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Looking back at a consequential year in Menlo Park

Housing and development led the news

By Arden Margulis

Menlo Park saw major shifts this year: New restaurants opened, long-planned development sites moved from concept to approval, downtown parking became the subject of a lawsuit and a future ballot measure, and city leaders spent much of the year navigating state housing requirements. Major choices were made and the city will be forever impacted by the events of 2025.

Housing and development

It was not a quiet year in Menlo Park: Beginning in January, there was one major topic on the minds of residents and city councilmembers: housing, and compliance with state housing law.

• Sunset magazine campus

In March 2024, Menlo Park's housing element was finally certified after the City Council approved amendments.

However, Menlo Park did not escape "unscathed," as Mayor Betsy Nash put it: The city received two builder's remedy applications. While one did not have any major movement in 2025, Willow Park, a proposed development at the former headquarters of Sunset magazine promising 665 housing units and more than 390,000 square feet of commercial space, moved forward.

In November 2025, Menlo Park deemed the project ineligible for streamlined approval and builder's remedy. If the project is not subject to builder's remedy, it will have to comply with many of Menlo Park's zoning regulations, which would likely kill the project in its current form. However, the developer and local advocates have signaled they are not backing down without a fight: YIMBY Law, an advocacy group, reported Menlo Park to the California Department of Housing and

See **MENLO PARK**, page 16



Andrea Gemmet

The office complex at 80 Willow Road in Menlo Park was designed for Sunset Magazine and served as its headquarters from 1951 to 2015.

What enthralled readers in 2025? License plate readers and more

Here's a look at what Almanac readers were interested in in 2025

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

Every week, The Almanac reports on news from Menlo Park, Woodside, Portola Valley, Atherton and surrounding communities, and these stories often generate thousands of pageviews and lots of engaged reading. There is no hard-and-fast rule that determines what kind of stories draw the most eyes, but breaking news and enterprising investigations always do well.

These are the 10 most-viewed stories on almanacnews.com in 2025, in order.

• Hundreds of agencies tap Atherton's surveillance system for feds; town fails to follow own rules

In July, Almanac staff writer Arden Margulis obtained public records from the town of Atherton showing that outside agencies had conducted millions of searches of Atherton's automatic license plate reader data. The news came to light amid growing concerns over federal immigration enforcement, when federal authorities were searching for local residents.

These findings revealed that for months Atherton had not been following its own policy,

which required the police commander to review every search the town receives. Outside agencies were also omitting their reason for the search request.

Margulis continued to dive into license plate reader networks for other local jurisdictions. Over the course of the year, he continued to obtain public records from Menlo Park, Redwood City and the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office.

• National Weather Service cancels Bay Area Tsunami advisory

A tsunami advisory was canceled for the Bay Area in July

after an 8.8-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula. While the advisory remained active for other coastal cities in California, the National Weather Service deemed the Bay Area and Central Coast as safe.

• Restaurant closure caused by 'impossible' struggles, owner says

A longstanding Italian restaurant in Menlo Park closed in June after 36 years of business. The owner blamed the loss of outdoor dining and inflation for his business troubles. Ristorante Carpaccio had been

the longest-running restaurant in downtown Menlo Park, open since 1988.

The restaurant's owner claimed that the city's decision to reopen a portion of Ryans Lane took away its outdoor dining space and made it less competitive with other downtown restaurants.

• Sushi Sam's is reborn with familiar hands in a new San Mateo location

When Sushi Sam's Edomata closed its doors in December 2024, the community feared it had lost a cultural epicenter

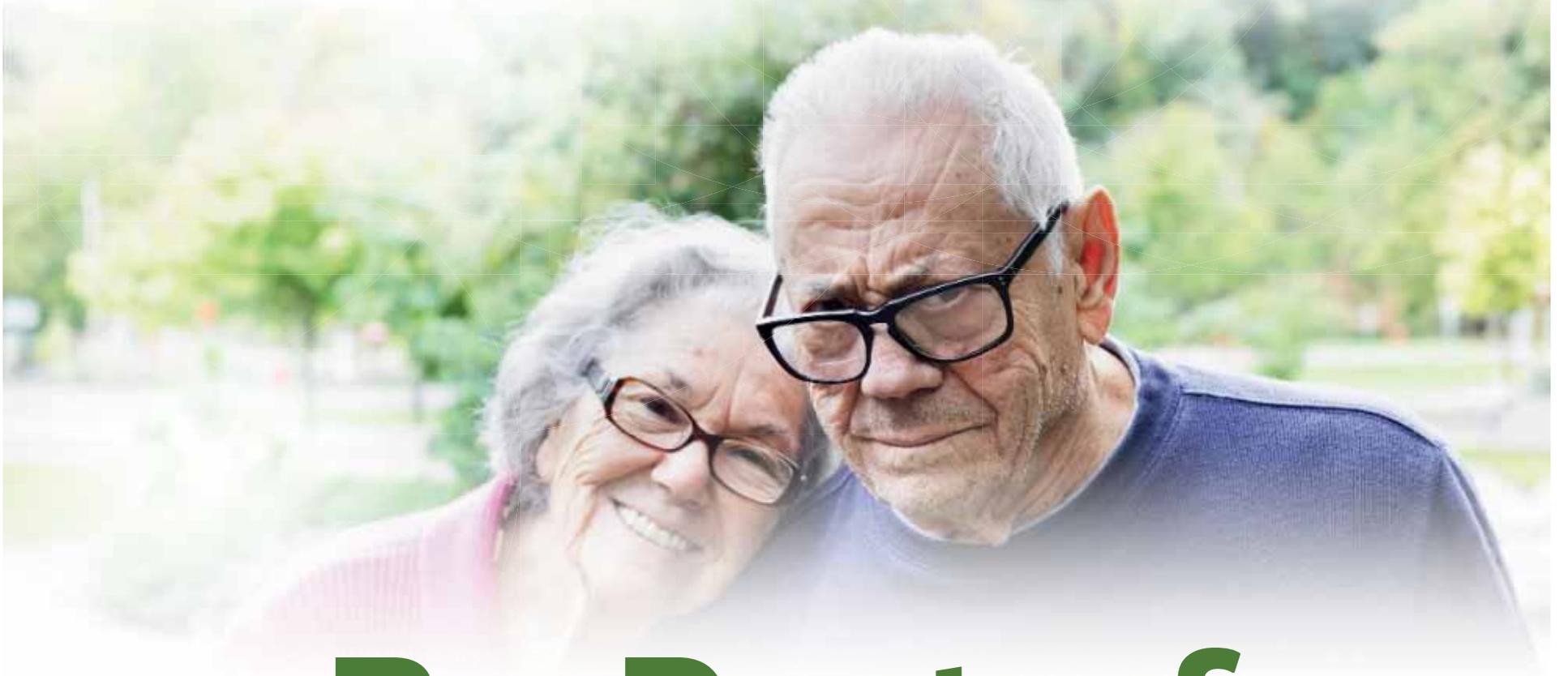
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Courtesy Emily Steinberger

Graduates yell "Woodside Wildcats" after Principal Karen van Putten asks the entire crowd to participate in the cheer at Woodside High School's graduation ceremony in Woodside on Friday, June 6, 2025.

Education in 2025: New beginnings and administrative tensions

Loss and celebration both evident in area schools

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

Schools across the Midpeninsula ended the 2024-25 academic year and entered the next with lots of excitement for future developments and new beginnings, as well as some anxiety around school district administrator positions.

In January, Las Lomitas Elementary School District Superintendent Beth Polito

went on leave immediately after the District Attorney's office launched an investigation into LLES's credit card spendings. Polito walked out of a closed session meeting on Jan. 15, in advance of her August retirement date and never returned. The district hired Erik Burmeister in February to serve as the new superintendent for the 2025-26 school year.

The local community also

mourned the loss of Dylan Taylor, a Menlo Park youth coach and educator who died after a collision with a garbage truck near Encinal Elementary School. The incident in May sparked serious considerations for increased bike safety and traffic enforcement from local school districts and law enforcement officials.

In June, The Almanac

See **EDUCATION**, page 18

Following up on the crimes that made headlines in 2025

Police responded to SLAC, scams and more

By Arden Margulis

In 2025, The Almanac published over 70 stories about criminal activity in the region, including coverage of a carnival worker who was charged with attempted murder and the raid of a gift store where law enforcement found chocolate with psychedelic mushrooms. As 2025 comes to a close, here are some updates on ongoing cases and a look back at

some of the developments.

Of course, 2025 ended with several major police incidents including a self-inflicted shooting near La Entrada Middle School and a false gunfire report one day later. Those cases were excluded as there is no active criminal case to provide an update on. Information on juvenile cases was hard to come by, and The Almanac hopes to publish further updates on major cases involving juveniles in 2026.

• Arrest made in attempted burglary at SLAC lab - Jan. 6

On Jan. 5, Ronald Simpson was allegedly seen with bolt cutters near SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory campus in unincorporated Menlo Park. When deputies from the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office arrived to investigate around 8:30 p.m., they saw a man matching Simpson's description.

See **CRIMES**, page 17

Progress in Portola Valley after a year of struggle

Mountain lion cubs, Little Leaguers were stars in town

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

The town of Portola Valley is navigating a financial crisis, amending its housing element and filling staffing vacancies as the new year begins.

The community experienced many highs in 2025 with a successful rescue of three mountain lion cubs, the hiring of a new town manager and the pure joy of watching the Alpine Little League's journey, which stopped just shy of the World Series.

In January, reports of a dead mountain lion on Portola Road had many residents worried about the possibility that the female lion was the mother of three cubs that were spotted on a local household's security camera footage. Concerned for the orphaned cubs, community members began to work together to search for them.

A week and a half later, a resident spotted them in the neighborhood and the neighbors quickly took action to keep the cubs secured until wildlife specialists could capture and rescue them. The cubs, named Fern, Thistle and Spruce, were taken to the Oakland Zoo for rehabilitation and were later placed in their permanent homes in the Phoenix and Birmingham zoos.

Portola Valley also welcomed its interim Town Manager Mark Linder, who helped the town pick up pace with its housing element and budgeting process. In July, the town appointed Darcy Smith its permanent town manager.

The town also faced some challenges when the community expressed disapproval for the Dorothy Ford Park site as an affordable housing option in its original housing element proposal. In March, the Town Council explored four different sites that could accommodate the needed amount of housing units.

In May, the council approved changes to Ford Field's site zoning ordinance to state that the housing element "shall exclude the existing Little League baseball field and the adjacent surface parking lot serving the baseball field." Portola Valley residents and Little Leaguers called the field a "town gem" as they asked the town to save the field from potential demolition.

The town's financial crisis began to stabilize throughout the year as the council adopted a new policy for the acceptance of donations and began to explore ways to enhance

See **PORTOLA VALLEY**, page 13



Courtesy Oakland Zoo

Three Portola Valley mountain lion cubs were rescued and transported to the Oakland Zoo for rehabilitation on Jan. 26, 2025.

Woodside prepares for next steps with new town manager, town center update

Mayor promised 'dynamic' year

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

The town of Woodside began 2025 prepared for a “dynamic” year as Mayor Brian Dombkowski put it. With a state-approved housing element, Town Center Area Plan update and new town manager on the agenda, the town had many things to consider throughout 2025.

In May, the town bid farewell to longtime Town Manager Kevin Bryant, who retired after 17 years in Woodside. The community celebrated Bryant's service with a luau-themed retirement party. During his last Town Council meeting, he received a recognition and proclamation from San Mateo County Supervisor Ray Mueller, state Sen. Josh Becker and state Assemblymember Marc Berman.

With Bryant's departure, the town appointed Jason Ledbetter to take on the role of Woodside's town manager. Hailing from Siskiyou County in rural Northern California, Ledbetter had big shoes to fill, but within months on the job, he had quickly become acquainted with the community and its needs.

The May Day Festival brought hundreds of people out to Woodside to celebrate its 103rd annual celebration. This year's theme was “Giddyup, Woodside!” Karen Seiko Arimoto-Peterson was honored with the title of grand marshal and Sharon LaCrosse Ryan as deputy marshal.

The town also made a big step forward in starting its Town



Magali Gauthier

Woodside Elementary School third graders perform during Woodside's May Day celebration on May 3, 2025.

Center Area Plan update. In July, the Citizen Advisory Committee was formed bringing together a group of 18 local residents to serve as representatives for their district. The town began to see more community engagement as Woodside's consultant team from Good City Company began hosting pop-up events and workshops to gauge the community's opinions on Town Center.

In August, the CAC held its first meeting to discuss potential constraints, ideas and opportunities that the town has to re-envision Town Center since its last amended plan in 1988. In October, the town held

its first community open house for residents to share their ideas on improvements and enhancements to Town Center, which is both a community gathering place and a tourist magnet.

Following in the footsteps of neighboring towns, Woodside continued to explore an ordinance that would prohibit the use of gas-powered leaf blowers and enforce the use of electric leaf blowers. In December, the town voted to exempt properties located in special conservation planning and open space zoning districts from the proposed ban. The ordinance will be voted will be voted on this month.

In its annual mayoral rotation, Woodside broke from tradition to renominate current Mayor Dombkowski for his second consecutive term. For more than 20 years, it was expected that the mayor pro tempore from the previous year would take on the mayoral seat, but Council member Paul Goeld deferred his turn to ask that Dombkowski serve again. Ironically, Woodside's last back-to-back mayor was Goeld, Dombkowski shared with The Almanac. ■

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After six-month elevator fix, jail visits resume

Authorities say it will pause again in 2026

By Arden Margulis

In-person visitation at Maguire Correctional Facility resumed on Dec. 26 after nearly six months without access due to a broken elevator, the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office announced last week. But the office warned that visitation will likely be halted again in 2026 once construction begins on a broader elevator replacement project.

The pause started in late June due to the sole visitation elevator breaking down. While the facility has other elevators, those are located in a secure part of the jail and it would be unsafe to allow the public to use, the Sheriff's Office previously told this news organization.

