

# The Almanac

NONPROFIT LOCAL NEWS FOR THE MIDPENINSULA

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## Speakers find a supportive platform at Menlo Park Toastmasters

Club offers confidence-boosting community and encouragement

By Arden Margulis

What brings a banking executive, a software engineer, a dental hygienist, a writer and a logistics worker to an empty Menlo Park church at 7 p.m. on a Tuesday? A desire to become more confident public speakers.

They're all members of the Menlo Park chapter of Toastmasters International, where weekly meetings focus on building confidence through public speaking. The club is hosting an open house later this month to welcome prospective members.

While some Toastmaster clubs might target employees of a certain company or industry, Menlo Park Toastmasters is open to all. When you ask a member what makes the Menlo Park club special, they all say the same thing: its welcoming atmosphere.

"I think the greatest part of the club is the environment: the

folks that are already members are very supportive, very helpful and always available to answer any questions so I can navigate my path to become a better public speaker," said Ramón Martínez, who joined the club in September 2025.

"It is not only to help with speaking, it's also a community," said Ben Lim, a tech worker who joined the club six months ago.

Though members came from different backgrounds, many who spoke to this news organization said the club's atmosphere helped them work toward their goals.

"In the tech industry, when they tell you how to communicate, it's always very technical, very data-focused," said Lim. "What you find at Toastmasters is that the value of telling a story is actually more important to captivate the audience."

Lim said that even though he joined six months ago, he has

See **TOASTMASTERS**, page 10



Seeger Gray

Nini Che opens a Toastmasters meeting at Bethany Lutheran Church in Menlo Park on Jan. 6.

## Hundreds protest Trump, ICE slaying of Minnesota mom

About 700 demonstrators lined El Camino Real Saturday

By Miranda de Moraes

For just shy of two hours, a blaring orchestra of honks reverberated down El Camino Real midday on Saturday, Jan. 10, when protesters occupied close to two blocks of the busy street.

Spilling onto a traffic island, the demonstrators, around 700 of them according to organizers, took over the area from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., occupying all four corners of the El Camino Real and Jefferson Ave. intersection in protest of President Trump's agenda. Most signs denounced the president's ambitious utilization

of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, including its killing of an American citizen this week.

A white mother of three, Renee Nicole Good, 37, was fatally shot in her car by Immigration and Customs Enforcement on Wednesday in Minneapolis, blocks away from the site of the 2020 murder of George Floyd by a police officer.

Signs reading "Trust your eyes, not lies!" refer to the controversy spun up over whether Good was unlawfully murdered by a federal agent, or if the agent's gunshot was a legitimate means of his own self-defense.

Video footage from an agent's cellphone made publicly available Friday includes Good's last words before the agent killed her — "That's fine dude, I'm not mad at you" — which ICE critics argue demonstrates Good's innocence.

Among the dozens of protesters was Ron Hess, 79, a Redwood City resident born in 1946.

"I've never seen anything like it in my lifetime," Hess said. "After 250 years of democracy ... they really think they can just take that away from the American people. It's just stunning."

Hess said he couldn't recall

attending any protests before Trump's second term, in part because he was busy raising a family, but also because he believes the stakes have escalated.

"It's up to us older people who are still paying attention to protect our grandchildren," the 79-year-old resident said.

The majority of the attendees had white hair, which the protest organizer, JoAnn Loulan of Portola Valley, said she expected. She told this news organization on Jan. 9 that the demographic at many of her protests is "basically old, white people who aren't afraid of being arrested."

Even so, Josh Levinson, a Redwood City dad of three, attended the protest with his children because he wants his kids to understand that "if you ignore what's happening, eventually it will come for you."

"It just feels like we're going down the toilet bowl," Levinson said.

