire and natural disasters and addressing affordable housing challenges.

"Your thoughts, energy, ideas and passions are a vital part

of Portola Valley. We have an amazing town," said Hasko in her speech. "Let's bring our best efforts over the next year to celebrate and protect it for the future. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as mayor over the last year."

San Mateo County Supervisor Ray Mueller presented Hasko with a certificate of appreciation on behalf of the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors.

During nominations, council member Rebecca Flynn nominated Taylor for mayor and Hasko nominated Hufty for

vice mayor. The council unanimously voted to approve both nominations.

"Three years ago I ran on fiscal responsibility, public safety and civility and I have to say that this council has been the epitome of civility," said Taylor. "This coming year, we've got some big challenges to deal with but I look forward to working with you all on those challenges and with the staff." ■

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Magali Gauthier

Portola Valley Mayor Craig Taylor.

Christmas tree fundraiser anchors Sea Scouts voyage

Group has been leaning on event to enhance maritime skills for 31 years

By Hannah Bensen

At the Palo Alto Christmas tree lot on Middlefield Road, every Noble and Douglas fir comes with a nautical bonus: you're not just bringing home holiday cheer, you're helping power a crew of Sea Scouts learning to captain a 95-foot ship.

The Christmas tree sales serve as a fundraiser for three units of Sea Scouts — a youth leadership program that one leader, Max Rosenberg, likened to "boy scouts with boats."

"What we like to do in Scouting is we like to teach teamwork and leadership and problem solving," Rosenberg said.

The Sea Scouts have been running the tree lot in Palo Alto for at least 31 years, Rosenberg said. That's how long Rosenberg, 47, has been involved in the program, first as a youth and now as the "skipper," or the primary adult leader, of the all-boys Sea Scouts Ship Terrapin — the name of the Palo Alto-based unit. In addition to the Terrapin, the Christmas tree lot serves as a fundraiser for two other units: the Sea Scouts Ship Gryphon and the Mariner Scout Ship Tradewind, an all-girls program similar to Sea Scouts.

The Scouts provide a full Christmas tree service: the youth will help you select a tree from one of four species — Noble, Douglas, Nordmann, and Grand Firs — and carry and tie it to your car. They will also deliver and set up the tree at your home for an additional fee. Trees are priced according to species and height, varying from \$35 for a small tabletop tree to a few hundred dollars for an 11-foot

tree. They typically sell 1,700 trees per year, Rosenberg said, and the Terrapin Ship almost solely relies on the fundraiser to support their programming throughout the year.

The Terrapin do maritime activities aboard a 95-foot ex Coast Guard cutter, a boat built in 1953 to complete Cold War-era missions such as anti-Russian submarine patrols and search-and-rescue operations. The boat, which was originally called *Cape Wash*, was acquired by the Navy in 1987 and then retired and donated to the Sea Scouts in 2012. The boat was renamed the *Terrapin* this year.

The Scouts cruise the *Terrapin* in the Bay and the Sacramento-San Joaquin river delta, an expansive maze of inland waterways. The youth take on all the roles needed to run a ship, from steering and navigation to emergency preparedness and food preparation.

"We try and teach them everything that we can," said Rosenberg, who is a marine engineer. "When we get underway, our goal is that our crew can, for the most part, operate the vessel with oversight from the adults."

Andrew, 16, said the learning curve of running the ship — maritime skills, using power tools, maintaining equipment, tying knots — has been quicker than he thought. Andrew, who is from Los Altos, has been in Sea Scouts for about a year and a half. All last names of youth are omitted in accordance with the Sea Scouts' media policy.

"When you think about a 95-foot boat, you probably imagine something that's very large, but once you get used to it, it doesn't feel as large," Andrew said.

Rishi, 18, has been in Sea



Seeger Gray

A Sea Scout loads Christmas trees onto a forklift at the Sea Scouts' Christmas tree lot next to Middlefield Ballpark in Palo Alto on Dec. 10.

Scouts for five years. Rishi ascended the ranks of the Terrapin unit to boatswain, the highest ranking youth officer. In that role, he directs the rest of the crew, oversees their work and focuses on engine operations. Rishi said he enjoys being on the water and that the program has given him leadership and teamwork skills.

Several of the Scouts said they enjoy the program because they like working with their hands. Nate, 18, said he has learned to use tools he's never used before.

"You show up to the boat every Saturday, and there's something you have to fix," Nate said. "It's like, there's a hole in the deck. There's something wrong with the engine. So you use a lot of power tools. You learn how to use an angle grinder to grind off rust or stuff like that. So it's a lot of experiences you don't usually get with anything else, especially here, where it's all so tech-focused."

Nate, who is a junior officer from Los Altos, will attend the

Cal Poly Maritime Academy, where he'll get a four-year degree in mechanical engineering along with a Merchant Mariner Credential, a Coast Guard's license that will allow him to work in the commercial maritime industry. He said his career choice was informed by the Sea Scouts. Rosenberg said some Sea Scouts go into maritime careers such as the military or commercial positions, but the majority do not.

"I had no interest in this before I joined, and now I want to do it as a job," Nate said.

For some of the youth, the highlight of the program is the 10-day cruising expedition the group takes in the spring up the Delta toward Stockton. The group alternates between cruising days and sitting days, where they anchor and take out a smaller boat to go water skiing. Throughout the expedition, the unit is sleeping aboard the *Terrapin*, which can accommodate 21 people, and splitting all the duties of running

the ship. Julien, a 15-year-old Scout from Redwood City, is the deckhand, meaning he makes sure the deck is clear of objects and helps with docking, anchoring, and departing. Will, 14, was on galley duty last spring, helping to plan and cook the meals.

In addition to the unique skills they learn, several Scouts said they enjoy the unique community and the camaraderie of working on a ship together.

"You really don't get this anywhere else...working on a boat, especially a bigger boat like ours, and learning about how the engines work, learning all the different rules about how you drive the boat," Julien said. "It's a very nice community, very fun people to hang out with."

The Sea Scouts' Christmas tree lot is located at 3672 Middlefield Road by the Mitchell Park library. The lot is in the Little League's parking lot, and the Scouts donate a portion of their proceeds to the League. For the last few years, the Scouts have also donated some trees to families in need through organizations such as Upward Scholars and Family Connections. This year, they are planning to donate 50 trees, Rosenberg said.

The tree lot is open 11am to 9pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 9pm on weekends. More information can be found on the Terrapin's website.

"We can confidently say that all the proceeds from the tree lot continue to support youth programs," Rosenberg said. ■

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.

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San Mateo County revamps executive ranks as supervisors approve new roles

By Miranda de Moraes

San Mateo County is restructuring its top administrative ranks, adding a second assistant county executive and a second deputy county executive as part of a leadership overhaul approved by the Board of Supervisors on Dec. 9.

The new positions, which take effect Jan. 4, 2026, come as longtime Assistant County Executive Illiana Rodriguez prepares to retire.

Supervisors appointed Justin Mates and Adam Ely as assistant county executives, and Rocio Kiryczun and Nicholas Calderon as deputy county executives.

"The demands on local government continue to grow, from major capital projects and emergency readiness to the need for deeper community

engagement and interagency collaboration," said County Executive Mike Callagy. "These leaders bring exceptional experience, institutional knowledge, and a deep commitment to public service."

By increasing the number of assistant county executives and deputy county executives to two each, the county hopes to equip the Executive's Office with greater oversight of departments and high-impact initiatives and to strengthen succession planning. By eliminating two vacant positions, county officials say the move will increase leadership capacity and generate more than \$300,000 in annual savings.

The new leadership structure aligns with the scheduled retirement of the current Assistant County Executive, Illiana Rodriguez. The new

team will also oversee the children's master plan, the childcare strategic plan, customer service improvements, economic development, and coordination of unincorporated services.

A dedicated Deputy County Executive will be assigned to the coast and unincorporated areas of the county for the first time, to increase visibility and resources for those regions. The project development unit will merge with Public Works, eliminating the development unit's Deputy Director position and saving the county approximately \$300,000.

Ely holds a Juris Doctor from University of California, Los Angeles and has served the county as the director of the Project Development Unit and, since 2022, deputy county executive. In his 20 years with the county, he's strengthened

emergency readiness and led domestic violence prevention initiatives, and has delivered projects such as the Navigation Center, County Office Building 3, and the North County Wellness Center.

Mates, who holds a Juris Doctor from Harvard Law School, has previously served as deputy county attorney and, since 2019, deputy county executive. He's led efforts related to pandemic response, farmworker housing compliance, support for unsheltered residents, budget strategy, emergency operations and accessibility.