San Mateo County has known about issues with the elevators in the jail for years and the county determined the elevators needed to be replaced in 2023. In June 2025, before the elevators broke, the county board of supervisors approved a \$4.5 million contract to replace four elevators in the facility.

The Sheriff's Office said it took a while to fix the visitation elevator because multiple attempts had failed.

In August, the Sheriff's Office acknowledged the issue publicly after The Almanac reported that in-person visitation was suspended. At the time, at least one family said they were “tormented” by not being able to see their incarcerated family member. Fixin'

SMC, which advocates for reform of the Sheriff's Office, publicly called on the Sheriff's Office to find a workaround while repairs were underway.

“It appears from the outside as though the Sheriff's Office doesn't care enough to find a workaround,” Fixin' board chair Jim Lawrence said at the time.

The Sheriff's Office said that all stair wells were in secure areas of the facility, and even if they allowed families to use them, it may violate the Americans with Disabilities Act.

While in-person visitation was paused, families could still contact their loved ones for free through virtual visitation, but several families said it was not the same.

“I have tried video visit with my son, but that is a pathetic system when you only see his face in a little square the size of a postage stamp. It also glitches out if either one of us move our faces even an inch,” the mom told Fixin', according to a press release.

The Sheriff's Office said that when the jail's elevators are replaced later this year, in-person visitation will need to be paused again during parts of the construction, which could continue into the entirety of 2026. It did not provide an estimate of when in-person visitation will be paused or for how long. ■

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Bay Area health experts warn of ‘super flu’ this season

Officials urge people to get vaccinated, take precautions

By Angela Swartz

Health officials are warning people to be aware of a new “super flu” variant that’s leading to an increase in cases throughout the state.

Flu levels are high in Redwood City, Palo Alto and Sunnyvale, and are on the rise, according to Dec. 23 wastewater data from WastewaterSCAN.

The strain, a new variant of the flu known as “H3N2 Flu A subclade K,” is causing an “active, early” flu season, according to a Dec. 19 message from the California Department of Public Health.

The state is warning that there’s been a notable rise in positive tests of the flu among children and that although hospitalizations are low, they are expected to increase. A flu outbreak in Marin County kept nearly a third of the students in one school district home last week, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

Test positivity in the Bay Area jumped from 4.9% on Dec. 6 to nearly 9% a week later, according to state data. Hospitalizations, along with

emergency department visits, also rose during that period.

“Our most recent local data show that flu-related emergency department visits, test positivity and wastewater signals are rising, but they’re still mostly below the levels of the 2023-24 and 2024-25 seasons,” Faizus Amin, a health communications management analyst for San Mateo County, said in an email. “We typically see flu pick up around the holidays as people travel and gather indoors. It’s still a good time for the flu shot, and people can consider getting a COVID-19 vaccine at the same visit.”

Dr. Grace Lee, a pediatric infectious disease physician at Stanford Medicine Children’s Health, said in an email that Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital is beginning to see an increase in hospitalizations from the flu, but that it is still early in the season, which typically peaks between December and February.

“However, this year the season started earlier in Japan and Europe,” Lee said. “While initial reports from other countries indicate more severe disease than usual, we will need to continue to monitor cases in the U.S.”

Nearly 90% of the flu cases

reported nationally during the week ending Dec. 13 were the subclade K variant, according to the Centers for Diseases and Prevention. COVID-19 numbers remain low, according to local wastewater data.

Dr. Robert Hopkins Jr., medical director at the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, told TODAY that the mutated virus came too late for scientists to update the annual flu shot. The vaccine still offers protection from other influenza strains and reduces the severity of the illness, experts say.

“In every season, flu vaccines can offer protection against severe disease and complications from flu,” Lee said. “But individuals can only be protected if they receive the vaccine.”

From November through March, the San Mateo County Health Department is requiring people, with the exception of patients, to wear face masks in skilled nursing facilities. Santa Clara County also has a masking requirement during the flu season, but it applies to all “patient care areas of health care delivery facilities” and does not exempt patients.

Recommendations

Santa Clara County recommends a yearly flu vaccination for everyone 6 months and older, and particularly for groups that are more likely to get very sick from flu, including:

- People over 65 years old
- Young children
- Pregnant women (especially during the second or third trimesters) to protect infants from flu after they are born
- People who have health conditions such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease

Neil Maniar, the director of Northeastern University’s master of public health program, noted that it takes about two weeks to build a solid immune response to the vaccine. People do develop some immunity after a few days though.

“Flu is not the only respiratory viral infection circulating this winter, so we always recommend practicing good hand hygiene (wash with soap and water or use hand sanitizers), staying home when sick to prevent spreading germs to others, and staying up to date on vaccines,” said Lee of Stanford Medicine Children’s Health.

It’s best to stay home if you are sick, avoid close contact with people who are sick, wear a mask (especially in indoor, crowded places), cover coughs and sneezes, and wash hands frequently, a Santa Clara County Public Health Department spokesperson said in an email.

Pharmacies sell over-the-counter combination COVID-19, flu A and flu B tests. Some also offer testing in store.

People can also take prescription flu antiviral drugs — like Tamiflu — to help lessen symptoms or shorten the time they are sick with the flu. These medications work best if taken within a day or two of when symptoms start, and are recommended for those at higher risk of flu-related complications such as pregnant women and people with asthma, chronic lung disease, diabetes or heart disease, according to the CDC website.

For the latest respiratory virus data, go to Santa Clara County’s website, San Mateo County Health’s website and the state’s Department of Public Health website. ■

Angela Swartz is a Contributing Writer.

Independent game, toy stores thrive through holidays

The magic of gathering and the timelessness of play

By Hannah Bensen

At Gamelandia in Palo Alto, customers can buy classic fare like “Settlers of Catan,” a trading-based board game where players score points by building settlements, cities and roads. There are also newer games like “Root,” described by the store’s owner as a “strategic asymmetric war game with little woodland creatures.”

But the core part of Gamelandia’s identity, said CEO and owner Berry Hatfield, is the “experiential retail” component, where gamers can attend dozens of events per week. There are “Dungeons & Dragons” nights for kids ages 9 to 14 to play the classic table top board game, taking on various roles while world-building, puzzle-solving, and resolving conflict. There’s a weekly night to play “Riftbound,” a new strategic trading card game based on the video game League of Legends. The events, Hatfield said, cater to casual players and demographics that have been excluded from the traditional, hardcore gaming environments — children, women and LGBTQ people.

Hatfield opened the store with his wife in the twilight of the pandemic in 2022. Hatfield said they decided early on to invest in the experience side of the business — a strategic move that gave the store a “competitive edge” against larger retailers like Amazon and eBay, which undercut the cost of many games.

The store has seen consistent growth since they opened, Hatfield said. In the first year or so, Gamelandia provided an environment for people to come together after several years of quarantine and decreased socialization. Now, the store’s gaming events provide an escape for children and adults alike.

Parents love the model, Hatfield said. For \$20 — less than the cost of a babysitter — they can drop off their tween or teen at Gamelandia for four hours while the kids play D&D or Pokémon, another hugely popular trading card game. In storytelling games, kids can experiment with social norms and boundaries in a high-stakes, low-risk environment, Hatfield said.

Adults enjoy games for many of the same reasons, and the

store provides community and a respite from the day’s stresses.

“It really reinforced the need for people to have third space experiences,” said Hatfield. “The need for kids to have something fun they can look forward to doing in between school and going home, and for adults to be able to go out and do something... that isn’t work or hanging out at a bar.”

A few miles north at Cheeky Monkey in Menlo Park, dozens

of customers canvas the aisles before the holidays, looking at robotic dinosaurs, squishy fidget toys, scooters and learn-to-knit kits.

Opened in 1999 and purchased in 2002 by the current owners, Anna and Dexter Chow, Cheeky Monkey favors toys that have been rigorously tested for safety. Anna Chow said that many parents also want educational toys for their children, though nearly all toys

help develop fine motor skills or social-emotional learning for little kids.

“It’s not just ABCs and 1, 2, 3s,” Chow said. “Kids really need to play. It’s a very important part of their development, and we think of toys as the tools that they use to learn.”

Gamelandia and Cheeky Monkey are the rare independent game and toy stores on

See **TOY STORES**, page 14

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From the coast to the Peninsula, king tides reveal how wildlife adapt to extreme conditions

Here's what to look out for when king tides return Jan. 2-3

By Magali Gauthier

Rob Cala cautiously sidestepped a tide pool where eddies swirled around anemones, spiky urchins and hermit crabs at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in Moss Beach.

"What I love to share with people is we're standing on the bottom of the ocean right now," the San Mateo County park ranger supervisor said during an especially low tide in early December.

That day, the tide was about a foot or two farther out than normal thanks to a convergence of celestial events: the sun, Earth and moon aligning and the moon reaching its closest position to Earth in its orbit, all while the Earth approaches its closest point to the sun.

The result is a stronger-than-usual gravitational pull on the Earth that causes some of the highest tides — also known as king tides — and lowest tides of the year. They usually occur monthly throughout winter, with the next ones happening Jan. 2-3.

As the king tides reach their peak and creep deeper inland, they offer a glimpse of what sea level rise and the threats it poses may look like in the future. But, along with the low tides, they also expose how coastal and estuarine species adapt to extreme changes in their environment. It's a chance to observe wildlife, including some that are



Magali Gauthier

A great egret balances on a log during a king tide in the Bay just south of the Dumbarton Bridge on Dec. 6, 2025.

otherwise difficult to see, and learn about their behaviors.

"That's where that adaptation comes in," Cala said about the wildlife at Fitzgerald during low tides. "There's animals out there that are capable of breathing air, or at least resisting desiccating from the sun."

Limpets, a type of aquatic sea snail with a conical shell, can hold water in their shells to keep from drying out during low tides. Mussels will close shut to keep moisture in. Anemones out of the water will retract their tentacles and cover themselves in sand.

"It's like sunscreen — they're basically just trying to not dry out by exposure," Cala said. Having worked as a park ranger

for 15 years, Cala knows the wildlife intimately and is locally known for his photography of the tide pools and of the coast.

In one shallow pond at the reserve, an ochre sea star tucked itself into a bed of seaweed. Near its center, a cream-colored spot called a madreporite was clearly visible. Sea stars suck water through it into their vascular system to power their movements like gripping and feeding.

All around the star was a constellation of purple sea urchins, turban snails and hermit crabs. Bits of coralline algae, which look pink and crusty when underwater, were turning white and dying from exposure to air during the low tide.

In another tide pool, a group

of people took turns peering at an inches-long sea clown, a type of nudibranch or sea slug. It's easily discernible thanks to the vivid orange markings on its white body.

At the federally protected marine reserve, strict rules are in place to safeguard wildlife. Entering zones designated for the resident harbor seals is prohibited, as are dogs, as they can spread diseases to seals. Visitors shouldn't run on the reef, as there are slipping and tripping hazards, touch any creatures or remove anything — even abandoned shells.

"Use your eyeballs. Use your cellphone. Take lots of pictures," Cala said. "Understand that there's other people treading everywhere. The animals have a resiliency about them because they're hammered by air, sea, water and predation and everything. But at the same time, with everybody going around and grabbing everything, that can create a lot of problems."

On the other side of the Peninsula, Aja Yee, a programs coordinator at the San Francisco Bay Wildlife Society, echoed the need to give animals plenty of space when they come closer to shore during these tide events.

The San Francisco Bay Wildlife Society, a nonprofit partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and also referred to as a "friends group," assists USFWS with research, public outreach and education

in its wildlife refuges in and around the Bay Area, including the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. The local refuge includes Bair Island in Redwood City and large swaths of marshland throughout Menlo Park, Mountain View, San Jose and Fremont.

"When it is high tide, you know, they say give your distance," Yee said. "Give these animals some distance. They're not usually coming up to this place."

Around the Dumbarton Bridge, a number of ponds for waterfowl are part of the refuge. On the bridge's north side, the Ravenswood Trail was closed for duck hunting season, but northern pintails were diving for snacks right on the road's edge.

The animals were closer than they typically would be due to high water levels caused by the king tide. No binoculars were needed to spot a male pintail's characteristic long, dark tail sticking straight out of the water while its other half was submerged.

Northern shovelers floated about and could be easily distinguished from mallards. Both species have bright green heads, but the shoveler's long curved bill was unmistakable.

A rehabilitated marsh that was once an evaporation pond used for salt production is separated from the Bay by a levee on the

See **KING TIDES**, page 15

Belle Haven street closed due to flooding

Hamilton Avenue was shut to traffic on Christmas Eve

By Arden Margulis

Menlo Park issued a shelter-in-place alert after flash flooding on Hamilton and Carlton avenues early Christmas Eve morning. The flooded areas were closed to traffic throughout the morning and for much of the afternoon.

Menlo Park police said at about 3 p.m. that the street had been reopened.

The flood alert was sent around 5:20 a.m. Wednesday for the 1300 block of Hamilton Avenue and Carlton Avenue from Willow Road from the Menlo Park Police Department. The department later updated that only Hamilton Avenue between Willow Road and Henderson Avenue remained closed.

Police warned drivers to stay away and not to go around barricades or attempt to travel on closed roads, saying driving into flooded areas is extremely dangerous and could result in serious injury or death.

Menlo Park and the West Bay Sanitary District were working to clear drains on the road. Residents were asked to call 911 only for life-threatening emergencies or if an evacuation was needed. Much of the flooding had been resolved by 12:30 p.m. though the street closure remained in place for several hours after that, according to the police.

The city first warned of flooding in the area at 4:20 a.m. but upgraded the alert to a shelter-in-place warning about an hour later. At 9:45 a.m., the city said

no evacuations were needed but continued to ask residents to avoid the area.

The department advised residents to sign up for emergency alerts at menlopark.gov/smalerts.

The National Weather Service issued a flood watch for parts of California, including Menlo Park, through Friday evening. A wind advisory is also in effect from 8 p.m. Dec. 24 to 10 a.m. Dec. 25.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Palo Alto received 0.28 inches of rain in the past six hours. NOAA does not have rainfall data available for Menlo Park.