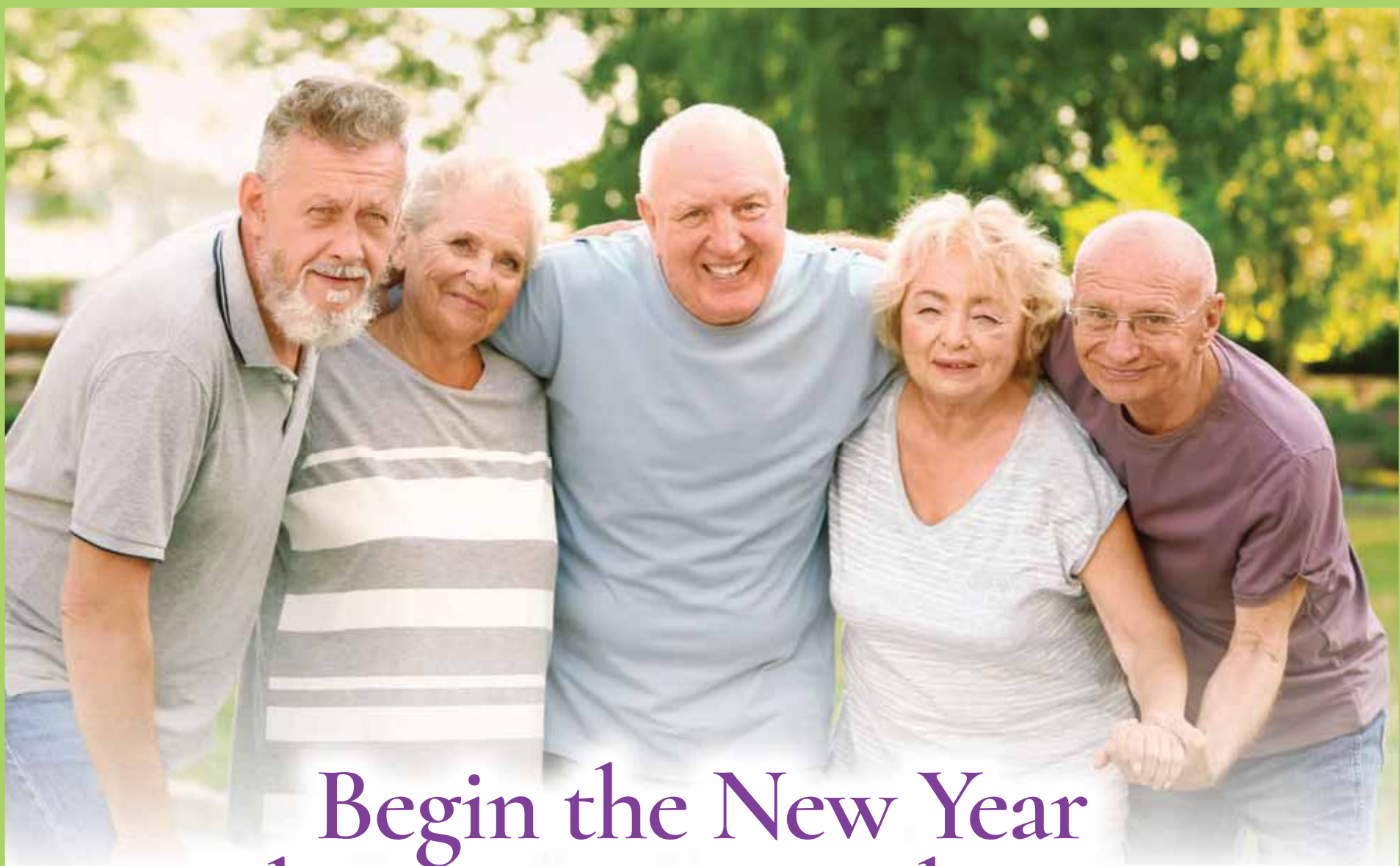
Regardless of the demonstrators' demographics, folks of all ages and races who drove everything from two-seater Smart cars to hefty semi-trucks honked with gusto down El Camino Real in solidarity with the protesters.

See **PROTEST**, page 15

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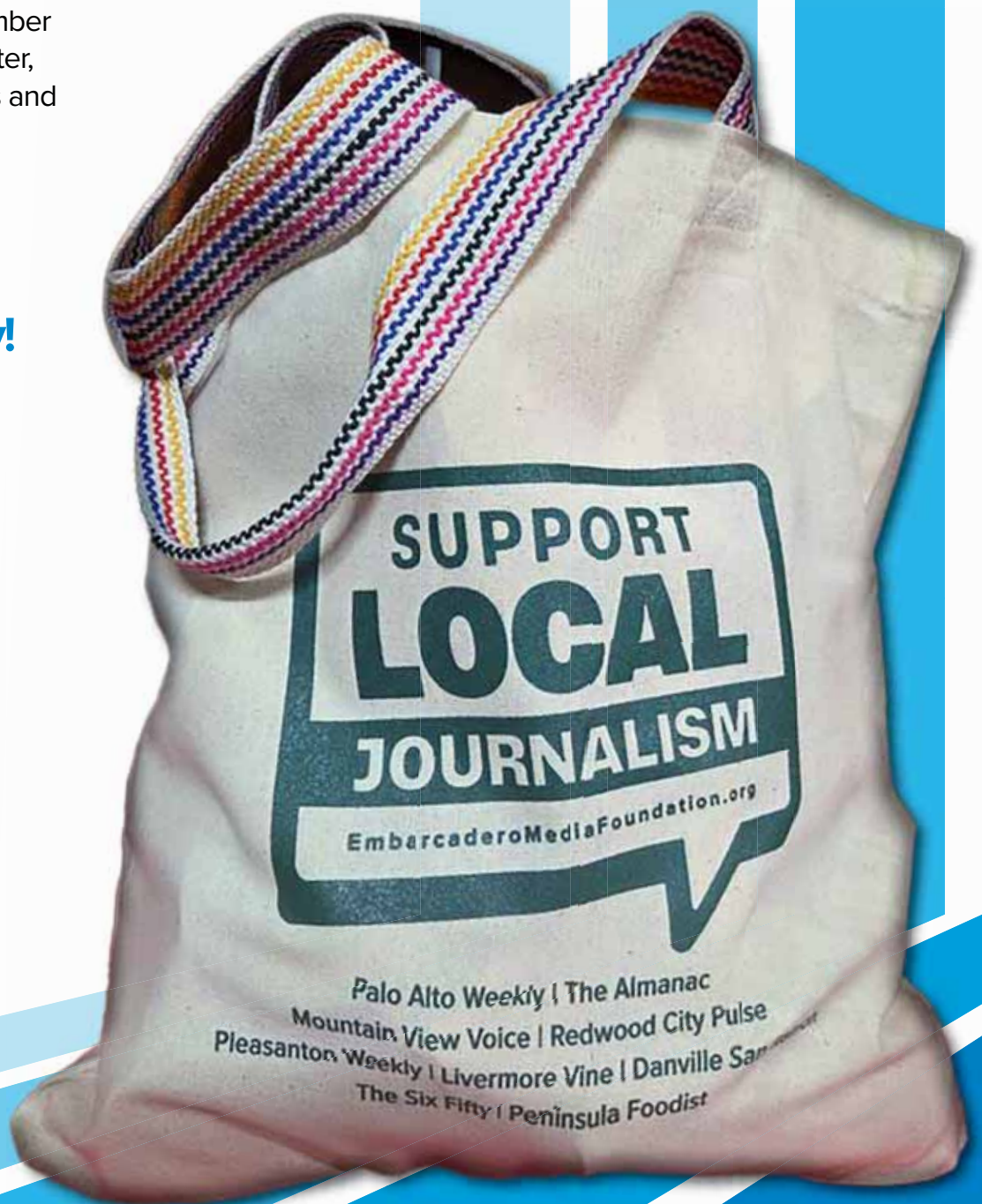
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Devin Roberts