Kiryczun has served the county for over 30 years, including seven years as director of human resources. She's directed the county through recruitment and retention efforts, pandemic operations, labor negotiations, employee engagement,

leadership development and organizational well-being.

Calderon has served as the director of parks since 2019, which has involved overseeing major capital projects, expanding access to recreation and emboldening community partnerships. Previously, he served as a senior legislative aide to Supervisor Don Horsley, real property services manager, and assistant parks director.

"The addition of these skilled leaders strengthens San Mateo County's executive team at a critical time," said Board President David Canepa. "With this new structure, the county is poised to navigate the complex challenges and advance community priorities in the years ahead." ■

Email Staff Writer
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mdemoraes@almanacnews.com.

Hibari brings kappo-style dining to Portola Valley

Japanese fine-dining comes to town

By Adrienne Mitchel

A new Japanese restaurant in Portola Valley is offering multi-course prix fixe omakase, and it's a lot more than just nigiri.

Hibari soft opened Nov. 17 at Ladera Country Shopper and specializes in kappo-style dining, in which the chef prepares a variety of dishes — think sashimi, tofu, nigiri, handrolls, soup and more — directly in front of the guests. Created by longtime friends Jesse Sun and chef Takashi "Taka" Segal, the restaurant focuses on highlighting local, seasonal ingredients.

Hibari's opening comes around the same time that Kappo, named after this style of dining, opened in Palo Alto.

Located in the former spot of Koma Sushi, Hibari's reservation-only six-seat bar offers a two-and-a-half hour dinner experience that starts at 6 p.m. (\$200), with optional sake pairing. The menu is left entirely up to Segal, who was the former head sushi chef at Nobu in Palo Alto and has had experience at Michelin-starred Omakase in San Francisco.

For those looking for a shorter and less expensive dining option, the 22-seat dining room is available for table service. Guests can choose between the 16-course dinner prix fixe (\$150) or the petit tasting, an 11-course meal (\$88). Both dinner options feature a seasonal starter, nigiri flight, soup and



Courtesy Hibari

Goma kanpachi don set, or kanpachi sashimi over rice topped with sweet soy and sesame dressing, at Hibari in Portola Valley (\$35).

dessert, with the dinner prix fixe also including a seasonal sashimi selection, tofu course (made with housemade tofu, sesame dressing and seasonal vegetables), dobin mushi (a clay-pot broth with seasonal seafood, mushrooms and citrus), nimono (braised seasonal dish), handroll and soup.

For the little ones, a three-course kids meal is available, consisting of soup, a five-piece salmon sashimi or seasonal nimono (simmered fish) served with steamed rice and a dessert of wakamomo (young peach in syrup) (\$18-\$22).

Lunch is à la carte, with 11 sets to choose from (\$18-\$66). Segal's top two favorites are the goma kanpachi don set and the yurinchi set. The goma

kanpachi, which is kanpachi sashimi topped with sweet soy and sesame dressing, is inspired by Segal's former coworker, who was from the Hakata region of Japan and made this dish as a family meal. It made such a lasting impression on Segal that he knew he had to add it to his menu.

Yurinchi is a Japanese-Chinese dish of fried chicken with a tangy soy-based sauce. Segal has fond memories of eating this dish at a restaurant owned by a Chinese couple who grew up in Japan.

"I loved it so much. Every time I had to order it," Segal said. "I'm so sad they closed. I couldn't have it anymore, but I need that flavor. That's why we bring it to here."

While not listed on the menu, Hibari offers chazuke service halfway through for anyone who orders donburi. Once the customer has eaten half of their lunch, Hibari staff will add fish miso broth to turn it into a porridge.

Segal said his style of cooking is deeply rooted in seasonality and locality.

"I select whatever the best ingredient of the day is, and we make up the dish that we think is best to present that ingredient to serve to the customer," he said. "If it's not in season, we don't eat."

He joked that instead of the term "edomae," which means "in front of Tokyo Bay," he considers his restaurant to be "SFmae," using as many local ingredients as possible. For example, he uses fresh wasabi from Half Moon Bay, tofu from San Francisco and rice from Sacramento, and partners with a local fish vendor who does ikejime (a method of killing the fish that minimizes stress and prevents muscle deterioration, improving the meat quality). Even floral arrangements on the tables are from next door Ladera Garden & Gifts.

Sun, a Woodside resident, and Segal, a Sunnyvale resident, first met in high school in China before moving to the Bay Area and working in sushi restaurants, with Sun focusing on front-of-the-house responsibilities and Segal on back-of-the-house duties. Sun previously owned Daigo Sushi in San Francisco, operating it

for 10 years before closing it during the pandemic.

Sun and Segal chose the name Hibari — which translates to skylark, a type of bird — because fish and birds are often associated together, according to Segal.

"We're serving something in the ocean, but we stay in the sky," he said.

The pair aims to show that omakase doesn't just mean nigiri. Segal explained that in Japan, true omakase is for regular customers only because the chef knows the customers' palette, appetite, allergies and preferences.

"That will become a tasting menu that belongs to you and chef," he said.

But in America, omakase has become synonymous with a prix-fixe menu, often focused exclusively on nigiri.

"I think my goal is to see people after the meal, they will love it. They feel satisfied. That's where my satisfaction comes from," Segal said. "Being a chef, the biggest accomplishment is when people after a meal come to me or say it was so nice." ■

Email Food Editor Adrienne
Mitchel at amitchel@
almanacnews.com.

STANFORD

continued from page 5

new partnerships between town and gown. One of the guiding principles of the new planning effort, which is known as StanfordNext, is the cultivation of “stronger local and on-campus relationships to ensure that new development benefits both Stanford and its surrounding communities.”

McNair said that she has been hearing interest from the community about having more access to Stanford and its offerings. Stanford already touts its work to support surrounding cities, from working with Project Safety Net to improve youth mental health in Palo Alto to testing AI-powered robots that would help the residents of the Channing House senior community get around. The new outreach process aims to solicit other ideas from residents for improving community collaborations.

“How do they experience Stanford and what is important to them — whether it’s classes or museums or music or theater?” McNair asked. “How do you experience campus? Is there something we can do to expand that experience?”

Some attendees proved



Seeger Gray

Stanford University’s campus as seen on Oct. 7.

receptive to the idea. Dulce Maria Gray, a literature professor at a community college, said she would like to see Stanford share its wealth of educational and cultural amenities with the surrounding communities, which may involve holding events outside campus or making more classes available a broader population. “I think it’s really important to have more collaboration between Stanford and regular folks,” Gray said.

McNair and others at the meeting highlighted the changes that have taken place in

academics since the last GUP application, with Covid-19 upending work habits and new disciplines like AI ascending in prominence both on and off campus. The one thing that hasn’t changed is the region’s housing crunch, which Stanford would need to consider as it plans its next phase of growth.

Kelly Kline, Stanford’s associate vice president for government affairs, said that while the community outreach is just getting started, housing is already emerging as the highest priority for area residents.

“The housing crisis has only become more acute,” Kline said.

Menlo Park Mayor Betsy Nash, who attended the Wednesday open house, shared that assessment. She told this publication that her top priority is ensuring that Stanford builds enough housing to accommodate its growing student and staff populations. If Stanford fails to do so, university students and staff will need to look for housing in the surrounding communities, further straining housing supply.

“We love to have them here, but when they come here, they take away housing from others in the community,” Nash told this publication.

Jim Cornett, who works at athletic events on Stanford University campus, said he believes transportation should also be a high priority for the university. While Cornett rides a bicycle to campus, many of his friends and fellow “red coats” drive to work. Parking, he said, is limited and expensive.

Others said they want to see Stanford think big. John Wertman, a researcher and member of the Stanford Historical Society, said he hopes the university will continue to pursue unique and ambitious campus projects that emphasize its role at the cutting edge of

science and technology.

“They should never stop looking far into the future,” Wertman said.

McNair said that as part of the new application, Stanford plans to look at the spaces it already has and make sure it is using them as efficiently as possible. It will also consider the future of academics and assess Stanford’s priorities on innovation, technology and science.

“As technology changes or as science changes or academics change, we need to make sure that the space is designed for and can accommodate that science,” McNair said. ■

Email Gennady Sheyner at gsheyner@almanacnews.com.

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Courtesy Upward Scholars

Upward Scholar's Cañada College class of 2025 students graduate with support from the nonprofit.

Upward Scholars helps adult immigrants navigate college

Support goes beyond classroom

By Arden Margulis

As adult immigrants in San Mateo County juggle work, family and school in one of the most expensive regions in the country, a local nonprofit is stepping in to bridge the gap between English classes and college degrees, helping students stay enrolled and build pathways to higher-paying careers.