Across San Mateo County, some residents were without power on Christmas Eve. According to PG&E, 5,885



Courtesy city of Menlo Park

Flooding on Hamilton Avenue prompted road closures on Christmas Eve.

customers across 83 outages in the county were without electricity. About 4,000 of the affected customers are in unincorporated San Mateo County, including an outage affecting the Half Moon Bay Airport.

PG&E previously reported

that 48 customers in a largely commercial area of Bohannon Drive were without power due to the storm but the issue was resolved. ■

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

General Manager's Corner



Sergio Ramirez
General Manager

If 2025 felt like a flash, it was, at least here at West Bay Sanitary District. Our Admin, Engineering, Maintenance, and Water Quality teams have been busy upgrading systems and replacing infrastructure. In 2023, the District completed its 10-year Master Plan, and staff have been busy bringing the plan to life. This past year, the District replaced approximately 1.5 miles of pipeline and eliminated many high-frequency pipeline schedules. In addition, the District's in-house construction crew completed one hundred fifty-seven (157) spot repairs using traditional open-trench and trenchless pipeline point repairs.

The District also entered into its third Operation and Maintenance interagency agreement with the City of East Palo Alto to help operate and maintain the City's wastewater collection system. The agreement requires the District to hydro-clean and video-inspect the entire system to identify needed repairs and minimize sewer overflows. In just twelve months, District staff have cleaned the

City's entire wastewater collection system and have completed 80% of the pipeline video inspections. Just as West Bay does for its system, repairs are routed to engineering to prioritize the repairs and implement full pipeline replacement projects.

At this time last year, the District was beginning construction on the new Bayfront Recycled Water Facility behind Bedwell Bayfront Park. The new facility will bring recycled water to the Menlo Park and Atherton area and eventually to the Menlo Park Government Center, Burgess Park, as well as the Willow Village project. The District broke ground

by demolishing the decommissioned Menlo Park Sanitary District treatment plant, which was constructed in the 1940s and retired in the early 1980s. Demolishing the old facility made way to constructing the one million gallons per day reclamation water facility and distribution system. The new facility will take raw wastewater and convert it to Title XXII clean and clear reusable water for irrigation, cooling towers, commercial, and multi-family toilet flushing.

Another notable project was the installation of a vertical and horizontal ecotone levee system to protect the Bayfront Recycled Water Facility and the District's twenty-acre Flow Equalization and Resource Recovery Facility. The project received a \$4.7 million grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation and created natural upland habitat protection. The project raised the levee elevation to fifteen feet, four feet above the FEMA eleven-foot flood elevation. West Bay was recognized for this project by receiving the 2025 Project of the Year Award from the American Public Works Association (APWA).

In 2026, the District will work with local jurisdictions to address the rapidly growing Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) industry and permitting process. Unfortunately, just as in many other agencies across the state, several ADUs have been constructed without the benefit of the local sanitary district's review and the ADUs' impact on the wastewater system. The District will seek to rectify the permitting process and make sure previously installed ADUs are carefully accounted for and are permitted appropriately.

For more information on ADU permitting, reclaimed water, and other projects, please visit our website at WestBaySanitary.org. Thank you, and we look forward to another great year!



WEST BAY SANITARY DISTRICT HONORED WITH THE 2025 PROJECT OF THE YEAR AWARD

West Bay Sanitary District is proud to announce that it has received the **2025 Project of the Year Award** from the **American Public Works Association (APWA) Silicon Valley Chapter** in the **Sustainable/Green category**. The award ceremony was held in May 2025, where project partners, including Freyer & Laureta, Inc., were also acknowledged for their contributions.



A major part of this project included improvements to the Flow Equalization and Resource Recovery Facility. This facility plays an important role during heavy rain by managing stormwater and wastewater, preventing system overloads and protecting the surrounding environment.

The Levee Improvement Project was supported by a \$4 million grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). This funding made it possible for the District to strengthen essential infrastructure while protecting nearby wetlands and wildlife habitat.



Project of the Year Award

LET'S TALK NUMBERS – AND WELCOME OUR NEW FINANCE MANAGER.

We are excited to welcome **Vivian Chu**, our new **Finance Manager**, to the West Bay Sanitary District team! Vivian is a Certified Public Accountant with over 20 years of specialized experience in governmental accounting and finance. Throughout her career, Vivian has served multiple Bay Area cities, providing expertise in financial reporting, budget development, audit preparation, and compliance with GASB standards. Known for a strong command of public sector accounting practices, Vivian has played a key role in improving financial transparency, strengthening internal controls, and supporting long-term fiscal sustainability for local governments. We are pleased to have her!



Vivian Chu

BAYFRONT RECYCLED WATER FACILITY PROJECT

After a year of construction, the Bayfront Recycled Water Facility Project is quickly taking shape. The project will feature a state-of-the-art recycled water facility, a distribution pipeline, and an influent wastewater pumping station. The concrete bioreactor structure walls are now up, and interior work is set to begin soon. Construction is also underway on the Advanced Treatment and Headworks buildings. In addition, construction has begun on the two recycled water storage tanks. The total project cost is \$66 million, which includes a \$5 million grant. The remaining funding will be collected through recycled water connection fees paid by recycled water customers and redevelopment.

25 YEARS OF SERVICE AND COUNTING

This year, we recognized Jed Beyer for 25 years of dedicated service to the West Bay Sanitary District. A Menlo Park native, Jed, joined the District in 2000 and has worked across various areas of wastewater collections and environmental compliance. Over the years, he advanced into the role of Water Quality Manager, where he oversees industrial and commercial wastewater programs, recycled water operations, environmental reporting, and the District's Safety and Health Program.



Jed Beyer

Jed's technical knowledge and experience have played an important role in supporting regulatory compliance and protecting local waterways. We appreciate his long-term commitment and the steady contribution he has made to the District's operations.

Congratulations, Jed, on 25 years of service!

PLAN REVIEW HIGHLIGHTS

At West Bay Sanitary District, we are committed to providing excellent sewer services to all property owners we serve. This is done through reviewing plans thoroughly before a house, multifamily, office, or commercial building is set for occupancy. To prevent sewage spills, backflows, and increased sewer maintenance from happening, we make it a point to review these plan sets to the best of our ability so that in the end the District and most importantly, the citizens and property owners are all satisfied with how the sanitary sewer system operates.

Here are some examples of current projects being reviewed for sanitary sewer service and recycled water by the District.

1) Moxy Hotel is located at 3723 Haven Avenue in Menlo Park; this project is a 163-room hotel and consists of two stories of podium parking. The project will include a coffee shop, hotel rooms, and other lounge areas which could include an outdoor rooftop garden. The building and outdoor rooftop garden could be supplied with recycled water by the District.



Moxy Hotel

2) SRI Parkline located along 333 Ravenswood Avenue in Menlo Park, the old SRI research campus is being redeveloped into a space filled with various residences such as town homes, commercial offices, and other open space amenities. This could be another opportunity to serve the community with the District's recycled water.



SRI Parkline

CAPITAL PROJECTS PROGRESS REPORTS

For the Point Repair Project 3A, our contractor, Casey Construction, has started work in the Olive Easement area. Crews are installing approximately 250 feet of new 8-inch PVC sewer pipe, along with a new manhole that will help improve access and maintenance. This will help make future maintenance easier and improve the overall reliability of the sewer system.

They've also begun work on Elena Ave. and Park Ave. in Atherton. That portion of the project includes replacing some of the older terracotta clay sewer pipelines with new 12-inch, 10-inch, and 8-inch PVC pipelines. These updates are part of our ongoing effort to improve aging infrastructure and help prevent issues before they occur. West Bay Sanitary District aims to replace approximately \$5 to \$10 million of pipeline infrastructure each year.

For a sewer emergency or sewer-related problems, please call us first! You can reach us day or night at (650) 321-0384. If the main public sewer line is blocked, only West Bay has the authority to clear the system. If the public sewer main line is clear, we may advise you to contact a plumbing contractor to resolve the issue on your property.

Fired assistant sheriff rehired by new San Mateo County sheriff

Monaghan was one of several current and former Sheriff's Office members who accused Corpus of retaliation

By Bay City News Service

San Mateo County Sheriff Ken Binder has appointed Ryan Monaghan as assistant sheriff, the same position Monaghan was fired from under former Sheriff Christina Corpus.

"I'm excited to share that Ryan Monaghan is returning to the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office to serve in the key role of Assistant Sheriff of Support Services," Binder said in a statement released on Dec. 24.

Monaghan is the latest member of Corpus' former executive team to be rehired by Binder, who was appointed to the role of sheriff last month after the Board of Supervisors ousted Corpus in October, concluding a year of scandal that rocked



Courtesy San Mateo County Sheriff's Office
Assistant Sheriff Ryan Monaghan.

the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office.

Corpus was fired after a judge found multiple grounds for dismissal and after voters

authorized the board to remove her. Among the allegations were that she was neglecting her duties as sheriff by engaging in retaliation and misusing public funds by having a conflict of interest in the hiring of her former chief of staff.

Monaghan was one of several current and former Sheriff's Office members who accused Corpus of retaliation.

He was fired from his assistant sheriff position by Corpus in September 2024, a move that Corpus said was due to growing mistrust in him.

She accused him of leaking information to County Executive Mike Callagy, who subsequently sought to block Monaghan's firing, citing concerns that it could be seen as unlawful retaliation for

cooperating in an independent investigation into mounting claims of misconduct by Corpus.

After his firing, Monaghan remained a county employee working in the District Attorney's Office, where he led a county-wide, multi-agency effort to combat human trafficking.

As assistant sheriff of support services under Binder, Monaghan will oversee the Professional Standards Bureau in the Sheriff's Office, which manages hiring and internal affairs investigations. He will also support the Fiscal Services Bureau, the Forensic Laboratory and the Technical Services Unit.

"I'm honored to return to the Sheriff's Office and consider it

a privilege to work alongside the dedicated men and women of the Sheriff's Office and to serve the diverse communities that make San Mateo County such a remarkable place," Monaghan said in a statement.

Monaghan has more than three decades of law enforcement experience. He served as Tiburon's police chief after spending 27 years in the San Mateo Police Department.

He will be joining alongside Undersheriff Chris Hsiung, who was also a member of Corpus' former executive team. Hsiung abruptly stepped down from his role as Corpus' undersheriff a few months before the turmoil in the Sheriff's Office entered the public eye.

Monaghan began his duties last week. ■

Riders can now tap credit, debit cards to ride Bay Area public transit

Payment system upgrade will also mean more features for Clipper Card users

By Andres Jimenez Larios / Bay City News Service

The long-awaited rollout of the new generation of the Clipper Card payment system began in December, when Bay Area travelers were 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. ■

TOWN OF WOODSIDE
2955 WOODSIDE ROAD, WOODSIDE, CA 94062

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE TOWN OF WOODSIDE will hold a hybrid public hearing allowing for the option to attend by teleconference/video conference or in person in Independence Hall, 2955 Woodside Road, Woodside, CA on **Wednesday, January 14, 2026, at 6:00 PM**, to consider:

125 Farm Road
Timothy Chappelle

ASRB2025-0016; XMAX2025-0009; GRAD2025-0003
Planner: Sarah Filipe, Associate Planner

Presentation and consideration of a proposal, requiring Formal Design Review (ASRB2025-0016), to construct a new single family main residence with an attached garage, detached garage, pool house, gym, detached Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU), swimming pool, sport court, vehicle gate, fencing, and associated site improvements on a vacant lot.

The project includes a Maximum Residence Size Exception (XMAX2025-009) and a Grading Exception (GRAD2025-0003) for site grading in excess of 1,500 cubic yards. The Planning Commission will consider the ASRB's recommendation on the project design and take action on all requested entitlements.

The project is Categorically Exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to §15303(a), which includes a single-family residence; and, Section 15303(e), which includes accessory structures.

The application materials are available for public review by contacting Sarah Filipe at sfilipe@woodsideca.gov.

All interested parties are invited to submit written comments to jpaping@woodsideca.gov and/or attend in person or virtually at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86068472736> and give testimony.

OBITUARIES

Local residents who died recently include:

Carol Massard, 96, of Rancho Mirage, who had lived in Menlo Park and Palo Alto before moving to Southern California in 2013, who worked as a medical secretary at Harvard Medical School and then at Stanford Medical School, who did voiceover work for WBZ-TV in Boston, who worked as a real estate agent for Taylor Properties in Menlo Park, and who loved to travel, died on Nov. 29, 2025.

Mary Martinson, 95, of Palo Alto, who was born

in White Plains, N.Y., who lived in San Francisco before settling in Palo Alto, who worked as a nursery school teacher, managed the print department at a tech company and then edited math textbooks, who loved to travel, who enjoyed Bay Area adventures with the "Gadabouts" group, monthly play readings and book gatherings, died on Nov. 21, 2025.

To read full obituaries, leave remembrances and post photos, go to Lasting Memories at AlmanacNews.com/obituaries. ■



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Give back locally

WITH A GIFT TO THE HOLIDAY FUND

Contributions to the Holiday Fund go directly to programs that benefit Peninsula residents. Last year, Almanac readers and foundations contributed a record \$366,000 from more than 150 donors for the 10 agencies that feed the hungry, house the homeless and provide numerous other services to those in need.

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

DONATE ONLINE:
AlmanacNews.com/holiday-fund



The organizations below provide major matching grants to the Holiday Fund.



Rotary Club of Menlo Park

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation

Boys & Girls Club of the Peninsula

Provides after-school academic support, enrichment, mentoring and mental health services for low-income youth.

Ecumenical Hunger Program

Provides emergency food, clothing and household essentials to individuals and families in need.

Fair Oaks Community Center

Helps individuals and families meet their most basic needs, offering homeless services and prevention, food distribution, transportation, rental and utility assistance, shelter referrals, and emergency support.

Haven Family House

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

Health Connected

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

Literacy Partners

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

Peninsula Food Runners

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

Ravenswood Family Health Center

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

St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room

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

St. Francis Center

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

Upward Scholars

Supports low-income adults by providing them with financial support, tutoring, and other assistance so they can continue their education and qualify for higher-paying jobs.