Transitional kindergarten students show off their crafts at Encinal Elementary in Menlo Park in 2024.

## Local districts open registration for new students

Tap into tours, meetings and more for incoming TK, kindergartners

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

Are you ready for the upcoming school year? Summer break is far from reach but local schools across the Midpeninsula are already releasing enrollment information for the 2026-27 school year. Whether you're interested in signing up your 4-year-old for transitional kindergarten or touring a local school, now is the time to get started.

Find registration details by district below.

### Menlo Park City School District

New student registration begins on Feb. 2 for all students in the Menlo Park district. TK children must be 4 years old by Sept. 1 this year. The school district is hosting informational nights

this month for prospective TK and kindergarten students:

- **Oak Knoll TK and Kindergarten Info Night:** Jan. 22 from 5-6 p.m. for TK and 6:30-7:30 p.m. for kindergarten in the large gym, 1895 Oak Knoll Lane, Menlo Park
- **Encinal Elementary School:** Jan. 29 from 5-6 p.m. for TK and 6:30-7:30 p.m. for kindergarten in the large gym, 195 Encinal Avenue, Atherton

Students interested in the district's Spanish immersion program must complete kindergarten registration between Feb. 2-28 to be prioritized. Registrations submitted after February will be added to a waitlist. A lottery to join in

See **REGISTRATION**, page 10

## Donors pony up \$2.5M to beautify Woodside Road medians

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

The town of Woodside received a monumental donation of \$2.5 million from two anonymous donors to fund a beautification project on Woodside Road. This is the largest private donation gifted to the town in over 20 years, said Mayor Brian Dombkowski.

The project will landscape the rundown road medians on Woodside Road from east of Highway 84 to Alameda De Las Pulgas, clearing weeds and dirt from an area that recently has seen minimal maintenance.

"(This project) would greatly improve a vital public corridor in our community and turn it into a welcoming, calmer and safer thoroughfare," said Dombkowski at the Town Council's Jan. 13 meeting. "(It will) create an enduring and lasting civic asset for our citizens and the surrounding residents of our community here."

The proposed design includes natural boulders and native, drought-tolerant plants such as manzanita, rockrose and coffeeberry. The final design and selection of plants will be reviewed by the Landscape Committee before final approvals by the Town Council.

Prior to the donation, the town had already allocated \$200,000 for this exact project, marking it as a priority on its list of capital improvements for 2026. The generous donation will allow the town to complete the entirety of the project, said Dombkowski.

The median on Woodside Road is within Caltrans' right-of-way, meaning the town must obtain an encroachment permit from the state agency once it completes the design process. The town will then be responsible for the maintenance, including irrigation,

regular cleaning of the medians and its surrounding areas.

This project is part of the Woodside Beautification and Safety Project from 2023, which tackled a cluster of weeds and litter at the median across from Caltrans Park & Ride lot on Woodside Road. The process to beautify the town's "front porch" was funded by a community donation of \$165,000.

"We've already seen the first stage of the beautification project, which is really lovely," said Councilmember Jenn Wall. "It really transformed the way Woodside looks when you enter and it was tastefully done."