Founded in 2009 by staff and volunteers at Sequoia Adult School, Upward Scholars began after an English-as-a-second-language teacher noticed many students completing adult school only to remain in low-paying jobs, despite opportunities to continue their education at nearby community colleges. The program initially supported two students transitioning to Cañada College in 2010 and has since grown steadily through partnerships with adult schools and colleges across the county.

"Many of our students face barriers like language, transportation and finances," Programs Coordinator Alma Noriega said. "Upward Scholars provides the academic, financial, holistic and career support that adult immigrants need to move up the economic ladder. Even small supports can make a big difference in a student's confidence and opportunities."

In 2019, Upward Scholars expanded from serving one adult school and one community college to all five adult schools in San Mateo County and all three community colleges in San Mateo County. While many students still come from Sequoia Adult School and attend Cañada College, the nonprofit now supports students at College of San Mateo and Skyline College as well.

Upward Scholars structures its support around four areas: financial, academic, career development and holistic. Financial

assistance includes help paying for textbooks, transportation, computers and food, resources staff say are often the deciding factor in whether a student can stay enrolled.

"Upward Scholars covers the cost of my textbooks, which is a huge support because I don't have to worry about paying for them," said Noriega, who also benefits from some of the programs. "I receive free tutoring, and my tutor helps me improve my English conversation skills. These supports have made a real difference in my confidence and my ability to grow academically and professionally."

Academic support includes tutoring and mentoring from volunteers, an English conversation club and help with transfers to four-year institutions and scholarships.

Career development programs help students explore fields with sustainable wages, including early childhood education, translation and interpretation, entrepreneurship and other community college pathways. The organization also employs students and alumni which it says offers professional experience while building advocacy skills.

Holistic support has become a central part of the program's work, particularly since the COVID-19 Pandemic. Diana Viscarra, the organization's programs director and a former Upward Scholars student, said students often face significant

emotional and mental strain in addition to financial pressure.

"During the pandemic we saw our students losing jobs, losing hours and dealing with so much stress," Viscarra said. "We realized they needed emotional and spiritual support, not just academic help, so they could stay focused and continue their education."

Viscarra said the nonprofit now offers individual and group counseling, emergency assistance and resource navigation to help students remain stable while in school. Demand for food assistance and grocery gift cards has been particularly high.

"Everything is expensive right now," she said. "Anything we can do to help students access food or reduce their stress helps them focus on their classes and their goals"

Both Noriega and Viscarra said the program's impact is immediate and personal. Viscarra credits Upward Scholars with changing her own educational path, from ESL courses to transferring to a four-year university and pursuing a master's degree.

"I started the program just wanting to improve my English," she said. "I never really saw myself going into higher education or a different career. But with the support and encouragement I received, I realized I had other options."

Upward Scholars says community donations are critical to sustaining the program as more students seek help navigating higher education in one of the most expensive regions in the country.

"When people support Upward Scholars, they are directly helping immigrant students build skills, gain confidence and create long-term economic stability for themselves and their families," Noriega said. ■

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

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This business is conducted by: a Corporation.
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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:
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Date: 11/13/2025
Hon. Stephanie G. Garratt
JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT
(ALM Dec 5, 12, 19, 2025 and Jan 2, 2026)

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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 version. 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 mas 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 quede mas cerca. Si no puede pagar la cuota de presentación, pida al secretario de la corte que le dé un formulario de exencion de pago de cuotas. Si no presenta su respuesta a tiempo, puede perder el caso por incumplimiento y la corte le podra 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)**

To place a legal notice visit AlmanacNews.com/legal_notices/



Seeger Gray

Menlo Park police officers and San Mateo County deputy coroner Holly Benedict investigate the scene where police say a suspect died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in a parking lot near St. Denis Church in Menlo Park on Dec. 16.

LOCKDOWN

continued from page 5

wound and was deceased, the department said.

As the incident was unfolding, police asked a church and two schools to lockdown in addition to nearby businesses and residences. The Las Lomitas Elementary School District office was also on lockdown, Superintendent Erik Burmeister told this news organization.

Since the lockdown disrupted lunch, La Entrada students were released to homeroom to eat. Following the lockdown, many parents picked up their kids early from school and kids who did not leave early were released at the end of the day as normal, Burmeister said.

Las Lomitas principal Alain Camou told parents that a bus for kindergartners and pre-K students was canceled. Camou said all students were safe and supervised by school staff. Las Lomitas was in a secure campus protocol, which

NASH

continued from page 7

“My kids don’t know any reality other than me going to city meetings,” Combs said. “This service is at times fun. It certainly has its challenges. But what I hope they’ve seen is that anything worth being a part of, anything that is of value, is also worth sacrificing for.”

“You often have a different perspective on things, and I think it really does add to our conversations and push, certainly me and I think all of us, to look at things slightly differently,” Nash said to Combs during the meeting.

Combs has been the sole dissenting vote on several City Council decisions.

HELP IS AVAILABLE

If you or someone you know is experiencing emotional distress or thoughts of suicide, help is available 24/7. You can also call or text 988, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, to connect with trained counselors nationwide or smchealth.org/suicide-prevention to access local suicide prevention resources in San Mateo County.

means instruction continued but students stayed in their classrooms.

As part of San Mateo County’s “The Big Five” protocol, a “lockdown/barricade” occurs when there is an immediate threat of violence or gunfire on campus, or a school is directed to do so by law enforcement. ■

Almanac Staff Writer Jennifer Yoshikoshi contributed to this report.

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

“While I know a lot of the comments tonight are about what I’ve done for Menlo Park in my time, I am appreciative of all that I feel Menlo Park has done for me,” Combs said.

“What I hope is that this place is not better because of my time here, but that it is impacted and further appreciates the diversity of opinion that makes it special,” he added.

Nash takes on the mayoral role as the council continues to navigate housing debates that dominated much of the past year. In November, residents will vote on whether to require a citywide vote on redeveloping the downtown Menlo Park parking lots. ■

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

Riders can now tap credit, debit cards to ride transit

Clipper Card gets payment system upgrade

By Andres Jimenez Larios / Bay City News Service

The long-awaited rollout of the new generation of the Clipper Card payment system has begun and Bay Area travelers are able to pay for public transit trips more efficiently and conveniently.

Clipper will transition the individual cards of passengers over the next 12 weeks with new features that will allow people to instantly add money to an account, receive free and discounted transfers across agencies, and manage multiple family accounts in one central online location.

Additionally, all agencies that use the system will also begin allowing travelers to use their bank cards, whether physical or on their mobile devices, to pay for their trips without the need for a Clipper Card.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission — the transportation planning agency for the nine-county Bay Area — has had a long-standing contract with San Diego-based Cubic Transportation Systems to manage the Clipper Card system. Cubic has worked with other operators like the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority as well as operators as far as Europe and Asia.

Locally, over 20 public transit agencies across the nine Bay Area counties — Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma — are a part of the cloud-based system update.

The new “tap-and-ride” system that allows people to use

their personal bank cards initially rolled out with BART in August. The agency reported it is now the second-most common ticket type used on their system, just behind the regular Clipper Card.

The public transit advocacy group Seamless Bay Area pointed out on its website that the new free and discounted transfers will substantially reduce costs for travelers. They used the example of connecting between Alameda-Contra Costa Transit, BART, and Muni — a trip that could potentially cost \$9.85 — but calculated that on the new system, the fare comes out to \$5 less, at \$4.85.

To receive special discounts,

such as for seniors or those enrolled in Clipper START, travelers should use the Clipper Card associated with their accounts. Bank and credit cards accepted include Visa, Mastercard, American Express, and Discover card, but transportation agency officials highly advise that passengers remove their physical card from their wallets to avoid erroneous charges to other cards.

If problems arise, the MTC advises passengers to contact in-station transit agency staff or contact Clipper customer service.

To call, email, or find the nearest in-person Clipper service center, visit clippercard.com/ClipperWeb/help. ■

Craig Leon Wentz

September 6, 1963 - December 10, 2025

Craig Leon Wentz, 62, passed away peacefully on December 10, 2025 in Denver, CO.

Craig was born in Mountain View, CA, and grew up in Menlo Park, CA where his love of sports, people, and storytelling first took shape. He attended Menlo Atherton HS and graduated from Palo Alto HS in 1981. He then went on and graduated from the University of Tennessee in 1986 with a degree in Communication and became a lifelong, loyal Vols fan.

Craig grew up playing sports and enjoyed baseball, football, and rugby throughout childhood, high school and college and golf in his later years.