Please consider donating online, which enables your gift to be processed immediately. The secure website is:
AlmanacNews.com/holiday-fund

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The Almanac



The Almanac Holiday Fund

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The Almanac Holiday Fund

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Almanac Holiday Fund Donor List

As of December 29th, donors have contributed
\$135,131 to the Holiday Fund.

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Literacy Partners brings community together through education

Working toward a more literate community

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

Literacy Partners Menlo Park is bridging the socioeconomic divide of Silicon Valley by promoting literacy for all ages and members of the community. By funding local educational programs, the nonprofit aims to provide everyone with the opportunity to learn, improve their careers and do their best in school.

In 2025, Literacy Partners provided more than \$75,000 in grants to support organizations serving toddlers to seniors. These include the speech and language program at All Five, classroom grants for teachers through East Palo Alto Kids and English proficiency night classes through the Rosalie Rendu Center. Since Literacy Partners was founded in 2020, it has supported about seven local organizations and distributed more than \$300,000 in grants.

Through its various partnerships, Literacy Partners is also able to help community members find their footing in local volunteerism rooted in education and dissemination of literacy, said President Mike Goodkind. It opens up opportunities for people to help English learners in the community through tutoring and career training.

“It gives them an anchor in the community that’s beyond just their job or the more casual social connections,” he said. “I think it also helps them understand the community better.”

Especially within the diverse population of Silicon Valley, Goodkind explained how volunteering can help bring two sides of the community together



Courtesy Literacy Partners - Menlo Park

Azucena Sandoval, left, and Menlo Park resident Betty Meissner, met as a learner-tutor pair for more than 10 years with the Menlo Park Public Library’s Project Read, funded by the recently renamed Literacy Partners - Menlo Park.



Donations to the
Holiday Fund can be made
at [AlmanacNews.com/
holiday-fund](http://AlmanacNews.com/holiday-fund).

— wealthy tech employees and low-income workers.

The organization aims to facilitate opportunities for community members to help each other and at the same time, bridge the wealth and English literacy gap.

“Not everybody in Silicon Valley is a trillionaire. I know I’m not, so I get that from personal experience but we’re creating a place for people to give and we’re a terrific place to get started,” Goodkind said.

He also said he believes that increased diversity is useful in education and volunteering offers more opportunities for people to have “meaningful interactions that allow them to see other people’s challenges on a day to day basis.”

Literacy Partners is entirely run by volunteers and is funded by individual donors and corporations. Goodkind said the biggest grants come from former tutors, community members and family foundations.

For more information on how to support Literacy Partners visit mightycause.com/organization/Literacypartnersmenlopark. If you are interested in volunteering, contact Goodkind at m.goodkind@literacypartnersmenlopark.org. ■

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

PORTOLA VALLEY

continued from page 5

revenues. Finance Director Tony McFarlane helped the town stabilize its budget and is currently completing audits that were long overdue.

In May the community came together once more, this time for a difficult search. Margaret “Elaine” McKinley reportedly went missing while on a hike with her friends at Windy Hill Open Space Preserve. McKinley, 79, has dementia and still has not been found. San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office and its search and rescue

team continue to look for her — including in a large search in December — but have not found McKinley.

On Alpine Road, a new affordable and supportive housing project opened in June, welcoming tenants into the complex. Willow Commons provides adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities with supportive housing that encourages social interaction, community and autonomy.

In August, the Portola Valley community was watching closely as its Alpine Little League All-Stars’ went on to compete in the West Region Tournament

in San Bernardino. Despite their loss against Fullerton’s Golden Hill Little League in an elimination game, the young players returned home as winners in the community.

The year ended with an acknowledgement of Councilmember Judith Hasko’s achievements during her time as mayor for 2025. She handed off the reins to Craig Taylor who previously served as vice mayor and will hold the mayoral seat for 2026. ■

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



George Geoffrey Westerfield

June 6, 1958 – December 1, 2025

George Geoffrey Westerfield (Geoff), 67, passed away peacefully surrounded by family on December 1, 2025, at Mission House, a hospice home, in Redwood City, California.

Geoff was born in Stamford, Connecticut, the beloved son of Putney and Anne Westerfield. Raised in Greenwich, Connecticut, and summers enjoyed in Watch Hill, RI., he graduated from Brunswick School in Greenwich, Connecticut, in 1976. After high school, the Westerfield family moved to Hillsborough, California. Geoff then attended Santa Clara University, where he received a Bachelor of Arts, in History.

After graduation, Geoff began his career at The Gap, working in the technical support division before moving into a managerial role overseeing local stores. Pursuing his keen interest in technology, he joined ComputerWare, specifically the MacSource store in Palo Alto, California. ComputerWare was an influential, Macintosh-only storefront that quickly became a vital gathering spot for the early Apple community and served as the model for future computer retail. During his tenure, Geoff was a core part of its expansion into a regional chain of stores throughout the Bay Area and became vice president of merchandising. In this role, he personally vetted every product stocked, ensuring the store's reputation for quality, and managed key vendor relationships. He helped make ComputerWare special, especially during MacWorld Expo. After, he co-founded The Marin Mac Shop, an Apple product distributor, which preserved the "clubhouse" feel and the strong third-party ecosystem that ComputerWare had championed. During these years, Geoff focused on several tech investments which ultimately enabled him to pursue other interests.

Foremost amongst his interests was a lifelong interest in basketball, both as a player and a fan. In retirement, after volunteering and assisting teams, he became a varsity boys' associate head basketball coach at Woodside Priory School, culminating in the Division IV State Championship. He delighted in designing plays to outwit taller teams from larger schools. Inspired by the great coach John Wooden, Geoff was equally concerned with imparting life lessons, promoting sportsmanship, teamwork, and perseverance. Woodside Priory was indeed a second home to Geoff. He loved the beautiful campus environment, the faculty, the students and families, and above all, its coaches and players.

Family and friends were at the core of Geoff's life. Incorporating his love of photography, he spent hours documenting their lives through countless photographs, and family beach week vacation videos. He shared his love of natural beauty, specifically the big waves of the Pacific coastline, and the stunning views of Yosemite and Lake Tahoe. His musical tastes were expansive ranging from classical to rock, especially his favorite, The Grateful Dead.

Another passion for Geoff was his ability to design and plant gardens. He created several gardens, many with cutting flowers, zinnias his favorite. Each spring, he planted his vegetable garden, sharing zucchini, tomatoes, and strawberries with family, friends and neighbors. Geoff quietly brought beauty and joy into our lives.

Recently, Geoff savored his newest role as a grandfather to Vigo and Maeve, spending quality time teaching Vigo the debatable 'fact' that "basketball is the greatest sport," how to hold a camera, to water properly, and how to grow carrots and strawberries from seedlings. He often spent time simply holding Maeve. The births of Vigo and Maeve brought immense joy.

Above all, Geoff had a deep love of family. He is survived by his wife of 37 years, Renee of Menlo Park, CA, and their children, Mark Westerfield (Alyssa) of Redwood City, CA; Emily Westerfield of Menlo Park, CA; grandchildren Vigo and Maeve Westerfield; his mother Anne M. Westerfield of Portola Valley, and his brother F. Bradford Westerfield of Vero Beach, FL; his sister Clare Evans (Jim) of Burlingame, CA, and their children Katie Evans of Palo Alto, CA, and Taylor Evans of Carlsbad, CA.

Celebration of Life will be held Saturday, January 17, at 11:00 a.m. at the Priory Chapel on the Woodside Priory Campus, 302 Portola Road, Portola Valley. All are welcome to honor Geoff's life.

Those who wish to honor Geoff's life may do so with a contribution to makeagift.ucsf.edu/hemetissuebank or St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

PAID OBITUARY



Seeger Gray

A shelf of board games at Cheeky Monkey Toys in Menlo Park.

TOY STORES

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the Mid-peninsula. They are invested in the timeless pastime known as play. Hatfield said that one definition of play is that it cannot have real world consequences and the participants must not want it to end. And play doesn't need to end with childhood: both Hatfield and the Chows said that adults are a part of their customer base.

The stores have navigated shifting economic conditions with different business models. With its decades of experience in Menlo Park, Cheeky Monkey has weathered economic developments including the rise of e-commerce, the 2008 global financial recession, and shifting federal policies from six presidential administrations. More recently, the Covid-19 pandemic brought an unexpected boon in sales in 2021 as customers had pent up demand for in-person shopping and for gifts that helped them reconnect with people.

In the last year, as President Donald Trump levied a range of tariffs on trading partners including Canada, Mexico, the European Union and China, Dexter said the policy has created extra work as the store figures out what costs to absorb and how much they are forced to pass on to customers by raising prices. At Gamelandia, Hatfield said the store tried to stock up on games that would be impacted in advance and had to modestly raise prices, but decided not to carry merchandise if the publisher was passing on the full brunt of the tariff burden to sellers.

Coupled with the tariffs this year have been layoffs in various industries — including in tech companies with offices in Silicon Valley like Meta, Amazon, Intel, and Oracle — that have led to increased economic uncertainty. The changing macroeconomic environment has impacted Cheeky Monkey and Gamelandia a bit differently.

Sales at Cheeky Monkey have been a bit more challenging compared to past years. While Menlo Park's high-income earners tend

to have more disposable income and the toy market is more resilient than other industries, the Chows said some spenders are behaving more cautiously. Cheeky Monkey relies on holidays like Christmas and birthday parties year-round to drive business. During a recession, Anna Chow said that families will sometimes tell partygoers not to bring gifts, while the business tends to do better during economic booms.

"When things are well, people do tend to throw a little more lavish parties, and that kind of extends to their kids as well," Dexter Chow said. "So they'll go bigger on both gifts that they're giving, or sometimes even birthday party favors. They'll go bigger with what favors they're giving out because they're just feeling a little more flush and confident."

Gamelandia tends to see the inverse trend: the games and collectibles market is frequently thought to be countercyclical to economic trends, Hatfield said. This means that the gaming market tends to do better, or at least remain recession resilient, during economic downturns because it provides a relatively cheap form of escapism and social connection. With games ranging from around \$10 to \$60, the value proposition of gaming, Hatfield said, is high since you can play with several friends and play the game week after week. Some customers have even told Hatfield that they went to Gamelandia after getting laid off or went through a rough personal period.

"Anytime I walk by a room and there's 30 people in there having fun and talking, and there's a lot of energy and buzz, and they're engaged in something that isn't one of the 18 things they're stressed out about that day," Hatfield said. "I mean, it doesn't get better than that." ■

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.

KING TIDES

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south side of the bridge. Water levels here are controlled and tidal fluctuations are minimal, so the water was only a little higher than it usually is.

Still, birds were hunting for food within view of the trail. Egrets nipped at each other as they competed for limited space on the narrow bank. A few Forster's terns hovered above the surface before tucking their wings and diving into the water in a flash. Amid all the action, a bat ray circled the area, its fins breaching the surface every few seconds.

On the Bayside, water levels were significantly higher than usual and the bank was fully submerged, covering wide swaths of pickleweed, a native low-growing shrub with red tips. A great egret balanced on a log bobbing against a water gate as it tried to snap up fish from the rushing waters.

"It can swim. It flies," Yee said of the great egret. "But it doesn't usually hang out in a big pond of water like a duck. It's not designed to sit there in the water and paddle around it. It's designed to stand at the water's edge with its long legs and then find its prey and pick it out of the water."

The Bay's wetlands are also home to the endangered Ridgway's rail and the salt-marsh harvest mouse (though none live in this specific part of the refuge). These rare species prefer to hide deep in the low-lying Bay plants. The king tides can force the animals to higher ground, exposing them to people, dogs and predators.

Back on the coast at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, hushed whispers rose as a red octopus the size of a human palm was spotted crawling right next to someone's foot. The light was fading as the sun set, and the octopus was nearly indistinguishable from the color of the rock.

Cala said the creatures are known to slither across the reef during low tide, "presumably looking for food." The creature hid under a large bundle of seaweed as a group of nature enthusiasts eagerly tried to catch a glimpse of it.

A short time later, cheers erupted close by. A red six-rayed sea star, along with another nudibranch, had been sighted.

"There's spots you can sit and watch and the animals start to reveal themselves," Cala said. "It's very meditative, actually."

Hot spots and approximate timings for highest and lowest tides

Tide predictions can be found at the National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration website.

Pillar Point in Half Moon Bay (and the nearby Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in Moss Beach)

Jan. 2 highest tide: 7.16 feet expected around 8:40 a.m.

Jan. 2 lowest tide: -1.79 feet expected around 4:10 p.m.

Jan. 3 highest tide: 7.14 feet expected around 9:30 a.m.

Jan. 3 lowest tide: -1.77 feet expected around 5 p.m.

Oyster Point Marina/Park in South San Francisco

Jan. 2 highest tide: 8.81 feet expected around 10:15 a.m.

Jan. 2 lowest tide: -1.66 feet expected around 5:40 p.m.

Jan. 3 highest tide: 8.77 feet expected around 11:10 a.m.

Jan. 3 lowest tide: -1.68 feet expected around 6:40 p.m.

Palo Alto Baylands

Jan. 2 highest tide: 9.60 feet expected around 10:30 a.m.

Jan. 2 lowest tide: -1.13 feet expected around 6:55 p.m.

Jan. 3 highest tide: 9.55 feet expected around 11:25 a.m.

Jan. 3 lowest tide: -1.14 feet expected around 7:45 p.m.

Coyote Point Recreation Area in San Mateo

Jan. 2 highest tide: 9.24 feet expected around 10:15 a.m.

Jan. 2 lowest tide: -1.68 feet expected around 5:50 p.m.

Jan. 3 highest tide: 9.19 feet expected around 11:10 a.m.

Jan. 3 lowest tide: -1.70 feet expected around 6:35 p.m.