The anonymous donation was made to the Woodside Community Foundation, a non-profit organization that administers funds established by tax-deductible contributions. In 2003, the town received a \$2.1 million community donation through the foundation to pay for the construction of Barkley Fields and Park — Woodside's only town-owned park and playing field.

During the Jan. 13 Town Council meeting, council members unanimously voted to approve a resolution authorizing an agreement between the town and the Woodside Community Foundation to transfer the donated funds.

Town staff and council members commended Dombkowski for his involvement in finding the donors and communicating the impact that this project will have on the town.

Town staff anticipates the project will break ground in the spring of 2027, after a year-long design and permitting process. ■

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## Menlo Park gymnastics center closed due to water damage

Shuttered since Dec. 30, it's set to reopen by the end of January

By Arden Margulis

Arrillaga Family Gymnastics Center is temporarily closed due to storm damage that occurred at the end of December

The city of Menlo Park discovered storm-related flooding on Dec. 30 and hired a

contractor to clean up the water damage, said city spokesperson Kendra Calvert.

During the cleanup, contractors discovered damage to drywall, floor mats and equipment. Classes were set to resume on Jan. 6 after the holiday break but were postponed to Jan. 12 due to the flooding.

The closure has now been extended to allow more time for repairs and cleaning. City staff estimate the closure will last an additional two weeks, Calvert said.

Arrillaga Family Gymnastics Center is located at 501 Laurel Street and offers youth gymnastics programs to kids as young

as 1 year through the city's recreation department. In the 2025 winter season alone, some 1,333 participants attended gymnastic classes at Arrillaga.

Participants were refunded for canceled classes and city officials hope to schedule make-up sessions.

"The City is committed to

ensuring that all water damage is repaired and the facility is completely dry, clean and safe for users before reopening," Calvert said in an email.

The 22,500-square-foot gymnastics center at Burgess Park opened in 2012 and cost \$12 million. It is named after Palo Alto developer John Arrillaga. ■

# San Mateo County leaders target school-to-prison pipeline at community conference

'Everybody was listening to us,' youth says

By Hannah Bensen

Tayvon, 19, hopes to attend college and pursue a skilled trade, such as engineering, plumbing or underwater welding. Now a high school senior, he has had a tougher path than others his age.

Tayvon entered the child welfare system at age 5, when child protective services placed him in the care of his grandmother, who raised him with his siblings and cousin. He later spent some time in a San Jose juvenile detention center, where he says he experienced racism and indignities like strip searching. His last name has been omitted for privacy.

Around 2,800 youth are held in juvenile detention centers across California. These numbers have steadily declined since the early 2000s, when state records show that more than 10,000 youth were detained. But research shows that a school-to-prison pipeline still exists, a system where students who experience punitive punishments like suspensions are far more likely to become enmeshed in the criminal justice system.

San Mateo County leaders and community members are working to dismantle this pipeline. On Jan. 7, the Juvenile Justice Commission and Delinquency Prevention Commission hosted the first-ever Prevention in Action conference at the College of San Mateo, in partnership with the youth program Project Change. The event brought together educators, mental health professionals, law enforcement, community partners and policymakers to discuss how to divert youth from the juvenile justice system and the best practices for assisting system-impacted youth.

The conference featured speakers who delivered workshops and lectures on topics including school suspension



Courtesy Dennis Menendez

Tayvon, who entered the child welfare system at age 5, hugs Johanna Rasmussen, chair of the San Mateo County Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Committee, during the inaugural San Mateo County Prevention Conference on Jan. 7.

alternatives, financial literacy, and prosocial behavior in schools. At the end of the day, four youth, including Tayvon, spoke on a panel to discuss their experience in the foster care and juvenile justice system. They discussed policies such as strip searches that needed to end immediately, highlighted mentors who had positively impacted them, and spoke directly to the audience about what the community should know about the system.

"We're all the same human beings," Tayvon said in an interview. "We all got private parts, we all got hair, we all got eyes, we all got a nose. We might just be a different color, but we all came from God."

Johanna Rasmussen, who serves as chair of the JJDPC and helped organize the conference, said the goal was to "educate the educators" about the obstacles youth face within the foster care and juvenile justice systems.

Youth arrive at school carrying a wide range of burdens, Rasmussen said. Some stem from personal upheavals — such as divorce, death or illness in the family — while others reflect broader instability, including hunger, housing insecurity or fear of immigration enforcement. Educators and school-based mental health professionals are often on the front lines responding to student behavior, and the approaches they take can either exacerbate challenges or help students stabilize and succeed.

Chris Middleton, a staff attorney at the Youth Law Center,

spoke at the conference about strategies for ensuring a smooth transition from court schools in county juvenile halls to traditional schools, including students' rights to enrollment and partial academic credit. He said that the quality of a student's educational environment can significantly reduce recidivism.

"Getting students to be in a place where they're in school for a long period of time, [where] they feel really rooted and connected with their community, is the ideal," Middleton said in an interview.