Craig spent 25 years in sports media, working across radio, television, newspapers, and play-by-play announcing. He later devoted eight years to the golf industry, serving at Shoreline, Sharon Heights, and Canyon Oaks in Chico. His most meaningful role came at Arbor Acute in Chico, where he worked in hospitality assisting individuals with dementia and those in short-term rehabilitation. His compassion, patience, and sincerity made a profound impact on the people he served.

He loved golf, meeting new people, and taking quiet, reflective walks. He was history buff at heart with a sharp mind for politics and sports. Craig was always one that could strike up a conversation with anyone, everywhere he went.

Among his many accomplishments, Craig was most proud of two things: celebrating 31 years of sobriety and reading the Bible in a single year. His faith guided him deeply, and he lived each day with gratitude and purpose.

Craig's warmth, wit, and gentle spirit touched everyone who knew him. His legacy is one of resilience, faith, kindness, and an open heart. He will be deeply missed by those who knew and loved him.

Craig was preceded in death by his mother, Jeanie and his father, Leon. He is survived by his brother, Brad (Darci), his sister, Julie, his niece and nephews, Taylor (Collin), Zack, and Ryan and his stepmom, Cathy. He cherished each of them and carried their love with him always.

The family plans to hold a private service. If you knew Craig and would like to share a story or two, the family would like you to join them on Monday, December 29 at 1pm at the Dutch Goose in Menlo Park. In lieu of flowers, a donation in Craig's name can be made to your charity of choice.

PAID OBITUARY



Waltraut Charlotte Elsbeth Otilie Monroe

June 24, 1937 - October 16, 2025

Waltraut “Traut” Charlotte Elsbeth Otilie Krumbholz Monroe died peacefully on October 16th in her home of 58 years, with her family by her side.

Born in Flensburg, Germany in 1937 to Hans-Georg Krumbholz & Charlotte von Kathen Krumbholz, she was the 2nd of 5 siblings. Her father, an officer in the German Navy, died on the Russian Front near the end of the war. After the collapse of Germany, her mother fled from the advancing Russian army in the dead of night with her 5 children. After a journey that took them from the island of Rügen to Berlin then north-west Germany, they were resettled as refugees in a small farming village, where they spent the next 8 years.

It was on this farm where Traut was given the nickname “die Katze” or “the cat” for her ability to climb a large beech tree in which she sought refuge, began her path towards independence and honed a skill she’d rely on later in life in her beloved oak tree at the top of Coal Mine Ridge.

An excellent student but from a family with very limited means, she did not get the opportunity to go to college. Nevertheless, she was able to get more education than was customary at the time for a young woman. Driven by a desire to learn, she left the village she had spent the last 8 years living in and moved north to Hamburg to attend an academically oriented high school. She then attended a language school where she continued to study English and French, becoming fluent in both while also obtaining business skills. She supported herself with part-time jobs as she developed the ability to be self-sufficient and independent, skills that she’d come to rely on again later in life.

At age 20, she moved to Geneva, Switzerland where she continued her language studies and met Robert “Bob” Monroe. They were married in 1961 and lived in Europe for the next six years where her son, Lars and daughter Katrine were born.

In 1967, Traut and her family moved to America, settling in Portola Valley where she lived the next 58 years of her life. In Portola Valley, Traut was an enthusiastic mother, enjoyed raising her children & being an active volunteer in their classrooms while also working part-time and then full-time jobs. On Saturday mornings, she taught German at the German-American school in Palo Alto.

In 1979, Traut was diagnosed with malignant melanoma and was forced to confront her mortality. Winning her battle against cancer brought on a shift in priorities for her. With her children now older and more independent, going to college became a possibility and then a reality for Traut. In the fall of 1982, she enrolled at Foothill College. After more than 25 years of being out of school, she was an apprehensive student but quickly realized she could rise to the challenge. In 1989, she enrolled at U.C. Berkeley and 2 years later graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree from the Haas School of Business.

At the same time, Traut began running and hiking the trails near her home in Portola Valley. She joined a running club (50 Plus) and met a group of women with whom she would hike & backpack throughout the world. Their adventures spanned the Sierras, the Brooks Range (Alaska), Mont Blanc, Nepal and beyond.

In 1994, her first grandchild, Megan, was born. Megan was followed by Ryan, Hannah and Erin, all of whom Traut showed with love and attention. Her grandchildren meant the world to her, and they were all with her until the end.

Traut's family would like to thank her care team at Palo Alto Medical Foundation, who provided so much care & guidance these last 2 years of her life as she battled pancreatic cancer.

A celebration of life will be held in the new year, please contact her family for more information.

PAID OBITUARY

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TIDE ACADEMY*continued from page 5*

our incoming student population,” according to a 2019 district mailer.

Sequoia Union spends about \$39,000 per student at TIDE compared to an average of \$22,467 per student at the district’s other schools, according to state data.

TIDE currently has 195 students, with 63 freshmen, 56 sophomores, 29 juniors and 47 seniors, Leach told the board this week. Some classes have as few as four to six students, she added.

The school opened in 2019 — right before the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents argue that the Sequoia Union has struggled with low enrollment across its schools, but that TIDE was especially impacted as a newer and smaller campus.

Parents are also concerned that using the term “closure” will potentially drive away prospective families who are otherwise interested in enrolling their child at TIDE next school year. Enrollment season is currently in progress and the last day to enroll is Feb. 1, TIDE Education Foundation President Andromeda Garcelon said. The district has said it plans to make a decision on TIDE’s closure on Feb. 4.

With dozens of community

members ready to speak during public comment, the board decided on Wednesday to limit each speaker to one minute rather than the three minutes regularly allowed. Many public commenters spoke past the limit, despite the microphone cutting off after the 60-second mark.

TIDE community calls school “home”

Students at TIDE approached the podium to share their positive experiences with the school, with some calling it their “second home.”

The school’s small classroom model has especially been helpful for the large community of neurodivergent students that the school has welcomed, said junior Bea Coombes. In the 2024-25 school year, state data showed that 22% of TIDE’s student body had a reported disability.

“Over time, TIDE has become a place where many neurodiverse and vulnerable students finally make progress,” said public commenter Luis Diaz. “Students with autism, ADHD, anxiety or processing challenges, they succeed here because the campus is small, predictable and staffed by adults who know them well.”

TIDE also offers career technical education and dual enrollment classes through a partnership with Foothill College in Los Altos Hills. Commenters on

Wednesday stressed how beneficial the school’s programs were in preparing students for college and careers.

TIDE English teacher and recruitment coordinator Daphne Pacia-McCann argued that larger schools have had the opportunity to also build these programs but haven’t opted to do so.

“You have to have teachers who are qualified to do it, who are willing to train and make connections with partner institutions and who are willing to put in the sweat equity to build the institutional knowledge necessary to build those programs,” she said.

Students also spoke about feeling a sense of belonging at TIDE, receiving support from teachers and attending a school that stressed the importance of community.

“TIDE is a small school in this district that makes students with special needs feel like they belong,” said Coombes. “Instead of shunning these students, they focus on helping them succeed.”

Teachers approached the podium to highlight TIDE’s role in promoting equity in the district, as the only Sequoia Union school that is east of Highway 101. Cat Cole, a founding teacher at TIDE, noted that about half of the school’s students live in East Palo Alto, Belle Haven or North Fair Oaks — all historically

disadvantaged areas.

“The superintendent (in 2018) shared that part of the vision of TIDE is to disrupt historic patterns and draw students across the 101 freeway from west to east, instead of east to west,” said Cole. “TIDE has made this happen.”

Comments from school board members

Ginn, one of the board members on the subcommittee that recommended considering closing TIDE, observed that students leave the school over time, with class sizes progressively decreasing from freshman to senior year.

He expressed interest in seeing TIDE’s cost and student ratio data in comparison to each school in the district. Ginn added that he’d also like to look into the possibility of TIDE becoming a 10th through 12th grade school if there were not more than 100 students enrolled for ninth grade.

Thompson, the other board member on the committee with Ginn, took the opportunity to address recent concerns about her former role as the executive director of Summit Preparatory Charter High School, which is seen as a competitor to TIDE. Thompson said that she no longer works with the school and “has no financial interest” in it. Thompson currently works for Crystal Springs Uplands Middle School, an independent private

school in Hillsborough.

“When this comes before the board in February, to abstain, I would need to demonstrate a conflict, and in this case, I don’t have one,” she said.

Trustee Sathvik Nori proposed a different approach to the district’s budget deficit and urged the board to explore other options rather than solely evaluating the closure of TIDE. Providing transparency for the community by looking at different solutions is important, Nori said.