Upcoming king tides events

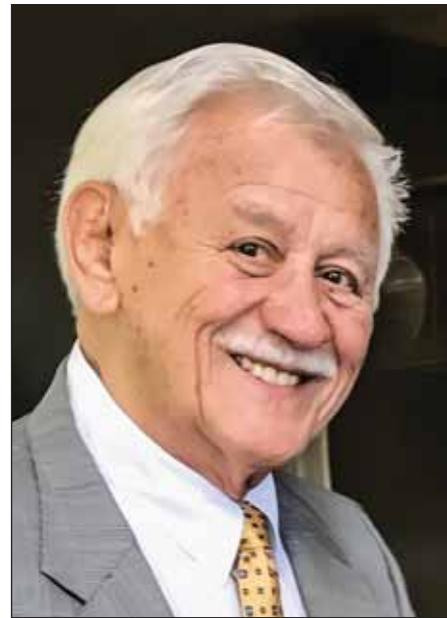
Keep an eye on the event pages for Palo Alto-based Environmental Volunteers and California State Parks, as they previously have held king tides guided walks.

Jan. 2, 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District docents will lead a walk on the Bay Trail at Ravenswood Preserve and discuss how the king tides impact the marsh, the ongoing restoration of these wetlands and the species that inhabit them.

Jan. 3, 11 a.m.-noon The San Francisco Bay Wildlife Society is hosting a guided walk at Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge's Ravenswood Unit. Attendees can expect to hear about how king tides can give us a glimpse into sea level rise.

Jan. 3, 11 a.m.-noon The San Francisco Bay Wildlife Society is also hosting a guided walk at Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge's Alviso Unit. Similarly to the Ravenswood event, attendees can expect to hear about the high tides, sea level rise and habitat restoration. ■

Magali Gauthier is a Contributing Writer.



Joseph Cindrich

September 11, 1934 – October 24, 2025

Dr. Joseph Cindrich, 90, of Menlo Park, died peacefully at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Palo Alto on October 24, 2025. He is survived by his dear companion, Alberta (Bear) O'Brien. Joe was predeceased by his wife Karen (2015), his father and mother, Anthony (1954) and Agnes (1958); sisters Katherine Kasmarcak (2011), Anne Chromey (2000), and Mary Alice Lapsevich (2018); and brothers Mike Cindrich (2011), George Cindrich (2018), and Paul Cindrich (2022).

Joe and Karen were married for forty-four years until her death in 2015. Joe had a daughter from a previous marriage, Tanja Marie Hayes, who died in 2016 in Bloomington, Indiana. He is survived by two grandchildren, Santana Hayes and Jance Hunt, both residing in Indiana, his goddaughter, Isabel Stumphauzer, as well as numerous nieces and nephews.

Joe was born in Republic, PA on September 11, 1935. His parents were both immigrants from Yugoslavia (later Croatia) and his father was a coal miner. Joe briefly worked in the mines. However, his passion for football and desire to further his education served to propel him to accomplish many great things during his career. Joe was an outstanding high school football player at Redstone High School and was recognized for his play with many honors, including All-Conference and All-State. After receiving multiple college scholarship offers to play football, Joe attended the University of Pittsburgh and later transferred to the University of Tennessee.

Following the death of his father, Joe joined the United States Marines in 1955 to help support his family and serve his country. Joe played football for the Marines until a knee injury sidelined him. He then served as a football coach and embarkation and supply officer for the Marines on the islands of Japan and Okinawa. Following his military service, Joe completed his BS and MS degrees at Indiana University. Joe started his professional career as a faculty member at Western Illinois University, where he met his wife, Karen. Joe earned a doctorate in Public Health from the University of Maryland in 1975 and later held a faculty position at San Diego State University before serving in several roles within the federal government in Washington, D.C.

Joe served nine years as Health and Safety Manager at the U.S. Department of

Agriculture, where he improved safety standards for the meat, poultry, and grain industries. In 1987, he moved to the San Francisco Bay Area to become Regional Administrator for Region IX at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, leading efforts to enact seatbelt, DUI, and motorcycle helmet laws. Joe testified on key legislation numerous times and earned recognition from national and local leaders. He retired in 1998 after 21 years of service in Federal government.

Joe, a proud Croatian American, co-founded the National Federation of Croatian Americans (NFCA) and served as its President during the 1994 Croatian and Serbian war. Joe also spent over 25 years on the Executive Board of the Croatian Scholarship Fund, helping more than 425 Croatian students earn university degrees. In 1996, President Clinton and Vice President Gore honored Joe at the White House where he was recognized for his work both at the NFCA and with the Croatia Scholarship Fund. In 2018, Joe received the NFCA Lifetime Achievement Award in New York City for his support of Croatia by the then President, Mrs. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic.

Joe chaired the Palo Alto Elks Lodge Board of Trustees for five years and was integral in developing a strategic plan to build a new facility and allow the Lodge to prosper for future generations. Dedicated to education and health, Joe remained active playing handball into his 80s. Joe was also an excellent gin rummy player and loved Croatian tamburitza music.

Throughout his life, Joe remained grounded by his humble coal mining roots. Joe always claimed, "I had the advantage of growing up disadvantaged!!"

The Cindrich family extends heartfelt thanks to all staff at the Palo Alto VA Hospital for their care and to all family and friends for the prayers, kindness, and friendship shared during this time. A celebration of life service will be held in Menlo Park in early 2026. Joe loved his mother very much and he will be interred in the Pennsylvania cemetery where his parents are in Spring 2026.

Memorial donations may be made to the following: Croatian Scholarship Fund, Box 290, San Ramon, CA 94583; or Capuchin Franciscans, 1345 Cortez Ave, Burlingame, CA 94010.

PAID OBITUARY

TOP STORIES

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for sushi on the Peninsula. Luckily, the legacy of the restaurant was revived with the opening of Sushi Edomata in a new San Mateo location. The new restaurant is headed by the nephew, niece and son-in-law of the retired owner of Sushi Sam's.

• **Familiar face buys USGS campus in Menlo Park for \$130M**

The Presidio Bay Ventures, the group behind Springline in Menlo Park, bought the former U.S. Geological Survey campus in Menlo Park for over \$137 million during a bid auction in April. The group's purchase of the property was lauded by city officials who hope the site can help fulfill the state-mandated housing allocation.

• **Why two moms are opening a new wine and cheese bar in their Menlo Park neighborhood**

Two Menlo Park neighbors joined together to open Haven Wine & Cheese, an eatery and



Courtesy Christina Schmidhofer Photography

People drink wine at Ristorante Carpaccio in Menlo Park. The restaurant's closure brought a lot of readers to almanacnews.com.

bar located at 1925 Menalto Ave. in Menlo Park. The store features a retail section where patrons can purchase cheese, wine bottles and grab-and-go food items such as sandwiches, parfaits, chia seed puddings and charcuterie boxes.

• **Here's how to spend Labor Day weekend in Silicon Valley**

The Almanac shared 19 different community events worth attending during Labor Day weekend. As many people looked forward to an extra day off on a long summer weekend, The Almanac offered a list of

free events hosted across the Peninsula ranging from concerts, plant exchanges, art fairs, festivals and cookouts.

• **Claims against Sheriff's Office rack up**

Claims and lawsuits against the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office began to pile up after voters approved giving the county Board of Supervisors the power to remove then-Sheriff Christina Corpus from office.

In April, Assistant Sheriff Ryan Monaghan, who had been fired by Corpus in September,

filed a \$5 million claim against Sheriff's officials, claiming retaliation. On Dec. 17, Monaghan was reappointed to his former position as assistant sheriff by newly appointed Sheriff Ken Binder.

In another claim, County Executive Mike Callagy filed a \$10.5 million claim against Corpus. Union official Carlos Tapia, who was wrongly arrested for timecard fraud, also filed a claim against Corpus, detailing information about the former sheriff and her former Chief of Staff Victor Aenlle's efforts to dismiss rumors about their alleged affair.

Aenlle also filed a claim against the county alleging he should have been represented in a separate lawsuit alleging retaliation.

• **Early results show ballot measure to oust sheriff appears headed to landslide victory**

Results from a San Mateo County special election, known as Measure A, passed by a landslide in early March. By 11 p.m. on election night, 85% of voters opted to approve the measure. With Measure A approved, the

San Mateo County Board of Supervisors was granted the power to remove former San Mateo County Sheriff Christina Corpus. After a series of investigations and legal processes, the board unanimously voted to remove Corpus from her position on Oct. 14.

The county appointed Ken Binder as sheriff on Nov. 12.

• **Here's what a highly acclaimed Korean chef would buy from Jagalchi, the Bay Area's newest Korean food**

The opening of Jagalchi, a 75,000-square-foot Korean food complex, was long-awaited and brought huge crowds to long aisles of products. Shopping in the Daly City store can be overwhelming. So, food editor Adrienne Mitchell walked through the store with acclaimed Korean chef Michael Kim to get his opinion on what he would buy at the Bay Area's newest Korean supermarket. His selection of items varied from snacks, teas, alcohol, produce, seafood and more. ■

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

MENLO PARK

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Community Development and to the California Attorney General's Office.

• **Parking lot affordable housing**

As part of its housing element, Menlo Park said it would build at least 345 affordable housing units on downtown parking lots. However, business owners and some community members formed a group in opposition to the plan called Save Downtown Menlo. By the end of 2024 and into early 2025, Save Downtown Menlo had launched a petition to stop the project, started fundraising for a legal defense fund and organized people to show up at council meetings.

It did not stop in 2025. In

April, Save Downtown Menlo sued the city of Menlo Park, claiming that the city did not have the right to develop the parking lots. However, later in the year, it voluntarily dropped the lawsuit as the city had not taken final action to approve the development and so Save Downtown Menlo could focus on its citizen initiative.

Save Downtown Menlo launched a citizen initiative for a ballot measure to require that any plan to reduce the availability of parking go to a citywide vote. The citizen initiative was launched in May and had received more than enough signatures by October. In December, the city decided to let the initiative go before voters instead of adopting it outright after commissioning a \$165,000 study.

The initiative will go before voters in November 2026.

• **SRI development**

A proposal to build 646 residential units at the former headquarters of SRI was approved by the City Council in October. The developer, Lane Partners, agreed to cap non-residential square footage at 1 million square feet, which includes 287,000 square feet in existing buildings that will remain and 40,000 square feet of commercial and retail space.

Lane Partners will also dedicate a 1.6-acre plot to an affordable housing developer to build no more than 154 affordable housing units.

Lane Partners left open the opportunity to add additional housing units after removing 380,000 square feet of office and research space.

• **USGS Campus**

Presidio Bay Ventures, the group behind Springline, purchased the former headquarters of the U.S. Geological Survey at 345 Middlefield Road for \$137,000,006. While no plans have been formally submitted, Presidio Bay Ventures has started meeting with residents to discuss ideas for how to change the space into a mixed-use development.

Commercial space

According to a report to the Menlo Park City Council, commercial vacancy rates in downtown Menlo Park are the highest they have been in a decade even

though asking rates are the lowest in the past 10 years.

Despite this, Menlo Park saw several high-profile new restaurants come to Menlo Park.

In January, Eylan, a Cal-Indian restaurant by the owners of Ettan in Palo Alto, opened in the Stanford Middle Plaza. Not even a year after opening, Eylan was added to the Michelin Guide after receiving a Bib Gourmand and a Special Award for exceptional cocktails.

In February, Bistro Vida owner Ali El Safy opened Bar Loretta next to Bistro Vida. Safy hoped the bar would be a place for young people to gather and be less formal than his sit-down restaurant.

In June, Ren Omakase opened at 403 El Camino Real. The Japanese omakase restaurant was created by veteran restaurant owner Sunny Noah, who had already opened three other omakase restaurants on the Peninsula.

In October, Café Vivant opened in downtown Menlo Park. The restaurant serves heritage chickens from Corvus Farm in Pescadero.

All and all, Menlo Park saw at least 10 new restaurants or cafes in 2025. That's not to say there were not some closures, most notably, Italian restaurant Ristorante Carpaccio closed after 36 years in Menlo Park.

• **600 block of Santa Cruz Avenue**

The City Council decided to keep the eastbound side of the 600 block of Santa Cruz Avenue

closed to vehicular traffic. While the future of the block is still to be determined, for now, the city planned to order contemporary furniture and solicit public feedback on how to make the block inviting for all residents, especially students at nearby schools who have used the closure as a hangout space after school.

Belle Haven Community Center

In 2024, the Belle Haven Community Center opened and city leaders hoped it would be a "jewel" in the community. However, 2025 saw major challenges caused by the community center.

In May, users of the senior center at the Belle Haven Community Center said it felt the center was not made with them in mind. Some of the many issues included hard-to-use chairs, tripping hazards, inaccessible restrooms and unclear emergency plans.

Additionally, Menlo Park's pool operator, Team Sheeper, threatened to leave the city after Team Sheeper said it was set to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars due to lower than expected attendance at the Belle Haven pool. In order to keep Team Sheeper from leaving, the City Council agreed to provide additional funds, in addition to continuing to pay for some pool operations and provide the facilities. ■

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

Employment

The Almanac offers employment advertising.

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For assistance email LegalNotices@AlmanacNews.com.

CRIMES

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Simpson allegedly ran towards Interstate 280 but was apprehended with the help of a search dog. Simpson was allegedly found with other burglary tools in addition to bolt cutters. At the time of the burglary, Simpson was on release for another case, court records say.

Simpson was originally charged with two counts of felony attempted burglary and attempted vandalism. In February, he pled no contest to one count of felony burglary and was sentenced to 60 days in the county jail, in addition to two years probation. Due to the crime, he likely only served 30 days in jail, according to prosecutors.

He told police he planned to break into the lab to steal copper wiring, which he planned to sell to buy food, prosecutors said. SLAC declined to ask for restitution.

Court records indicate that his parole was revoked in July due to a violation and he was ordered to serve another 60 days in jail. Records show a warrant was issued for his arrest but do not indicate he has been apprehended.

• **Menlo Park police arrest person linked to string of bike thefts - Jan. 24**

In January, the Menlo Park Police Department announced it had arrested San Jose resident Brenden Orallo, 20, for burglarizing at least three homes to steal bicycles. While many of the bikes and stolen goods had already been sold, the department was able to recover one bicycle worth \$8,000.