Another goal of the conference was to foster dialogue and build relationships across sectors. Rasmussen, who works closely with youth in the juvenile justice system, pointed to a striking moment when a formerly detained youth from the panel shared that a police officer in attendance had made a positive impact on him. The two connected over an unexpected bond: both have limb differences. The youth lost his left hand in a fireworks accident, while the officer uses a prosthetic leg. The exchange stood in sharp contrast to the youth's previous experiences with law enforcement of harassment and distrust.

"[The youth] went over there and they hugged, and I saw this emotion. This officer was totally invested in this kid," Rasmussen said. "It just blew my mind."

Paul Bocanegra, another commissioner on the JJDPC, said he was pleased with the community participation in the conference and with the meaningful conversations he

had with law enforcement and county officials. Bocanegra was sentenced to life without parole when he was 16 years old and served more than 25 years in adult prison for a crime he says he didn't commit. He now serves as the executive director of Unlocked Futures, an organization that assists system-impacted youth.

As a conference organizer, Bocanegra said it was important for a diverse array of stakeholders to participate because they can push youth into the criminal justice system through policy or policing. They are also the ones who can divert youth from the system. Bocanegra said the youth panel, which he facilitated with Rasmussen, was particularly powerful.

"Having the community stand and clap and come up and give them a business card — that's what inclusion looks like to me," Bocanegra said. "And I wish these kids always felt as comfortable around law enforcement and all the key players as they were comfortable today."

For Tayvon, the conference was an opportunity to share his experience and remind the audience that respect goes a long way.

"I just feel like today was a really good day," Tayvon said. "Everybody was listening to us, and they were on our side." ■

*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](mailto:hbensen@almanacnews.com).*

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# Home of longtime downtown Menlo Park Italian restaurant hits the market

Carpaccio closed in June; AJ Tutoring still occupies top floor

By Arden Margulis

Ristorante Carpaccio's building is up for sale, just months after the 36-year-old eatery closed.

The downtown property, located at 1120 Crane St., housed Carpaccio throughout its 36-year history. One of the longest-running restaurants in downtown Menlo Park, the business closed permanently on June 22, 2025, with the owner citing "impossible" struggles to stay afloat following the loss of outdoor dining in an alley behind the building. The Menlo Park City Council decided to reopen the alley in

April 2025, after closing it to vehicles during the pandemic in 2020.

The property was listed for sale by the commercial real estate firm CBRE on Dec. 4, 2025, but no listing price was publicly disclosed.

According to the property description, Carpaccio's ground-floor restaurant space totals 3,950 square feet, and the second-floor commercial space, currently occupied by AJ Tutoring, is about the same size. AJ Tutoring's lease runs until June 2027.

The restaurant space is "fully built-out" and includes a wood-fired pizza oven, according to the listing, which calls it "a rare

opportunity in the Bay Area's most affluent and supply-constrained sub-market," according to the listing.

Public records obtained by this news organization show the property was owned for decades by Solvang resident Margret Tsai until her death. While public records do not indicate when the property last changed hands, its assessed value in 2025 is \$2.4 million.

CBRE representatives were not immediately available for comment. ■

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Arden Margulis

After housing Carpaccio for 36 years, the building at 1120 Crane St. in Menlo Park is for sale.

# With new plan, East Palo Alto hopes to lure business and boost image

10-year economic blueprint emphasizes prime location, cultural identity

By Lisa Moreno

The East Palo Alto City Council unanimously adopted this month an economic plan that aims to attract more businesses, generate jobs and build the city's brand over the next decade.

The Economic Development Strategic Plan was promoted by City Manager Melvin Gaines and council members, who included it on their 2023-2025 and 2025-2027 priority lists. Now that the final version is approved, city staff will develop a detailed five-year implementation plan and allocate money to new initiatives during the upcoming budgeting season, which will begin this spring.

Over the past year, the city's consultant HR&A Advisors connected with stakeholders and over 100 community members to ask how they envisioned economic mobility. Residents primarily wanted to see tangible support like grants for micro businesses, further investment in youth job training for high-paying careers

and development of community spaces to create a downtown, according to staff.

Through an analysis of the city, consultants found that East Palo Alto's strengths lie in its central Silicon Valley location, affordability, proximity to the Bay waterfront and self-reliance with opportunity for economic growth and a strong youth population. But the city also faces challenges with limited retail and transit, complicated business licensing and lack of county and state resources.

"We want to strengthen EPA's identity and better highlight East Palo Alto's story, specifically moving to shift perceptions and attract and retain businesses and visitors," HR&A representative Judith Taylor said at a Jan. 6 council meeting.

Consultants and city staff used the analysis and community feedback to create a multifaceted plan with three main goals and corresponding initiatives to get the city started. Initiatives are categorized into three categories — quick wins, mid-term and

long-term — with the costlier items in the latter two groups.

The first goal is to boost home-grown businesses with shorter and clearer permitting processes. Some of the proposed quick wins include creating a bilingual microbusiness guide and streamlining business licensing processes. A longer term project could entail creating an "incubator office space" or center for microbusiness.