“I’d be more comfortable in seeing data in context to other solutions that are being proposed, because there are other options that we’d have in front of us as to stuff we could consider and actions to address,” said Nori.

Future meetings

The district plans to hold community meetings on Jan. 13 and Jan. 15 where data points will be shared, Leach said.

On Jan. 26, the Board of Trustees is scheduled to have a public study session to review financial and enrollment data. A special board meeting is then slated for Feb. 4, at which Leach plans to share her recommendations on TIDE’s closure. ■

*Email Staff Writer
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The art of magic



'Cunning Folk' exhibition explores depictions of witchcraft and the occult in early modern Europe

By Karla Kane

The word “witch” may conjure up thoughts of Halloween, or Elphaba and Glinda on the stage and screen. Maybe you picture magic wands, flying broomsticks or bubbling cauldrons. The concepts of magic and witchcraft are ancient ones, and there are certain images and ideas about them that have developed over the centuries.

“Cunning Folk: Witchcraft, Magic, and Occult Knowledge,” an exhibition at Stanford’s Cantor Arts Center, explores depictions of witchcraft and magic specifically in connection with early modern Europe (roughly c.e. 1500-1750), a time when print culture was blossoming, allowing literary and artistic works to spread rapidly.

Curated by the Cantor’s Sara Lent Frier, “Cunning Folk” is divided into four parts: “Sabbath,” “Spell,” “Stranger” and “Suspicion.” It includes prints and paintings, books,

magical objects, sound recordings and even a few contemporary works in conversation with the historical pieces — some from the Cantor’s own collection, some borrowed from Stanford Libraries’ Special Collections and other sources.

The exhibition is “engaging not just with the idea of witchcraft as a whole but with the specific early modern visual and material art histories of witchcraft,” Frier said. “I really wanted to show how these things fly through time and resonate across time.”

The term “cunning” stems from the Anglo-Saxon “cunnan,” meaning “to know,” Frier said, and the exhibition encompasses a range of early modern European concepts of magical practitioners of all kinds, from those who offered healing remedies and protective charms to educated scholars of occult texts to those believed to practice the “wicked” type of witchcraft, known as malefic or diabolic witchcraft.

“Of course it’s a mythological idea; of course this is a belief that’s very old. There’s been a belief in this harmful and helpful magic since time immemorial, but really my interest in this show is the way that in this early modern moment, they kind of come together under this concept of ‘cunning,’” Frier said.

The works included in the “Sabbath” section are “maybe the most visually resonant with people who know witchcraft through Halloween and ideas of the witch as this kind of scary, intimidating, diabolic figure,” Frier said. The image of a witches’ sabbath — a nocturnal meeting of folks, usually women, together for maleficent reasons: feasting, dancing, conducting secret rituals, flying on brooms, etc. — proved highly inspiring for artists in the early modern timeframe.

French artist Dominique Vivant Denon’s 18th-century etching “A Coven of Witches,” after an older painting by Flemish artist David Teniers

II, shows a fairly cozy domestic scene, with witches studying a grimoire (book of magic) while demons illuminate their reading via torches, and one witch mounts her broom.

German artist Hans Baldung’s chiaroscuro woodcut “Witches’ Sabbath” from 1510 was “famous in its time for disseminating some of these visual tropes,” she said. In “Witches’ Sabbath,” nude women gather and make preparations while another rides backward on a flying goat. A vessel inscribed with pseudo-Hebraic characters gives the sense that the event has religious connections, as well as reflects antisemitic sentiments.

In many cases, there is an association between female bodies and female sexuality with demonic temptation, which has even older, biblical connotations. The invention of the printing press helped assure that these types of visuals became recognizable clues for denoting witchcraft.

Courtesy Cantor Arts Center
Above: “Cunning Folk” includes many pieces with imagery of witches engaging in rituals, such as this early 16th-century engraving by Agostino Musi’s “The Witch’s Procession.”

The “Spell” section of “Cunning Folk” offers a look at witchcraft as understood to be a skill, involving specialized knowledge and practical applications.

“I really wanted to explore not just that practice of diabolic witchcraft but also ... people who practice magic as a type of learned discipline, not just something they get from the devil to do bad,” Frier said. “This show is about all of these things existing together at the same time in different ways.”

In addition to artwork including portraits of magical practitioners such as Medea and Circe (characters dating to antiquity), this section also offers some

See **MAGIC**, page 20



Photo by Vivian Johnson



***On the occasion of
Midland Cabinet
Company's 60th year,
founder Robert Boynton
reflects on the joys of
doing what he wanted to
do from the start.
Build with wood.***



Midland Cabinet turned 60 this year, quite a milestone for a company from humble beginnings in, what else? A garage in my parents' San Mateo home. I knew as a kid what I wanted to do, and I'm doing it with my family and Midland's crew of artisans: creating the finest custom cabinetry and woodwork for some of the most luxurious homes in the world.

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As Midland moves into its 61st year, we wish you, our friends, neighbors, and family peace and good health in 2026. And we thank our clients and professional colleagues for giving us a place at the table in 2025 to make a house a home, for holidays and every day.

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Woodside resident and tech founder publishes memoir

Vinita Gupta was CEO of Digital Link and brought it to an IPO in 1994

By Angela Swartz

When Vinita Gupta moved to California five decades ago, she couldn't anticipate that she would be the first woman of Indian origin to take her company public in the United States. Now Gupta, 75, a Woodside resident, has documented her life in her memoir, "The Woman In Deed: Road to IPO, Bridge Tables, and Beyond," published this fall.

The book follows her upbringing in India, journey to the United States to earn a master's degree at 23 in electrical engineering from University of California, Los Angeles, and her success in Silicon Valley building her own company: Digital Link Corporation, which specializes in internet networking. The book offers memorable anecdotes, like the time Forbes magazine documented when she went into labor during a board meeting. She also describes raising her daughters and managing challenging health issues within her family.

The United Kingdom's House of Lords recognized Gupta for her work in the tech industry in November. She also holds two U.S. patents.

In retirement, she has shifted her focus to the semi-professional bridge team she owns and enjoying time with her 3-year-old grandson.

We spoke with Gupta about her memoir and some of her accomplishments.

The following interview has been condensed for clarity and space. It has also been edited to remove spoilers.

The Almanac: Tell me about how you decided that you wanted to document your life.

Gupta: I'm an avid "New Yorker" reader; the stories of New York culture, its artistic, creative culture have been told over several decades by people writing the stories in different ways, shining the light on the people from different walks of life.

However, in Silicon Valley, we have only portrayed the lives of the top few people in an expansive way, and stories like mine, even though I was very successful at some level, I am not in those icons. ... And I think more stories need to be told which are inspirational and give a real flavor of what makes Silicon Valley tick.

The Almanac: What was the cultural shift like for you from India to UCLA and then Silicon Valley?

Gupta: There were two levels of culture. One was the social culture from India to the U.S. and UCLA; it was startling to me. Living in a



Vinita Gupta

dorm, you get American food so you don't get your Indian food. Also the girls, young men and women lead very, segregated lives (in India). ... In UCLA, there was physical proximity of the students, girls and guys, hugging and kissing each other, so ... it was something that I had to adjust to because I was a single woman.

And I was the only woman in (my) class. ... I was coming from a developing country to the most significant nation in the world and the fact that there were no other women in my class was a surprise to me.

When I moved for my first job

to Silicon Valley, what was different was the work culture. ... Assimilation was hard. The guys basically did not invite me to social get-togethers, whether they were card games on Friday nights or whatever. I only worked with men, so I felt very isolated.

The Almanac: What gave you the fortitude to shrug off a professor in India who told you and another woman to leave your engineering program to open your spots to men?

Gupta: We knew these thoughts were prevailing in the society, so it did not come to us as a surprise. ... What came as a surprise was that just two women in the class were called into his office. We said, "You know he's old and stodgy. He doesn't know what he's talking about." We didn't think it made any difference to our lives going

forward. ... We do remember that incident very well.

The Almanac: What did it mean to you when you became the first Indian woman to take a tech company public in the U.S. in February 1994?

Gupta: When it happened, it was more the joy of being able to take a company public. I wasn't thinking "Oh, I'm the first one." I've actually seen that every time when you cross an external milestone ... it is only a pause that's never a destination. ... But then the next set of problems you have to face. ... I call my book the "Woman in Deed" because I learned everything by doing. Nobody gave me a playbook on how to run a company, how to be a CEO, how to be a woman CEO.