Orallo was charged with felony first degree burglary and felony first degree residential burglary. During the crimes, he was out of jail for a different felony court case, records indicate.

While the court denied a motion to release him on his own recognizance in January, he was allowed to leave jail in February after arranging a \$50,000 bail bond.

In March, he did not show up for a preliminary hearing and a warrant was issued for his arrest. Originally, the bail company petitioned the court to vacate the forfeiture of bail and exonerate it from having to pay. However, a judge denied that request.

After that, the bail bond company requested a 180-day extension to locate Orallo. According to court documents, the bail bond company has been unable to locate him. Both of the phone numbers Orallo provided were inactive and he no longer lives at either of the two addresses he provided.

A bail bondsman told the

court he was “confident” that with an extension, he could locate Orallo and bring him into custody.

• **Two elderly residents targeted in Menlo Park, Atherton scams - April 18**

Over \$2.4 billion was lost to scams targeting elderly adults in 2025, according to the Federal Trade Commission. While many perpetrators of these crimes are overseas and often difficult to identify, both the Menlo Park Police Department and the Atherton Police Department independently arrested two people who allegedly defrauded elderly residents.

According to the Menlo Park Police Department, San Jose resident Arya Mehta, 22, allegedly texted a 77-year-old resident purporting to be affiliated with a major online retailer and a federal agency in February. Mehta allegedly threatened the victim with prison time unless they provided cash to a courier. The victim withdrew \$35,000 in cash from multiple bank branches over two days. According to police, Mehta picked up a box with the cash on Feb. 12 and police later located him and arrested him.

Mehta was charged on Aug. 18 with felony theft by false pretenses, felony theft from an elder or dependent adult and two enhancements. Mehta was let out of jail on supervised release on his own recognizance.

On Oct. 21, his attorney doubted Mehta’s mental competency and the defendant is set to be evaluated by a doctor. The court will receive the doctor’s evaluation on Jan. 5.

In Atherton, police arrested a 57-year-old San Bruno resident in April after she allegedly convinced an elderly resident to hand over \$15,000 in cash, believing it was going to PayPal.

The victim had received an email claiming to be from PayPal about an unauthorized withdrawal and was later contacted by the suspect, who allegedly posed as a PayPal representative and instructed the victim to give \$15,000 in cash. The victim went to several bank branches over two days to get the funds. Police said a caretaker intervened and police were able to arrest the suspect before cash changed hands.

Following the arrest, prosecutors requested the Atherton Police Department conduct a follow-up investigation so the District Attorney’s Office could decide whether to file charges. While the officer assigned to the case only recently submitted the results of the investigation, the District Attorney’s Office elder abuse unit asked for further details and expects to make a

charging decision within the next three weeks.

It is the policy of this news organization not to name suspects until the District Attorney’s Office decides whether to file charges.

• **Nativity Carnival worker charged with attempted murder - April 29**

Merced resident Jaydon James Anderson was sentenced to six years in state prison on Aug. 26, 2025 for a June 2024 incident where he allegedly pointed a 9 mm handgun at an intoxicated 19-year-old at the Menlo Park 7-11 on Oak Grove Avenue, and pulled the trigger. The handgun jammed, so no shot was fired, prosecutors said.

Anderson had just finished working at the annual Nativity Carnival up the street, according to police. While the incident occurred on June 8, 2024, he was arraigned almost a year later in May.

While he was originally charged with attempted murder, the charges were reduced to felony assault with a semi-automatic weapon and an enhancement for use of a firearm.

Anderson is a convicted felon and was prohibited from owning a firearm.

Nativity School previously told this news organization he worked for a company hired to run the carnival.

Because of the gun charge, Anderson will be required to serve at least 85% of his sentence, District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe said.

• **Man broke into Atherton home, ate food while residents were away, police say - June 12**

Atherton has some of the most valuable houses in the country. So when there is a break in, oftentimes items like famous paintings or jewelry are stolen.

However, when Tong Thach, 47, was arrested on June 10 for breaking into an Atherton home, all he had done was eat \$20 worth of soda, chips and leftover noodles.

Residents of the home on Lloyd Park Lane came home to find him in their kitchen and called the police.

Thach was charged with felony first degree burglary. He was originally released on his own recognizance on June 11 but the court’s pretrial services division requested his release be revoked and a warrant was issued for his arrest.

On Dec. 18, Thatch’s attorney declared doubt of his mental competency and the criminal case was suspended. After a doctor examined Thach, he determined Thach was not competent to stand trial and the District

Attorney’s Office agreed.

Thach was ordered to go to the Department of State Hospitals to be restored to competency. Thach consented to antipsychotic medication and will be voluntarily receiving treatment. If he later decides to revoke consent, the court will decide whether to force him to receive treatment involuntarily.

A status hearing is scheduled for Jan. 7. Thach’s commitment was ordered to not be longer than two years.

• **Deputies raid controversial West Menlo Park gift store, find illegal drugs - Aug. 13**

As the county health department was threatening legal action against a “gift store” in West Menlo Park that allegedly opened and sold tobacco paraphernalia without a license, deputies from the San Mateo County Sheriff’s Office executed a search warrant on the store.

According to the Sheriff’s Office, on Aug. 12, following a raid of the store, it found evidence the store sold tobacco, weed and psychedelic mushroom chocolate.

Following the raid, the store closed for good after pressure to the landlord from county supervisor Ray Mueller and some residents over the sale of tobacco

products, a sign installed without permits and the pending criminal investigation by the Sheriff’s Office.

According to Sheriff Spokesperson Gretchen Spiker, a criminal investigation is still underway by the San Mateo County Narcotics Task Force and no case has been sent to the District Attorney’s Office.

The Almanac attempted to get a copy of the search warrant but the San Mateo County Superior Court did not respond in time for publication.

As for the storefront located at 3536 Alameda de Las Pulgas, it is now a wellness business. ■

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

LEHUA GREENMAN



“May the New Year bring you happiness, peace and prosperity. Wishing you a joyous 2026!”

650.245.1845 COMPASS

**TOWN OF WOODSIDE
2955 WOODSIDE ROAD
WOODSIDE, CA 94062**

NOTICE OF ADOPTION/SECOND READING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF WOODSIDE will hold a hybrid public hearing allowing for the option to attend by teleconference/video conference or in person in Independence Hall, 2955 Woodside Road, Woodside, CA, on Tuesday, January 13, 2026, at 7:00 PM, to consider:

SECOND READING AND ADOPTION OF AN ORDINANCE AMENDING WOODSIDE MUNICIPAL CODE CHAPTER 150: BUILDING REGULATIONS TO ADOPT THE 2025 CALIFORNIA BUILDING STANDARDS CODE AND FINDING THAT THE ORDINANCE IS EXEMPT FROM REVIEW PURSUANT TO THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT.

A report is available for public review at Woodside Town Hall weekdays from 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM and 1:00 – 5:00 PM, or online at: <https://www.woodsideca.gov/>.

All interested parties are invited to submit written comments to townhall@woodsideca.gov and/or to attend in person or virtually at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85437892933> and give testimony.

**TOWN OF WOODSIDE
2955 WOODSIDE ROAD
WOODSIDE, CA 94062**

NOTICE OF ADOPTION/SECOND READING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF WOODSIDE will hold a hybrid public hearing allowing for the option to attend by teleconference/video conference or in person in Independence Hall, 2955 Woodside Road, Woodside, CA, on Tuesday, January 13, 2026, at 7:00 PM, to consider:

SECOND READING AND ADOPTION OF A NEW ORDINANCE SECTION 94.06, PROHIBITION OF GAS-POWERED LEAF BLOWERS, OF CHAPTER 94, HEALTH AND SANITATION

A report is available for public review at Woodside Town Hall weekdays from 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM and 1:00 – 5:00 PM, or online at: <https://www.woodsideca.gov/>.

All interested parties are invited to submit written comments to townhall@woodsideca.gov and/or to attend in person or virtually at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85437892933> and give testimony.

EDUCATION

continued from page 5

highlighted the graduation of hundreds of students from Midpeninsula high schools across Redwood City, Menlo Park, Atherton, Woodside and Portola Valley. Students walked across the stage to obtain their high school diplomas, stepping into the summer months as high school graduates.

Throughout the year, lawsuits and claims made against the Sequoia Union High School District began to pile up. The district is now facing at least six active lawsuits made by parents and former staff.

Legal actions made against the district allege wrongful termination, racial and disability discrimination, retaliation and harassment. Legal claims were filed by former Menlo-Atherton High School secretary Ofa Taimani and former M-A

basketball coach Mike Molieri. This year, lawsuits were filed by former Woodside High School counselor Sharlett Downing and Molieri. A complaint was filed by former ethnic studies teacher Chloe Gentile-Montgomery.

In August, students returned to school and saw construction workers on campus as many campuses were wrapping up or continuing projects for modernized classrooms, expansions and facilities improvements.

Ravenswood City School District celebrated its reopening of Los Robles-Ronald McNair Academy in November and look forward to another reopening for Belle Haven Elementary School in 2026.

Menlo Park City School District had been proactive about teaching bike safety to its students all year long. In preparation for the first day of school, Safe Routes to School parent volunteers hosted a practice bike ride for incoming

middle school students. Later in November, fourth grade students at Encinal learned biking fundamentals on the school blacktop.

The district also became the first in the area to approve a policy addressing e-bikes on campus. The rising popularity of e-bikes, many of which are illegal for riders under 16, became evident at Hillview Middle School. The policy prohibits students under the age of 16 from bringing Class 2 and Class 3 e-bikes, e-motos, e-scooters and eboards to campus. Class 1 e-bikes with a throttle or ability to travel over 20 mph is also prohibited. Within its first week of implementation, Hillview Middle School reported that no prohibited e-bikes had been brought on campus.

The month of December has some students, parents and teachers of the Sequoia Union High School District on edge as they face the potential closure of TIDE Academy, a small STEM-based

high school in Menlo Park. Tensions were high at the December school board meeting as the community spoke up and asked for the district to save the school. The conflict between the district and TIDE Academy remains unresolved as the school waits to learn more information during district meetings in January before a final decision is made in February.

La Entrada Middle School and Philips Brooks Elementary School were placed on a lockdown after reports were made to the Menlo Park Police Department

that there was a man with a firearm on Dec. 16. 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 in the afternoon. The alert came during lunchtime for La Entrada students, who were moved to their homerooms to eat. Many parents came to pick up their children from school, following the lockdown. ■

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

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Public Notices

TOP METAL DESIGNS, INC
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
FILE NO.: M-302362

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

1.) TOP METAL DESIGNS, INC., located at 831 Sweeney Ave Unit H, Redwood City, CA 94063.

Registered owner(s):
TRANQUILINO CEJA

831 Sweeney Ave, Unit H
Redwood City, CA 94063

State of Incorporation/Organization: CA

This business is conducted by: a Corporation.
Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 08/05/2004.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on December 02, 2025.

(ALM Dec 19, 2025, Jan 2, 9 and 16, 2026)

BLUEBIRD EDUCATIONAL CONSULTING
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
FILE NO.: M-302490

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

1.) BLUEBIRD EDUCATIONAL CONSULTING, located at 2560 Sherborne Drive, Belmont, CA 94002.

Registered owner(s):
ELIZABETH HARVEY-GUEDES

2560 Sherborne Drive
Belmont, CA 94002

This business is conducted by: an Individual.
Registrant has not yet begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on December 24, 2025.

(ALM Jan 2, 9, 16 and 23, 2026)

EMILY JOUBERT
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
FILE NO.: M-302419

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

1.) EMILY JOUBERT, located at 818 Charter Street, Redwood City, CA 94063.

Registered owner(s):
IN ANY EVENT, INC.

818 Charter Street
Redwood City, CA 94063

State of Incorporation/Organization: CA

This business is conducted by: a Corporation.
Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 04/30/2004.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on December 15, 2025.

(ALM Jan 2, 9, 16 and 23, 2026)

CASPIAN SOLUTION
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
FILE NO.: FBN721758

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

1.) CASPIAN SOLUTION, located at 2047 Foxworthy ave, San Jose, CA, 95124.

Registered owner(s):

SHIVA ADLI
2047 Foxworthy Ave
San Jose, CA 95124

This business is conducted by: an Individual.

Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 01/15/2025.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on December 02, 2025.

(ALM Jan 2, 9, 16 and 23, 2026)

SHILO
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
FILE NO.: M-302283

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

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

Registered owner(s):
SHIORI KIRIAKE

350 Sharon Park Dr. H102
Menlo Park, CA 94025

This business is conducted by: an Individual.
Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 11/26/2025.

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

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

HUSH LINE
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
FILE NO.: M-302341

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

1.) HUSH LINE, located at 1025 Alameda de las Pulgas, Ste 708, Belmont, CA 94002.

Registered owner(s):
SCIENCE & DESIGN, INC.

1025 Alameda de las Pulgas, Ste 708
Belmont, CA 94002

State of Incorporation/Organization: CA

This business is conducted by: a Corporation.
Registrant has not yet begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above.

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

(ALM Jan 2, 9, 16 and 23, 2026)

X DRIVE
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
FILE NO.: M-3022422

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

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

Registered owner(s):
NADER HADIZADEH RAEISSI

1383 Laurel Street
San Carlos, CA 94070

This business is conducted by: an Individual.
Registrant has not yet begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on November 20, 2025.

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

MI SECOND CASA
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
FILE NO.: M-302388

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

1.) MI SECOND CASA, located at 847 N San Mateo Dr, San Mateo, CA 94401.

Registered owner(s):
MI SECOND CASA SPANISH IMMERSION

PRESCHOOLS, INC
847 N San Mateo Dr
San Mateo, CA 94401

State of Incorporation/Organization: CA

This business is conducted by: a Corporation.

Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 11/10/2025.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on December 10, 2025.

(ALM Dec 19, 2025, Jan 2, 9 and 16, 2026)

REPOSADO
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
FILE NO.: M-302483

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

1.) REPOSADO, located at 311 Baldwin Ave, San Mateo, CA 94401.