East Palo Alto has already begun evaluating ways to license microbusinesses like street vendors through a prospective ordinance, but the new directive could put more financial strain on local business owners.

Goal two aims to attract new businesses and private investors, boosting the tax base and local pay rates.

HR&A recommended the city first create a comprehensive webpage where business owners can view reasons to work with East Palo Alto and research available land and building space. Consultants also recommended specifically seeking child care, health care and construction-related businesses.

Some longer term initiatives include hiring dedicated staff to assist with business inquiries and providing industry-aligned job training programs.

In the past, East Palo Alto has awarded various grants to the local nonprofit JobTrain, a career development organization that began in East Palo Alto and has expanded across the Bay Area. City council members recommended developing that relationship instead of starting from scratch in regards to job training.

"We can definitely fund and encourage third parties and non-profits," Council member Mark

Dinan said.

Goal three is to make East Palo Alto "investment ready," utilizing vacant sites and increasing foot traffic. This goal essentially aims to change perceptions of the city — market it as a place to live, work and visit through festivals and waterfront recreation for a quick win. As a more comprehensive approach, consultants recommended engaging with a branding consultant.

The initiatives listed in this article are labeled as the most essential for city progress according to city documents, especially hiring a business ambassador that could serve as a go-to for all inquiries.

"There is a need for these additional staff members across time in the mid-to-long term, and the sooner that you can get those staffed, the more they can do to put more of these strategies into place," Taylor said.

While all council members expressed general support for the plan, Romero was more interested in smaller wins that

could cater to the direct success of residents and was wary of gentrification.

"I want to recognize that larger quote-on-quote economic development projects, in whatever city they are located, are displacing and gentrifying," Romero said.

Others supported the plan's proposal to better showcase East Palo Alto's strengths and attributes, including its cultural identity. Vice Mayor Ruben Abrica said the city should lean on its diverse programming and cultural events, like Juneteenth and Cinco de Mayo festivals, that draw people from throughout the region.

Members of the public also expressed excitement over possible economic growth.

"This group has really put together the matrix for us to begin thinking about the future of EPA," said former city council member Larry Moody. ■

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Magali Gauthier

East Palo Alto City Councilman Larry Moody speaks at a public hearing on Oct. 22, 2019.

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# After a decade of ‘embarrassing’ delays, City Council lets West Menlo Triangle annexation effort move ahead

By Arden Margulis

A decade-long drive to annex a 14-acre area of unincorporated West Menlo Park may finally progress after the Menlo Park City Council decided to keep the neighborhood’s quest alive at its Jan. 13 meeting.

For more than 10 years, homeowners in an unincorporated area bordered by Alameda de Las Pulgas and Santa Cruz Avenue, dubbed the West Menlo Triangle, have asked to join the city of Menlo Park, hoping to tap into city services like policing and public works.

“Honestly, we feel left out. We live here. We shop here. We eat here. But we can’t vote

here,” said unincorporated triangle resident Kristen Kassai. “Living in this ‘no man’s land’ between the county and the city is confusing: sidewalks will stop abruptly and when we need help, we are reliant on a sheriff that is two towns over.”

City Councilmember Drew Combs has called the decade-long saga to add around 60 residences “embarrassing” for the city. It is the longest known annexation attempt in San Mateo County history.

Even though the area is tiny, comprising less than 0.2% of the city’s land area, city staff says the annexation process would take significant resources and has implied it could delay projects like the development of housing and

parking garages on downtown parking lots.

There are quite a few steps before the neighborhood can officially become part of the city. The annexation needs to go through the county’s Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo), which is tasked with regulating changes in municipal boundaries.

The city needs to prezone the area and amend its general plan, host at least two public hearings, adopt an ordinance, negotiate with the County of San Mateo about how property tax revenue will be allocated, get the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors to pass a resolution and coordinate with LAFCo to host another public meeting and hear any protests.

City staff estimates the total cost would be \$60,000. Staff is also concerned there may need to be a review under the California Environmental Quality Act, which would be an additional expense.

Residents have already paid over \$10,000 in fees and asked the council for a waiver. Without it, residents would be on the hook for the cost to process the application.

Another resident said that, because it is part of the county, heritage trees are not protected the way they would be under city rules.

While Menlo Park officials previously expressed concerns over the cost of adding sidewalks and infrastructure, San Mateo County recently spent

millions of dollars upgrading roads and pedestrian infrastructure along Alameda de Las Pulgas, leaving less for the city to do.

On Jan. 13, the City Council handed the annexation advocates a lifeline, and voted 3-1 to approve a fee waiver with Mayor Betsy Nash dissenting and Councilmember Cecelia Taylor absent.

## A long history

West Menlo Triangle residents submitted an application to LAFCo in 2015 and the City Council added a broader annexation policy to its work plan in 2016.