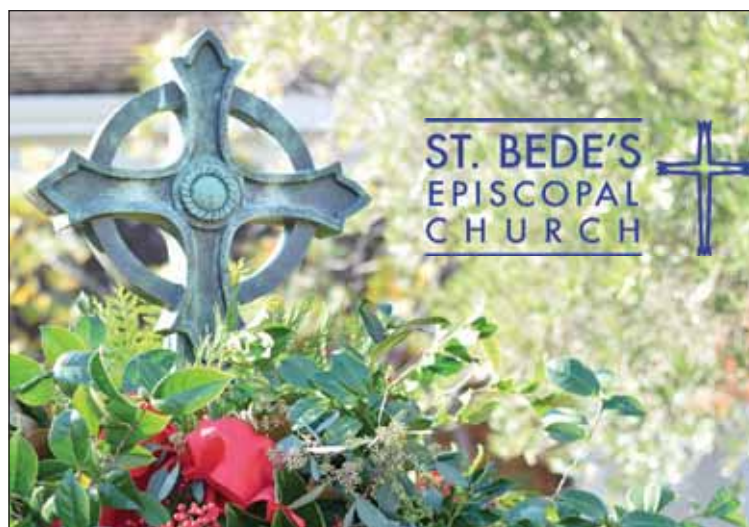
There was an incident where I felt in the beginning, like in

the first five, seven years after working, "Oh my accent was so different." People had problems understanding me as an Indian and I started imitating twisting my tongue to copy the American accent. ... 'Til I witnessed one of the Indian Stanford professors give a talk on his 60th birthday. ... He talked and I said, "I can understand him perfectly. He's not trying so hard to change his accent." And suddenly my life became so much simpler.

The Almanac: You said that Forbes published a story about when your water broke during a board meeting. What was it like to read that?

Gupta: They had come and taken pictures and talked to us ... and we knew an article would

See **MEMOIR**, page 20



Christmas at St. Bede's Episcopal Church in Menlo Park

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MAGIC

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fascinating bits of artifacts used by, or very similar to those made by, cunning folks who believed in the protective power of witchcraft.

A long scroll, covered in tiny writing and drawings on both sides, dates to around 1790, from southern Germany or Austria. The “magic roll” is full of prayers, symbols and ritual formulas, and would have been worn on the body as an amulet.

“It just goes to show you the intricacy of the spells, of the knowledge that goes into them,” Frier said, noting that Christian symbols are included, emphasizing that Christianity and magic co-existed.

“This is very much used by a Christian person to help protect their body from all forms of misfortune, warfare, death in childbirth; all kinds of different things that might happen,” she said.

Adam Lonicer’s book “Kreuterbüch” (Herbal), dating to 1557 Germany, is open to a page discussing plant species including St. John’s wort, called fuga daemonum (demon flight) in Latin and recommended for wound care and warding off witchcraft alike. The pages of the book are full of marginalia — both medical notes and Christian prayers — showing its heavy use. “Many of us take St. John’s wort today,” Frier said, noting that herbal knowledge remains valuable and relevant.

A frontispiece engraving by Thomas Cross from the 1651 English book “Popular errors” by James Primrose shows an angel advising an ill patient to take medical advice from a male

physician, rather than a female traditional healer, even though many of their practices and remedies would have been similar.

“While you had cunning people, who were often women and peasants, practicing folk traditions ... you also have the rise of the early modern medicine institutions at this time,” Frier said. “Some of these things start to overlap and some of them end up at odds with each other.”

The “Stranger” section of the show explores how witchcraft has long been associated with “otherness” and exoticism. In the early modern period in Europe, this comes through both more locally, in conjunction with stereotypical and invented depictions of non-Christian religious communities, including Jewish and Islamic populations, as well as in depictions of interactions with cultures farther away, as European colonialism spread to what became known as the Americas. Artists and writers created sensationalized, xenophobic imagery and projected associations with European witchcraft tropes on these “foreign” cultures and figures.

In Theodor de Bry’s 1590 engraving “Praestigator” (meaning conjurer), from the Latin edition of Thomas Harriot’s “A Briefe and True Report of the Newfound Land of Virginia,” an Algonquian healer performs a ritual dance. This illustration is based on colonist John White’s watercolors of scenes from his journey to what is now North Carolina, which he labeled “the flyer.” In de Bry’s engraving, though, the figure is retitled “conjurer,” implying a practitioner of trickery and diabolic magic, Frier said.

American artist Candice Lin’s

“Sycorax’s Collection (Herbarium),” a 2011 mixed-media piece incorporating dried herbs, is one of the contemporary works included in “Cunning Folk.” Sycorax is a character mentioned in William Shakespeare’s “The Tempest,” a “damned witch” who was exiled to an island and was the mother of the monster Caliban. In the play, a European nobleman seizes the island and enslaves Caliban, which Frier said is understood today as reflecting European colonialism and oppression of Indigenous peoples.

In Lin’s piece, Sycorax is pictured with cats and herbs in her garden, including plants that have been used to induce abortions. Lin is drawing a parallel between the persecution of women herbalists in Europe and the brutal subjugation of people in the Americas due to European colonialism using “this focal point of plant practice, which is such a form of secret empowering knowledge for both of those groups,” Frier said.

The “Suspicion” section of the exhibition reckons with “the stakes of a lot of these narratives, the culmination of some of these beliefs in the witch trials in both Europe and America, which ended in the execution of at least 50,000 people,” Frier said. “I wanted to give space to that and talk about the various forms of doubt, which underlie a belief in witchcraft on both sides.”

Selections from two haunting songs are played in rotation, audible throughout the exhibition’s space in the Ruth Levison Halperin Gallery. These ballads come from early modern printed broadsides that spread information not only through text and illustrations but also through song, with the words set to familiar tunes of the day. Musician Leslie Lancaster Allison sung and recorded two of these English ballads especially for “Cunning



Courtesy Glen C. Cheriton

Contemporary artist Sunny Smith’s “Salem Witches Bureau,” seen center here, is a reproduction of a piece owned by their ancestors, who lived in Salem during the witch trials. Smith worked with artist Rachel Howe, a descendant of a woman executed at Salem, to fill the cabinet with ritual objects.

Folk,” one of which, “Damnable Practises of three Lincolne-shire Witches,” tells of a servant woman and her daughters executed for allegedly using witchcraft to kill the heirs of their noble employer.

A copy of German inquisitor Heinrich Kramer’s 1520 “Malleus maleficarum” (“The Hammer of Witches”), which was hugely influential, is on display. There’s also a 1655 political grievance from Newcastle, England, complaining that the authorities hired a fraudulent witch hunter, ultimately sending more than 200 local women to their deaths.

Another piece by a contemporary artist, the Bay Area’s own Sunny Smith, is rooted in personal lineage. “Salem Witch Bureau” is an enlarged reproduction of an actual bureau owned by Smith’s ancestors, residents of Salem, Massachusetts, during its witch-trial frenzy (allegedly, a witch jumped out of one of the drawers). Smith worked with an expert in early modern furniture to craft the piece. This year, they collaborated with fellow American artist Rachel Howe, a

descendant of Elizabeth Howe, who was executed at Salem. They placed ritual objects inside the bureau, envisioning it as a portal through which to connect with the past and their intertwined history.

“I had people coming and telling me stories, sharing a lot of things with me,” Frier said, of her experience putting “Cunning Folk” together. “It was just a really good reminder that obviously this is a very historicized show that’s meant to really be encapsulated within its specific historical context, but also something that continues to speak so strongly to others in all kinds of personal and different ways.” ■

Email Assistant Lifestyle Editor Karla Kane at kkane@almanacnews.com.

“Cunning Folk: Witchcraft, Magic, and Occult Knowledge” runs through Feb. 22, at the Cantor Arts Center, 328 Lomita Drive, Stanford; free; museum.stanford.edu/exhibitions/cunning-folk.

Employment

National Grid USA Service Company, Inc. seeks Vice President - Global Head of Brand in Menlo Park, CA to dev & implement brand strategy for National Grid. Oversee brand audit, competitive & SWOT analysis, & brand strategy & positioning. Supervise dev & exe of brand refresh for National Grid, incl ident, selection, & mgmt. of ext agency partners.

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MEMOIR

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come out, but we didn’t know what the headlines were going to be. I remember that distinctly because we were invited to (venture capitalist) Bill Draper’s home. ... They always had a lot of good food and music. And he said, “Congratulations.” And that’s when he told us about the Forbes article, and ... those were pre-cell phone days, so after coming home, a couple of days later, the magazine arrived, and we read it and I almost fell off the chair. I was so embarrassed with that “The Day Vinita Gupta’s Water Broke” (headline). I said, “What a tagline.” Those were private issues in my mind, coming from India.