Registered owner(s):
ROBERT SCOTT FISCHER

311 Baldwin Ave
San Mateo, CA 94401

This business is conducted by: an Individual.

Registrant has not yet begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on December 22, 2025.

(ALM Jan 2, 9, 16 and 23, 2026)

DESIGNS BY DOW
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT
FILE NO.: M-302007

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

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

Registered owner(s):
LIAM DOW

864 15th Ave
Menlo Park, CA 94025

This business is conducted by: an Individual.

Registrant has not yet begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on October 27, 2025.

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

ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE FOR CHANGE OF NAME SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA FOR THE COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
Case No.: 25-CIV-06910

TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS:

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

PEI-YU CHI to PEGGY CHI

THE COURT ORDERS that all persons interested in this matter appear before this court at the hearing indicated below to show cause, if any, why the petition for change of name should

not be granted. Any person objecting to the name changes described above must file a written objection that includes the reasons for the objection at least two court days before the matter is scheduled to be heard and must appear at the hearing to show cause why the petition should not be granted. If no written objection is timely filed, the court may grant the petition without a hearing.

NOTICE OF HEARING: 1/12/2026, 9:00AM, Southern Branch of the Superior Court of California, County of San Mateo located at 400 County Center, Redwood City, CA 94063.

A copy of this ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE shall be published at least once each week for four successive weeks prior to the date set for hearing on the petition in the following newspaper of general circulation, printed in this county:

ALMANAC

Date: 11/13/2025

Hon. Stephanie G. Garratt

JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT

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

SUMMONS
(CITACION JUDICIAL)
CASE NUMBER: **25CV123745**

(Numero del Caso)

NOTICE TO DEFENDANT:

(AVISO AL DEMANDADO): **MATTHEW PEREIRA, an individual and known heir of ELMER PEREIRA aka ELMER PEREIRA, JR. (DOE?)**

YOU ARE BEING SUED BY

PLAINTIFF: **NISSA QUANSTROM**

(LO ESTÁ DEMANDANDO EL DEMANDANTE)

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

You have 30 CALENDAR DAYS after this summons and legal papers are served on you to file a written response at this court and have a copy served on the plaintiff. A letter or phone call will not protect you. Your written response must be in proper legal form if you want the court to hear your case. There may be a court form that you can use for your response. You can find these court forms and more information at the California Courts Online Self-Help Center (www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp), your county law library, or the courthouse nearest you. If you cannot pay the filing fee, ask the court clerk for a fee waiver form. If you do not file your response on time, you may lose the case by default, and your wages, money, and property may be taken without further warning from the court. There are other legal requirements. You may want to call an attorney right away. If you do not know an attorney, you may want to call an attorney referral service. If you cannot afford an attorney, you may be eligible for free legal services from a nonprofit legal services program. You can locate these nonprofit groups at the California Legal Services Web site (www.lawhelpcalifornia.org), the California Courts Online Self-Help Center (www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp), or by contacting your local court or county bar association.

NOTE: The Court has a statutory lien for waived fees and costs on any settlement or arbitration award of \$10,000 or more in a civil case. The court's lien must be paid before the court will

dismiss the case. ¡AVISO! Lo han demandado. Si no responde dentro de 30 días, la corte puede decidir en su contra sin escuchar su versión. Lea la información a continuación. Tiene 30 DÍAS CALENDARIO después de que la entreguen esta citación y papeles legales para presentar una respuesta por escrito en esta corte y hacer que se entregue una copia al demandante. Una carta o una llamada telefónica no lo protegen. Su respuesta por escrito tiene que estar en formato legal correcto si desea que procesen su caso en la corte. Es posible que haya un formulario que usted pueda usar para su respuesta. Puede encontrar estos formularios de la corte y más información en el Centro de Ayuda de las Cortes de California (www.sucorte.ca.gov), en la biblioteca de leyes de su condado o en la corte que le quede más cerca. Si no puede pagar la cuota de presentación, pida al secretario de la corte que le dé un formulario de exención de pago de cuotas. Si no presenta su respuesta a tiempo, puede perder el caso por incumplimiento y la corte le podrá quitar su sueldo, dinero y bienes sin más 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 o 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 Alameda 1225 Fallon St. Oakland, California 94612

The name, address, and telephone number of plaintiff's attorney, or plaintiff without an attorney, is: (El nombre, la dirección y el número de teléfono del abogado del demandante, o del demandante que no tiene abogado, es):

NAME: Gina Arico-Smith
ADDRESS: 2999 Oak Road, #550, Walnut Creek, CA 94597

SBN: 139645
Tel: 925-817-3715

Fax: 925-930-9588
DATE: 05/19/2022

(Fecha)

Clerk (secretario)
By: Chad Finke

Deputy (Adjunto)
By: **M. Cortez**

(ALM Jan 2, 9, 16 and 23, 2026)

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

The year in film: Perfect pairings

Revisit the movies of 2025 with our critic's hand-picked double features, from dark comedies to poignant family dramas

By Peter Canavese

Uncertainty surrounded us this year, the ground metaphorically shifting beneath our feet every day. When the doomscrolling became too much, the movies — one drug of choice — always waited to provide respite from, escape from, or philosophical reflection on our sociopolitical and existential anxieties. Perhaps it was that peculiar uncertainty that brought an uptick in ticket sales this year, in defiance of the “loneliness epidemic.” As Nicole Kidman famously says on behalf of one theater chain, “Heartbreak feels good in a place like this.”

Even feature-length comedy made a tentative comeback this year: the genre that has of late produced meager results, mostly in poorly made and indifferently promoted streaming titles, made a stand in public spaces again this year. Crowds could laugh together at Liam Neeson in the “Naked Gun” reboot, smile at the deadpan humor of writer-director Wes Anderson’s “The Phoenician Scheme,” and even laugh at our own paycheck-to-paycheck woes and fears by way of the Keke Palmer-SZA friendship romp “One of Them Days.” In days like them, it was good to laugh.

The big news around Hollywood in 2025 centered around the influence of the Oval Office. When not trying to cancel late-night hosts for their satirical ribbing, the President of the United States personally greenlit “Rush Hour 4” as he inserted himself into the giant merger details currently remaking the industry. First, David Ellison’s Skydance media swallowed Paramount Global in a deal that hinged on Trump’s approval; now, Netflix appears poised to swallow Warner Brothers Discovery despite Ellison’s last-ditch hostile takeover bid.

What does it all mean for the average movie consumer? We’ll find out soon enough, but it’s more bad news for the people who produce filmed entertain-

ment in a shrinking industry. Worse, like every other industry, Hollywood must “danse macabre” with the specter of A.I.: what now, when screenwriting and acting and even physical production can be outsourced on the relative cheap to one of the massive, energy-sucking data centers springing up to drink our milkshake.

But that’s a tomorrow problem. We’re here to celebrate what went right this year at the movies. It was a year when mainstream American cinema again occasioned to reckon with the upheaval of political norms, whether it be the revolutionary race-war comedy of Paul Thomas Anderson’s “One Battle After Another,” Ari Aster’s pandemic-paranoia throwback “Eddington,” the creeping life-size fascism in Jan Komasa’s domestic thriller “Anniversary,” the politically charged violence of father-son drama “Sovereign,” or the dystopian nightmare “The Long Walk,” which the inhabitant of the Oval Office accidentally evoked two weeks ago when announcing his “Patriot Games.”

Read on for Your Friendly Neighborhood Film Critic’s idiosyncratic take on the most intriguing and satisfying films of the year. This year, I’ve lined up some of the runners-up as a kind of “shadow list” built for double-feature viewing. As always, your mileage may vary, but clip and save this list, and you may discover a few new favorites of your own in the new year.

The top 10 films of 2025

10. ‘One Battle After Another’ (HBO Max, Digital)

Leonardo DiCaprio leads a killer ensemble in this satirical tale of the radical left pitted against the far right. Inspired by Thomas Pynchon’s novel “Vineland,” Paul Thomas Anderson’s big-scale revolution-



Top: Noah Jupe, center, plays Shakespeare’s famous Danish prince in Chloé Zhao’s “Hamnet,” which explores the playwright’s family life, including a formative tragedy. Courtesy Focus Features. **Center:** Josh O’Connor stars in the “anti-heist” thriller “The Mastermind.” Courtesy Mubi. **Bottom:** As lyricist Lorenz Hart, Ethan Hawke, left, reacts to the success of his soon-to-be-former writing partner’s new musical in “Blue Moon.” Courtesy Sony Pictures Classics.

See **YEAR IN FILM**, page 20

YEAR IN FILM

continued from page 19

ary adventure accidentally landed at the perfect time to reflect a year of civil-rights-violating ICE raids and skewer the moneyed white nationalism behind the New American Order.

Pair with: 'The Secret Agent' (now playing in theaters). If "One Battle" looks into tomorrow, Kleber Mendonça Filho's quirky, '70s-set political thriller offers hindsight on a Brazilian military dictatorship that keeps a set of activist political refugees on the downlow and on their toes.

9. 'Sorry, Baby' (HBO Max, Digital)

In a year when the headlines came to be dominated by the Epstein Files, this deeply empathetic comedy-drama (yes, comedy!) explored the upsides and downsides to womanhood under a literally rapacious patriarchy that refuses to die. Writer-director-actor Eva Victor made their directorial debut with this quirky tale of resilience, which hopefully celebrates the nurturing instinct while acknowledging the psychic scarring of sexual assault, all the while reminding us that sometimes, even in our darkest hours, we just need to laugh to stay sane.

Pair with: 'On Becoming a Guinea Fowl' (HBO Max/Digital), Rungano Nyoni's powerful diagnosis of Zambian sexism, which issues a prescription of breaking from tradition to stand up to male predation.

8. 'The Chronology of Water' (local theaters in January)

In another of the year's auspicious directorial debuts, Kristen Stewart jumps in the deep end of Lidia Yuknavitch's 2011 memoir. Through non-linear narrative, Stewart paints a distinctive and bracingly daring, boldly fragmentary and psychologically intimate portrait of a young queer woman (Imogen Poots, never better) struggling to come into her own, pursue success, and live her truth even as sexual abuse, depression, and addiction existentially threaten her. Not an easy watch, but shouldn't be.

Pair with: 'If I Had Legs I'd Kick You' (Digital), a black comedy with Rose Byrne delivering one of the year's best performances as a mother on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

7. 'The Baltimoreans' (AMC+, Digital)

A balm to soothe the savage breast this year, "The Baltimoreans" offers the pure pleasures of laughter and two relatable humans falling in love. No ordinary rom com, this indie helmed by Jay Duplass has a charm and warmth that belie

its wintry setting as fresh faces Michael Strassner (who co-wrote with Duplass) and Liz Larsen banter with palpable chemistry as a meet-weird situation keeps two lonely souls hanging on (and hanging out) for more.

Pair with: 'Oh, Hi!' (Netflix, Digital), a black comedy that's as gleefully dark about (disastrous) dating as "The Baltimoreans" is light.

6. 'The Oslo Trilogy: Sex/Dreams/Love' (Digital)

Cheating here, but this deceptively casual, quietly ambitious trilogy of films from Norwegian writer-director — and novelist — Dag Johan Haugerud should stick together (even though each film satisfies on its own). Constructed of everyday profundities, confusions and insecurities, the films follow well-drawn characters on humble journeys of self-discovery with no fixed destinations but plenty of conversation and relational negotiation.

Pair with: 'Splitville' (Digital, Blu-ray), Michael Angelo Covino's tonally opposite raucous comedy of relationships flying off the rails and the search for satisfaction ... and sanity.

5. 'Blue Moon' (Digital)

This one's for the show-biz nerds in the house. Richard Linklater serves up another Robert Kaplow-penned story — after "Me and Orson Welles" — of artistic neuroses and greatness going hand in hand. Ethan Hawke will break your heart as Lorenz Hart — half of the legendary song-writing duo Rodgers and Hart — jealously weathers the smash opening-night Broadway success of Rodgers' collaboration with a new partner: Oscar Hammerstein III. Alive with the love of witty dialogue, this esoteric story flies by with theatrical brio.

Pair with: 'Nouvelle Vague' (Netflix), Linklater's equally esoteric, equally thrilling recreation of the making of Jean-Luc Godard's influential debut "Breathless."

4. 'Eddington' (HBO Max, Digital, 4K Blu-ray, Blu-ray)

When the arguments stop, the shooting begins in Ari Aster's sharply scripted, deliberately maddening button pusher. Joaquin Phoenix's alt-right sheriff squares off with Pedro Pascal's corrupt left-wing mayor in a film that dares to go there, albeit there being 2020 at the height of COVID-19 paranoia and Black Lives Matter anger. This black comedy of American division incorporates pernicious conspiracy theories, data centers, anger-fueled internet/cell-phone/talk radio culture, the masking debate, small-town American blight, and false flags to form a prism refract-



Top: Liz Larsen plays a dentist and Michael Strassner plays a newly sober man who make an unlikely connection after an emergency dental appointment in Jay Duplass' comedy "The Baltimoreans." Courtesy IFC Films. **Center:** Imogen Poots plays a woman who finds her voice as she faces memories of a dark childhood in the drama "The Chronology of Water," directed by Kristen Stewart. Courtesy The Forge. **Bottom:** Leonardo DiCaprio stars in director Paul Thomas Anderson's dark comedy "One Battle After Another." Courtesy Warner Bros. Pictures.

ing the truths and lies driving us to something much worse than distraction.

Pair with: 'No Other Choice' (now playing), Park Chan-wook's zeitgeisty, dog-eat-dog marketplace murder comedy, which plays like "Kind Hearts and Coronets" were it directed by Alfred Hitchcock.

3. 'The Mastermind' (MUBI, Digital)

Kelly Reichardt strikes again, with this highly anxious, highly amusing anti-heist thriller starring Josh O'Connor in his finest of four great performances this year. This is not your father's "Thomas Crown Affair," but rather an insinuating genre subversion and a character study of privilege and ambition not unique to America but emblematic of it.