In 2018, the city added the

See **ANNEXATION**, page 9

## Susan Lee (Cranmer) Buckley

June 17, 1939 - December 31, 2025

Susan Lee (Cranmer) Buckley passed peacefully in her sleep, surrounded by loved ones on December 31, 2025. She was born in Merced, California on June 17, 1939. She attended Fresno High and University of California, Berkeley where she was a member of Gamma Phi Sorority.

Susan was married to Fredrick (Fritz) Schwarz and had one daughter Jennifer Schwarz Richards of Orinda, Ca. In 1968, Susan married Charlton Henry Buckley, and they raised their children, Sarah Marie Buckley and Sean Charlton Buckley in Atherton, Ca. Susan and Charlton lived in Atherton, California, and Glenbrook, Nevada respectively where she kept her beautiful gardens that she lavished with her time and love.

Susan’s greatest joy later in life was her four grandsons: Sarah’s three sons, Nolan Henry Stuart, Oliver Bailey Stuart, and Sean Charlton Stuart, and Sean’s son Daniel Sean Buckley, who filled her life with laughter.

Susan and Charlton enjoyed a fabulous life full of travel, celebrations, friends, and family and their beloved dogs Lucy and Sammie.

Susan was preceded in death by her mother, Helen Louise Schach, her father Elmer Loren Cranmer, and her sister Sally Melinda Cranmer.

Susan’s life will be celebrated on Sunday, January 18, 2026 at 2 PM at the Menlo Circus Club located at 140 Park Ln., Atherton, CA. In lieu of gifts or flowers, the family requests you keep her in your thoughts and remember her as the vibrant woman we were blessed to have in our lives.



PAID OBITUARY

## County taps community affairs director as interim head of Parks Department

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

San Mateo County Parks has a new interim director, following the promotion of its former head. Emma Gonzalez began leading the department on an interim basis on Jan. 5 and will hold the post while the county plans to recruit its next permanent parks director.

The former director, Nicholas Calderon, was recently promoted to deputy county executive.

In a county press release, Gonzalez expressed excitement about working with park staff to

advance capital projects scheduled for completion in 2026, including the new Flood Park playground in Menlo Park and facilities improvements at San Bruno Mountain State and County Park.

Gonzalez previously served as director of community affairs and programming under San Mateo County Executive Mike Callagy. She worked on the county’s efforts in the 2020 Census, COVID-19 outreach and farmworker housing development. Gonzalez also led various initiatives in collaboration with local and state officials,

community leaders and philanthropic partners, according to the press release.

“Emma brings deep experience in public service, community engagement, and cross-departmental leadership,” said County Executive Mike Callagy in a written statement. “She has a strong track record of delivering complex initiatives and building trusted partnerships, and I’m confident she will continue advancing the Parks Department’s important work in service to our communities.” ■

Email Staff Writer

Jennifer Yoshikoshi at

[jjoshikoshi@almanacnews.com](mailto:jjoshikoshi@almanacnews.com).



Emma Gonzalez

## Portola Valley district’s Minoo Shah wins special education award

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

Minoo Shah, the director of educational services for the Portola Valley School District, was named the 2026 Special Education Administrator of the Year, according to a district press release.

Shah was recognized for her leadership, dedication to educational quality and innovation in serving students with disabilities by the Association of California School Administrators. She has worked in education for 25 years and began her career in India before pursuing masters and doctorate degrees in the United States. Shah has been with the TK-8 district of 495 students since 2014. “Shah’s colleagues describe her

as a ‘reflective leader’ who prioritizes curiosity over blame and approaches every challenge with an asset-based mindset,” said the district in the press release.

In her administrative role, Shah has been a key leader in initiating systemic transformations, advocating for equity, providing professional mentorship and creating partnerships with local education leaders, according to district officials.

Through her leadership, the district has been able to improve outcomes for historically underserved students and educators are

provided with opportunities to receive professional development. Shah is known to step in to cover for other staff so they can pursue learning experiences to grow their skills.

Shah has worked with school leadership teams, the San Mateo County Office of Education and Stanford University to support initiatives to implement the California Math Framework and uplift English learners in the community.

She was also recognized for her work with the district’s Local Control Accountability Plan development team, which ensures that student achievement data is consistently monitored to meet the high standards of the school’s community. ■



Minoo Shah

**ANNEXATION**

*continued from page 8*

annexation to its work plan again and launched a subcommittee to negotiate with the county on property tax allocation. However, the subcommittee never reported back to the full council, citing staff vacancies.

By 2019, discussions with the county restarted, and a staff report said annexation would go before the City Council in early 2020. After the COVID-19 pandemic started, the annexation process appears to have stalled.

City staff says most of the work done to this point will need to be redone, since so much time has passed.

Mayor Nash said that, given the city's other major projects, she did not want city staff to spend time on it while other projects are delayed.

Councilmember Combs countered by saying there will always be a limited amount of resources available and that finally processing annexation would be a way to regain public trust.