The Almanac: You didn’t touch on this in the book, but how often did you go back to India after you moved to the U.S.?

Gupta: In the beginning, we used to go, or plan to go, every year to India. There was a fondness and attachment to India. Slowly you become American. After 50 years being here, I would say that I consider myself an American and not Indian anymore. The fondness for India is still there, but not to the same extent as the attachment was for the first 10 years of my life.

Our kids are born and raised here. They are fully assimilated, integrated into the culture. ... That’s when the kids’ progress happens, but they also retain some of the heritage.

I have a 3-year-old grandson. ...

I invited him to celebrate our biggest festival, the Festival of Lights (Diwali). ... He got up the next morning and told his mother, “Oh in my school ... we should have a Diwali party.” She said, “Yeah, next time I will bring some things for Diwali for your school.” He said, “No, I want my grandmother to be there.” So he associated me with Diwali. You know, how you influence your generations tiny bit. ... I thought it was very cute. ... I never expected that he would retain anything about it. ■

Angela Swartz is a Contributing Writer.

Go to guptavinita.com/thewomanindeed for more information.

From balloon drops to bubbly: Where to ring in 2026

Celebrate New Year's Eve with parties, performances and more around the Peninsula

By Julia Brown and Heather Zimmerman

Another year has already come and (almost) gone, leaving precious few days before the calendar turns to 2026. Dinner reservations at some of the region's most popular restaurants and hotels are already filling up, and tickets for concerts like Peninsula-raised bluegrass artist Molly Tuttle have some ticket levels waitlisted.

New Year's Eve in Silicon Valley also means Noon Year's Eve celebrations for kids, upscale galas for adults and more laid-back events like comedy shows and dance lessons.

There are even a few options to spend the first day of 2026 getting centered and enjoying the outdoors.

Don't wait until the eleventh hour: Get your plans in order with our guide to New Year's Eve happenings below.

Visit almanacnews.com/arts-culture to find additional events, including special evenings at local restaurants and South Bay and Coastside celebrations.

Family-friendly events

Portola Valley Library Rainbow Fish will be the special guest at Portola Valley Library's Noon Year's Storytime Celebration, featuring songs, stories, crafts and a countdown to noon.

Dec. 28, 11 a.m.-noon, Portola Valley Library, 765 Portola Road, Portola Valley. Free. smcl.bibliocommons.com/events/6920f23e3631b51f2ece7b4f.

North Fair Oaks Library Kids can ring in 2026 early with book character Biscuit the Dog, a special storytime, food and a noon balloon drop. This program will be provided in Spanish.

Dec. 29, 10:30 a.m.-noon, North Fair Oaks Library, 2510 Middlefield Road, Redwood City. Free.

smcl.bibliocommons.com/events/69092525886bb73600b8f98f.

Woodside Library Cookie Mouse from "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie" will be the special guest for Woodside Library's Noon Year's storytime.

Dec. 30, 10:30-11:30 a.m., Woodside Library, 3140 Woodside Road, Woodside. Free. smcl.bibliocommons.com/events/6920f2663631b51f2ece7b53.

East Palo Alto Library Bring the kids by the library for a Noon Year's storytime with Paddington Bear, featuring songs, crafts and more.

Dec. 31, 11 a.m.-noon, East Palo Alto Library, 2415 University Ave., East Palo Alto. Free. smcl.bibliocommons.com.



Courtesy Paper Thin

Paper Thin will play rock and soul covers at Pioneer Saloon's New Year's Eve party.

com/events/690d1d5764ad59251cbad770.

Hiller Aviation Museum Noon Year's Eve Musicians Lori & RJ host a morning of singing and entertainment that includes German the Magician, singer Bella, dancers from Peninsula Lively Arts, and the Puppet Company that lead up to a giant balloon drop at noon, followed by a performance by Casa Circulo Cultural Folklorico and dancing to Lori & RJ. Tickets will only be sold in advance and are expected to sell out.

Dec. 31, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Hiller Aviation Museum, 601 Skyway Road, San Carlos. \$16-\$25 (free for children under 3). hiller.org/event/noon-years-eve-a-fun-event-kids.

Menlo Park Library Families can ring in the new year early with face painting, ice cream cups and a comic puppet show retelling of "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" by Puppet Art Theater. The event concludes with a countdown to the new year at noon.

Dec. 31, 10:45 a.m.-noon, Menlo Park Library, 800 Alma St., Menlo Park. tinyurl.com/MPLibraryNoonYearsEve.

Rinconada Library As part of its ICYMI movie series, the library screens a double feature of the police drama spoofs "The Naked Gun: From the Files of Police Squad" (1988) and "The Naked Gun" (2025). Bring a chair and enjoy light snacks. Best suited for ages 14 and up.

Dec. 31, 1:30-4:30 p.m., Rinconada Library, 1213 Newell Road, Palo Alto. tinyurl.com/NYERinconadaLibrary.

Performances and dancing

Alhambra Irish House The pub holds two celebrations, starting with an afternoon party that rings in 2026 on Irish time (4 p.m.) with live music by singer Stephen Ross, Irish food and a Guinness toast. A 1920s, Gatsby-themed party takes place in the evening, featuring a four-course dinner, with dancing to live music from band Nocturnal Paranoia and a midnight champagne toast. Guests can purchase tickets to attend the dinner only or get tickets for dinner and dancing.

Dec. 31, Irish New Year 3-5 p.m. \$5 per person; Gatsby party begins at 6 p.m. \$80 per person dinner only; \$100 per person dinner and dancing. Both events take place at Alhambra Irish House, 831 Main St., Redwood City. alhambra-irish-house.com.

Club Fox Beatles tribute band The Sun Kings present their annual New Year's Eve party, with party favors and midnight toast.

Dec. 31, 9 p.m., Club Fox, 2223 Broadway St., Redwood City, \$75 general admission; \$100 reserved. clubfoxrwc.com.

Cubberley Ballroom Guests can learn to merengue and waltz with instructors Samy, James and Michelle at a New Year's Eve dance party and lesson. Masks optional.

Dec. 31, lesson begins at 8 p.m. and dance party takes place 9 p.m.-midnight, Cubberley Pavilion, 4000 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto. \$20. cubberleyballroom.com.

Molly Tuttle Peninsula-raised two-time Grammy Award-winning bluegrass artist Molly Tuttle returns to The Guild Theatre for an intimate concert. Earlier this year, Tuttle released the solo album, "So Long Little Miss Sunshine," bringing pop, country and rock into the mix.

Dec. 31, 9:30 p.m., The Guild Theatre, 949 El Camino Real, Menlo Park. \$124-\$1,456 (some ticket levels wait-listed). guildtheatre.com.

Pioneer Saloon Paper Thin will play favorite soul and rock songs at a party where guests can enjoy snacks, a champagne toast and party favors.

Dec. 31, 9 p.m.-1 a.m., Pioneer Saloon, 2925 Woodside Road, Woodside. pioneersaloonmusic.com.

Rooster T. Feathers Comedian Eric Schwartz headlines an evening of laughs, with Red Scott and Alisha Dillon also on the bill, and a champagne toast. Two seatings, with an early show celebrating the East Coast countdown and a late show counting down to West Coast midnight. Shows are 21+.

Dec. 31, 7:30 and 10:30 p.m., Rooster T. Feathers, 157 W. El Camino Real, Sunnyvale. Advance purchase required: \$44.50 7:30 p.m. show; \$59.50 10:30 p.m. show.

rooster-t-feathers.seatengine-sites.com.

Stephens Green The Irish pub holds two celebrations: an afternoon party that celebrates the new year on Irish time (4 p.m.) with a Guinness toast, and an evening party with dancing to DJ CMC Beatz and a champagne toast to celebrate the West Coast countdown.

Dec. 31, Irish New Year 3-5 p.m.. Free; evening party 8 p.m. Cover TBA. 223 Castro St., Mountain View. ststephensgreen.com.

Tipsy Putt Tipsy Putt will be reservation-free (except for group tables) with no cover charges. There will be a live DJ, champagne toasts and bar games.

Dec. 31, 6 p.m.-1 a.m., Tipsy Putt, 301 W. McKinley Ave. #150, Sunnyvale. Prices vary. tipsyputt.com/event/ring-in-the-new-year-at-tipsy-putt-no-cover-no-stress.

New Year's Day

First Day Hikes California State Parks offer guided New Year's Day hikes of varying lengths and degrees of difficulty that explore natural features and wildlife. Participating area parks include Big Basin Redwoods, Montara State Beach and Burleigh H. Murray Ranch.