Pair with: 'Marty Supreme' (now playing), with Timothée Chalamet doing the character work as another American striver whose ping-ponging path to greatness reveals the limits of the American Dream.

2. 'Resurrection' (local theaters in January)

Few filmmakers working can rival the visual precision and dark beauty of Bi Gan's aesthetic, which finds its apex in this sprawling science-fiction fable of infinite ambition. At once a scarcely veiled critique of authoritarianism (poking the bear of the Chinese government) and a meditation on Buddhist belief, "Resurrection" also serves as a tour of 20th-century film history as it makes a heartfelt plea for our continued ability to dream big, including on movie screens.

Pair with: 'Sinners' (HBO Max, Digital), Ryan Coogler's ambitiously artful elevated-horror blockbuster that's as meta-musical as "Resurrection" is meta-cinematic.

And the best film of 2025 goes to:

1. 'Hamnet' (now playing in local theaters)

Sometimes nothing satisfies like a classically structured, good old-fashioned awards-friendly drama — at least when it's as ideally executed as Chloe Zhao's earthy and deeply moving "Hamnet," adapted with Maggie O'Farrell from her own speculative historical novel about Shakespeare's marriage and family. Never contradicting the historical record, "Hamnet" fills in the gaps while exploring the cavernous grief of Agnes Shakespeare and her dramatist husband, who transforms their pain into deathless art.

Pair with: 'The Shrouds' (Criterion Channel, Digital) A weirder take on grief and loss:

David Cronenberg's deeply personal, deliberately ambiguous musing on the ultimate body horrors of death and decomposition.

More runners-up:

'Misericordia,' 'It Was Just An Accident,' 'Peter Hugar's Day,' 'Sentimental Value,' 'Hedda,' 'Sirât,' 'Train Dreams,' 'When Fall Is Coming.'

Top documentaries:

'Orwell: 2+2=5' (Digital)
'The Alabama Solution' (HBO Max)
'The Encampments' (The Roku Channel, Xumo Play, Digital) & "The Librarians" (see thelibrariansfilm.com for upcoming screenings) (TIE)
'Zodiac Killer Project' (Digital Jan. 6)
'Come See Me in the Good Light' (Apple TV)

The bottom five films of 2025

5. 'Star Trek: Section 31'

This deadly dull streaming feature — starring Oscar-winning world treasure Michelle Yeoh — put another nail in the coffin of the current misguided "Trek" TV regime.

4. 'Oh. What. Fun.'

Though the message of gratitude for mothers is a good start, this holiday "comedy"/sad waste of Michelle Pfeiffer gets sadder the more it flops-sweats trying to be funny.

3. 'The Home'

Ridiculous, derivative, and starring Pete Davidson, this horror quickie proved there's no place like wherever this movie isn't.

2. 'Five Nights at Freddy's 2' Again? Really?

1. 'Bride Hard'

I may have dreamed this nightmare comedy starring Rebel Wilson as a spy trying to be a bridesmaid. Laugh-free but annoyances aplenty.

The animated winners:

'Little Amélie or the Character of Rain' (digital)
'Ne Zha 2' (HBO Max, Digital)
'Arco' (local theaters in January)
'Predator: Killer of Killers' (Hulu)
'Boys Go to Jupiter' (Digital) ■

Peter Canavese is a freelance movie critic and author of the website Groucho Reviews.

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Top: Raoul Peck's documentary "Orwell: 2+2=5" combines archival newsreels, film clips and contemporary news footage in exploring the career of George Orwell, author the novel "1984," which delves into the tactics of totalitarianism. Courtesy Neon. **Center:** Pete Davidson, center, stars as a retirement home superintendent who regrets ignoring warnings not to visit the facility's fourth floor in the horror film, "The Home." Courtesy Lionsgate. **Bottom:** The animated film "Little Amélie or The Character of Rain" tells of a toddler's beginning to understand her humanity. Courtesy GKIDS films.

Food & Drink

13 openings in 2026

Peninsula eateries both familiar and brand new are debuting next year

BY ADRIENNE MITCHEL

Courtesy Bacio di Latte

Bacio di Latte, a gelateria founded in Brazil coming in April to Palo Alto, offers at least 22 flavors of gelato at one time.

From a revamped sports bar to a Japanese restaurant-marketplace hybrid, there's plenty of new bites and beverages to look forward to in the coming year.

Notable local chains La Corneta Taqueria and Zareen's are in the final stages of opening their newest outposts, and brand new concepts such as The Pro and Yutori are also set to debut.

JANUARY

The Pro, Palo Alto

The Old Pro, a Palo Alto sports bar that shuttered in 2022 after nearly 60 years in business, is expected to reopen as The Pro in January.

Revitalized by Zola + BarZola owner Guillaume Bienaimé, the new sports bar will not have Bucky the mechanical bull, but it will have more of a focus on the food, Bienaimé said in a 2023 interview. Former Stanford and NFL quarterback Andrew

Luck is one of its investors.

The Pro, 541 Ramona St., Palo Alto; 650-600-0531, Instagram: @thepropaloalto.

FEBRUARY

La Corneta Taqueria, Palo Alto

Since 1995, La Corneta Taqueria has been folding burritos and crafting tacos in San Francisco's Glen Park neighborhood. In 2026, this Mexican institution is landing in downtown Palo Alto in the former SliderBar location on University Avenue. This will be the restaurant's fifth location, with existing Peninsula eateries in San Carlos and Burlingame.

David Perez-Campos, the nephew of La Corneta founder Joe Campos and co-owner of La Corneta Palo Alto, said they are in the final stages of construction and are aiming for a February opening.

La Corneta Taqueria, 324 University Ave., Palo Alto;

Instagram: @la.corneta.taqueria. Beginning February, open daily from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Yutori, Palo Alto

The team behind Stanford Shopping Center's Taro San Japanese Noodle Bar is opening a Japanese restaurant and marketplace in the former Corner Bakery Cafe spot along El Camino Real.

The 120-seat restaurant will offer brunch and dinner and will include a bar serving pan-Asian-inspired cocktails. Yutori will also have a cafe with matcha and pastries, a grab-and-go section with sandwiches and poke and a marketplace with artisanal soy sauce, imported snacks, specialty knives and home goods.

Yutori, 3375 El Camino Real, Palo Alto.

Zareen's, Sunnyvale

Pakistani Indian restaurant Zareen's is expected to expand to downtown Sunnyvale in February, according to owner and namesake Zareen Khan.



Natalia Nazarova

Mince beef "gola" kebabs with spicy chutney at Zareen's restaurant.

First established in Mountain View in 2014, the restaurant now has locations in Palo Alto and Redwood City. Khan decided to expand to Sunnyvale in 2023, when she thought the lease to her Mountain View restaurant would end, and it's taken more than two years to open.

"I love the vibe of the historic Murphy Street, which has this old

downtown feeling," Khan said. Her fourth restaurant will have a similar menu to the other three and will seat about 38 inside with a parklet outside.

Zareen's, 135 S. Murphy Ave., Sunnyvale; Instagram: @zareensrestaurant.

MARCH

Asia Live, Santa Clara

A two-story, 13,000-square-foot space in Westfield Valley Fair is in the process of being converted into an Asian food emporium. Owner George Chen, who's also behind China Live in San Francisco, said he's aiming for a March opening right after Chinese New Year for good feng shui.

Asia Live will feature a cafe with grab-and-go items and a full-service restaurant with an open kitchen, sushi and robata stations, tandoori ovens and an Indonesian rice table. It will also feature a bar, an outdoor patio and a rooftop terrace.

Asia Live, 2855 Stevens Creek Blvd., #1891, Santa Clara; Instagram: @asialivesv.



Courtesy La Corneta Taqueria

La Corneta Taqueria, which is expanding to downtown Palo Alto, offers a variety of Mexican food, including burritos, tacos, quesadillas, nachos, tostadas and more.



Courtesy Yutori

A rendering of the exterior of Yutori in Palo Alto, which will include outdoor seating and a Japanese garden.



Courtesy Arcanum Architecture

A rendering of the outdoor patio space at Cedar & Sage, which includes infrared heaters and a fireplace.

APRIL

Bacio di Latte, Palo Alto

Just in time for summer heat, Brazilian gelato chain Bacio di Latte expects to land at Stanford Shopping Center in late April, according to a company representative.

The gelateria has more than 200 locations in Brazil and 16 in Southern California, but this will be the first in the Bay Area. At least 22 flavors are available at all times, with a new flavor introduced every three weeks.

Bacio di Latte, 660 Stanford Shopping Center, Palo Alto; Instagram: @baciodialatte.us.

SPRING

Kukje Bakery, Daly City

Kukje Supermarket, a Korean grocery store in Daly City since 2002, is opening a bakery across the street in the former Jade Dragon Restaurant space.

Expected to open in the spring, Kukje Bakery will offer homemade baked goods, such as castella cake and red bean buns, as well as a full espresso bar. The bakery will seat about 50 and will feature a self-serve pastry case.

Kukje Bakery, 2368 Junipero Serra Blvd., Daly City.

Kona Island Coffee, Mountain View

Sip on Hawaiian flavors at a new coffee shop coming to The Village at San Antonio in April or May. Kona Island Coffee has operated as a San Jose-based mobile coffee truck since 2023, specializing in drinks made from 100% Kona coffee as well as Hawaii-inspired crepes.

Many of the cafe's specialty drinks are named after locations on the Big Island. The Captain Cook latte comes with

honey, vanilla and cinnamon and the Honalo macchiato with hazelnut. In addition to espresso-based drinks, expect Kona coffee pour-overs along with matcha and tea from Hawaii.

Kona Island Coffee, 2565 California St., Suite 84, Mountain View; 408-513-6455, Instagram: @konaislandcoffee.

LATE SPRING

Cedar & Sage, Palo Alto

"The best damn party in Palo Alto" is coming to Stanford Shopping Center in late spring, according to owner JC Clow.

Cedar & Sage is a sister restaurant to Clow's The Winery Restaurant & Wine Bar, a fine-dining restaurant open in Orange County since 2007. Like

The Winery, Cedar & Sage will offer a chef-driven and wine-focused menu. Expect live music most nights and decor depicting R&B and Rock & Roll Hall of Fame artists.

Cedar & Sage Bistro & Lounge, 1301 Stanford Shopping Center, Palo Alto; Instagram: @cedarandsagepaloalto.

JUNE

Koi Palace, Daly City

The Cantonese institution Koi Palace is supersizing itself. In June, the 29-year-old restaurant plans to close its flagship location and move into a 20,000-square-foot space in Serramonte Center.

Serramonte Center is a growing Asian food hub, with both



Courtesy Koi Palace

A rendering of the exterior of Koi Palace at Serramonte Mall in Daly City.

Chinese hot pot chain Haidilao and Marufuku Ramen coming soon.

Koi Palace, 3 Serramonte Center, Daly City; Instagram: @koipalace.

FALL

Croissanté, Palo Alto

California Avenue may soon be a destination for pastry lovers. Croissanté, a trendy French bakery with outposts in Santa Clara and Los Gatos, is coming to the former space of beloved dive bar Antonio's Nut House.

Owner Sean Kang said that there was "a huge delay," and he's expecting to open the bakery in late 2026.

Croissanté, 321 California Ave., Palo Alto; Instagram: @croissante_bakery.

Arsicault Bakery, Palo Alto

Just a street over from Croissanté, Arsicault Bakery is

expected to open in September or October at 388 Cambridge Ave., according to CEO Armando Lacayo.

This will be Arsicault's fourth bakery but its first outside of San Francisco. Established in 2015, the French bakery is known for its buttery and flaky croissants. It will carry around 15 pastries at a time as well as sandwiches on housemade baguettes.

The bakery will be mostly focused on takeout, with little to no seating inside and 12-20 seats outside, Lacayo said.

Arsicault Bakery, 388 Cambridge Ave., Palo Alto; Instagram: @arsicaultbakery.

TO BE ANNOUNCED

Tai Er, Santa Clara

While a representative from Tai Er was not able to speak on the timeline of Tai Er's opening at Westfield Valley Fair, the Sichuan restaurant is coming to the Santa Clara mall in 2026.

The global chain was founded in 2015 in Guangzhou, China, and has since expanded to more than 650 locations. Tai Er is known for its sauerkraut fish — sliced snakehead fish poached in a pork bone broth and layered with house-fermented Chinese sauerkraut — and it opened its first Bay Area restaurant in September.

Tai Er Sichuan Cuisine, 2855 Stevens Creek Blvd., Unit-A268, Santa Clara; Instagram: @taier_usa and @taier_bayarea. ■

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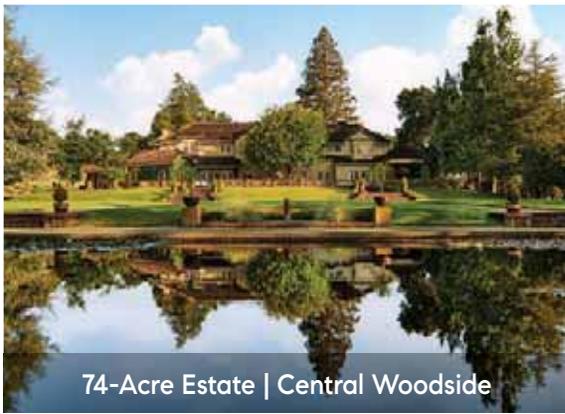


Courtesy Kona Island Coffee

Hanna Mejia Hans and Jorge Mejia, owners of Kona Island Coffee, stand outside their mobile coffee truck.

Dig into food news. Follow the Peninsula Foodist on Instagram @peninsulafoodist and subscribe to the newsletter at almanacnews.com/peninsula-foodist to get insights on the latest openings and closings, learn what the Foodist is excited about eating, read exclusive interviews and keep up on the trends affecting local restaurants.

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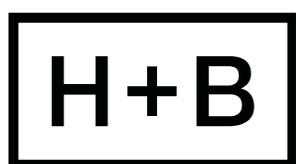
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