Jan. 1, many hikes begin at 10 a.m. Visit parks.ca.gov/?page_id=30737 to find an interactive map of participating parks and more details about each hike.

Hair of the Dog Hike Filoli visitors can take a 2-mile, self-guided hike, which offers access to private trails that are only open for special events. Three refreshment stations on the route will serve alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages.

Jan. 1, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., Filoli, 86 Cañada Road, Woodside. \$75 per person (includes daytime admission to Filoli house and gardens). filoli.org/holidays/#hair-of-the-dog.

New Year's Day Yoga Ananda Temple of Palo Alto holds a 2.5-hour yoga retreat that will include a relaxation session with the sounds of singing bowls and a 30-minute meditation.

Jan. 1, 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Ananda Temple of Palo Alto, 2171 El Camino Real, Palo Alto. \$45. tinyurl.com/AnandaPAJan1Yoga. ■

Peninsula jazz musician Nathan Tokunaga, who frequently performed in Menlo Park with the Cafe Borrone All Stars, recently received the prestigious Young Arts Award. Read about Tokunaga at almanacnews.com/arts-culture.

Food & Drink

Mainstream minimalism

Here's why many new Peninsula restaurants are going minimalist

By Edwina Dueñas

A string of new eateries have opened on the Peninsula boasting minimalist-inspired design in addition to compelling cuisine.

Hallmarks of minimalist design include clean lines, neutral color schemes and natural materials. This pared-down approach is what drew many restaurateurs to minimalism, as it provided a blank canvas to build on. Some owners were drawn to this simplistic aesthetic to allow the food and drinks to take center stage. Others used a thoughtful approach to colors and lighting to create a sense of warmth and comfort.

For each business, minimalist design is leveraged to reflect its hospitality values and enhance the guest experience. After all, minimalist design is rooted in functionality and explores what's essential — or can be removed — in a space.

Functionality was a key consideration for Milli Cafe, which recently opened in Millbrae

and offers espresso, matcha and house-baked goods.

"We strived to understand what we can provide for the community and our neighbors first and foremost," said owner Kevin Lee.

Since July, Milli Cafe has filled the gap for a specialty cafe along Broadway. Specialty drinks include a seasonal s'mores caramel mocha, charcoal latte and cold brew crema. Formerly a jewelry store, the space features white walls, black furniture and gold-accented lighting fixtures.

The space pays homage to the history of the location with a jewelry display case converted into a pastry case and hexagon floor tiles and triangular counter tiles meant to simulate diamonds. Lee describes minimalist design as a blank canvas to showcase the cafe's food and drinks.

Further down the Peninsula, cafe and bakery Temp & Time in Menlo Park blends minimalism with Japanese design touches. Serving up roll cakes, burnt Basque cheesecakes and



Vivian Johnson

San Francisco-based Studio BANAA designed Café Vivant and Somm Cellars in Menlo Park to have a neutral color palette.

tea beverages, Temp & Time opened in November 2024. Owners Suzie and Kay (who prefer to keep their last names private) have long admired Japanese design for its balance of simplicity and warmth. Bringing their vision to life proved to be a creative exercise for the team. Designing Temp & Time ended up being a two-year process, with an early iteration resembling an office.

After connecting with an

interior designer who studied art in Japan, the compact cafe transformed into a clean, simple and welcoming space the owners are proud of. This includes touches of greenery, warm accents and furniture from Asia such as the tables, chairs and lighting fixtures, as well as the roof and wall paneling.

"The design helps create an atmosphere where people feel comfortable settling in," Kay said. "Many customers come in

not just for drinks and desserts, but to sit, study, work or spend time with friends."

Other eateries, like Horsefeather in Palo Alto, approach design challenges with intentionality. Located in a former gym with no existing restaurant infrastructure, owner Justin Lew set out to create an atmosphere that could transition from daytime brunch and lunch service into a nightlife destination.

Lew describes the space



Vivian Johnson

The dining room and bar of Café Vivant in Menlo Park.



Rob Stark

Los Angeles-based design firm Preen incorporated Korean and Taiwanese touches to the interior design of Yeobo, Darling in Menlo Park.



Courtesy Milli Cafe

Milli Cafe owner Kevin Lee describes minimalist design as a blank canvas to showcase the cafe's food and drinks.

as being substantial but not overdesigned, rather than strictly minimal. Founded in San Francisco in 2016, Horsefeather characterizes its food and drink offerings as California comfort cuisine with pan-Asian and Latin influences.

Lew single-handedly designed the space, taking cues from the American Arts & Crafts

movement, Brutalism and Danish modern design.

"The palette came from those design references: walnut, stone, glass and brass — materials that wear in, not out," Lew said. "The lighting is soft and architectural. Seating is built for comfort and structure. We introduced greenery in a restrained way to support the natural materials, and

we're continuing to (add) layers as the space settles."

Open since the summer, Lew considers Horsefeather Palo Alto a more refined version of the original San Francisco location, while sharing elements such as blue booths, brass and geometric woodwork.

Intentionality was also a design throughline for Menlo Park fine-dining restaurant Yeobo, Darling. Both its menu and interior reflect the Korean and Taiwanese heritage of owners Michael and Meichih Kim, formerly of Michelin-starred Maum.

The duo worked with Los Angeles-based design firm Preen to add cultural touchpoints that imparted elegance and minimalism. This includes sheer curtains that draw inspiration from private dining rooms in South Korea and Taiwan, custom tables with silverware drawers also seen in South Korean dining establishments and leather slings for guests to store their belongings. Since opening in June, guests have been enthusiastic about the curtains and soft lighting, though they remark on the compact spacing between tables.

"The closeness of the tables is an intentional part of the experience, and it nods to some of our favorite restaurants in New York," Michael Kim said. "We want our guests to sit close to each other to encourage spontaneous conversations and connections."

Fellow Menlo Park newcomer Café Vivant embraces minimalism through its design and cuisine. Café Vivant is the first restaurant by New York-based wine professionals Jason Jacobeit and



Colton Redwine

Horsefeather Palo Alto has a distinct vibe from its San Francisco counterpart.

Daniel Jung, who also operate Somm Cellars next door. Open since October, the owners are thrilled to be part of the zeitgeist of new restaurants along Santa Cruz Avenue.

Specializing in heritage poultry, Café Vivant's chickens arrive as a premium product.

"We treat the birds in a minimalist way, with skill and detail, while also preserving and enhancing the flavor and distinctiveness they already have," Jacobeit said. Menu offerings include heritage chicken nuggets, pharaoh quail and whole birds for two, such as the Delaware Chicken and French Pearl Guinea Hen.

Jacobeit and Jung worked closely with a longtime creative partner to ensure the retail and restaurant areas each have their own aura yet remain meaningfully connected. San Francisco-based Studio BANAA was the architect for the project. The result is a 5,000-square-foot space featuring a gridded ceiling and unified millwork throughout, providing a material connection and a glass-enclosed fine and rare wine room that offers views of the retail to restaurant space.

Ultimately, minimalism resonates with the owners as a reflection of their hospitality ethos.

"From an aesthetic perspective,

we deliberately edit things out and question, 'Does this add to the guest experience?'" Jacobeit said. "Let's leave everything you need and nothing you don't." ■

Email Contributing Writer Edwina Dueñas at eduenas3@protonmail.com.



Courtesy Temp & Time

Cafe and bakery Temp & Time in Menlo Park blends minimalism with Japanese design touches.

Milli Cafe, 299 Broadway, Millbrae; Instagram: @a.milli.cafe. Open Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday and Sunday from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Temp & Time, 1438 El Camino Real, Menlo Park; 650-833-8768, Instagram: @tempandtimecafe. Open Wednesday to Sunday from noon to 6 p.m.

Horsefeather, 855 El Camino Real Suite 151, Palo Alto; 650-648-4845, Instagram: @horsefeather.pa. Open Monday from 4-9 p.m., Tuesday to Thursday from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., Friday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., Saturday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Yeobo, Darling, 827 Santa Cruz Ave., Menlo Park; 650-665-7799, Instagram: @yeobodarlingrestaurant. Open Tuesday to Thursday from 5-9 p.m. and Friday and Saturday from 5-9:30 p.m.

Café Vivant, 720 Santa Cruz Ave., Menlo Park; 650-557-2244, Instagram: @cafevivant. Open Tuesday to Thursday from 4:30-8:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday from 4:30-9 p.m.



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JAKKI HARLAN
650.465.2180 LICENSE# 01407129



200 South Ranch Road, Pescadero
OFFERED AT \$1,950,000

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