"I think it is an indication to people that city government works, because when you see something like this that has dragged on for 10 years ... people can use it to say 'government doesn't work,' 'city government doesn't work' and specifically, 'Menlo Park government doesn't work,'" Combs said.

"So for me, I think there is a lot of value, aside from what has been shared, for us as a city to show and indicate that, 'yes, we do work' and 'we can do basic things nowadays,'" Combs added. ■

*Email Staff Writer Arden Margulis at [amargulis@almanacnews.com](mailto:amargulis@almanacnews.com).*



**Audrey Joan Crevelt**

Audrey Joan Crevelt, cherished mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and dedicated member of St. Pius Parish, was born on June 16, 1930, in Cebu, Philippines. Her life was shaped by her deep faith, strong family bonds, and steadfast commitment to her community.

Audrey graduated from UC Berkeley and soon after married her college sweetheart, John Theodore. Together, they created a nurturing home and raised eight children. Her surviving children — Linda Crevelt, Sharon Crevelt Vintze, Patrick Crevelt, Michael Crevelt, Richard Crevelt, John Crevelt, and Mary Crevelt Mearns, 15 Grandchildren and 5 Great grandchildren will continue to honor her legacy of compassion, resilience, and kindness. Audrey was preceded in death by her beloved husband John and one child, David Christopher, whose memory she held close to her heart.

Celebration of Life

A Funeral Mass to honor Audrey will take place at 10:00 AM on January 30th at St. Pius Church. After the service, friends and family are invited to gather for a memorial reception at the Community Center on Roosevelt. This gathering will be a time to celebrate Audrey's extraordinary life and the enduring impact she made on everyone she met.

Honoring Audrey's Memory

For more about Audrey's life, please visit the Crippen and Flynn website, where a Bio Memorial has been created in her honor.

In lieu of flowers, the family kindly asks that donations be made to the St. Francis Center, or the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. These contributions will help continue Audrey's legacy of generosity and support for those in need.

PAID OBITUARY



**Town of Atherton**

Planning Commission, January 28, 2026

REGULAR MEETING, 6:00 P.M.

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

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING**

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that the **Atherton Planning Commission** will hold a public hearing to consider development standards on properties that are eligible for development under the "Abundant and Affordable Homes Near Transit Act" passed in 2025 as Senate Bill (SB) 79.

**NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN** that said item is set for hearing by the Planning Commission at its meeting on **January 28, 2026, at 6:00 PM** in-person and via teleconference accessible through the information provided below, at which time and place all persons interested may participate and show cause, if they have any, why the projects listed in the public hearing section should or should not be approved. This meeting will be held via teleconference pursuant to Government Code section 54953(e) to provide the safest environment for staff and the public while allowing for public participation. The public may participate in the Planning Commission Meeting via Zoom Meeting or by attending in-person in the Council Chambers at 80 Fair Oaks Lane, Atherton, CA 94027.

**Topic:** Atherton Planning Commission Regular Meeting

**Time:** January 28, 2026, 06:00 PM Pacific Time

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

**Zoom Meeting Option and Details:**

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

Meeting ID: 841 5024 9099

**Remote Public Comments:**

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

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

**Projects under Public Hearing:**

A. Consideration of a **Heritage Tree Removal (HTR25-009)** to construct a new residence and **Tree Protection Zone Exception (PTPZ25-00007)** to accommodate a new driveway at **68 Elena Avenue (APN 070-212-150)**, an approximately 1-acre site within the R-1A zoning district.

Atherton Municipal Code (AMC) Sections 8.10.040 (Removal of and Damage to Heritage Trees, Permit Process) and 8.10.020 (Definitions) outline the requirements for heritage tree removal. The Heritage Tree Removal (HTR) application requests that the Planning Commission consider the removal of one (1) Valley Oak Tree located in the buildable area of the lot toward the rear of the property to accommodate the rear of a new residence. Atherton Municipal Code (AMC) Sections 8.10.050 (Request for exceptions to the Tree Protection Zone (TPZ)) and 8.10.020 (Definitions) outline the requirements for construction activities within the TPZ. The Town of Atherton's *Heritage Tree Preservation Standards and Specifications* further describes that the Planning Commission may grant a Tree Protection Zone Exception (PTPZ) in the R-1A Zoning District for projects that are within a distance of a heritage tree less than 8 times the diameter of the trunk at breast height, noted as "8x." The PTPZ application requests that the Planning Commission consider approval of a new driveway that encroaches 5x from one (1) Coast Live Oak Tree. CEQA: This proposal has been determined to be categorically exempt from further environmental review pursuant to AMC Section 15.32.100 and CEQA Section 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land). If you have any questions on the item, please contact Gerry Martin, Assistant Planner, at [gmartin@athertonca.gov](mailto:gmartin@athertonca.gov) or (408) 809-9513.

B. Request for a **Special Structures Permit (SSR25-005)** to accommodate a detached garage as part of a new full site development **175 Isabella Avenue (APN 070-214-140)**, an approximately 1-acre site within the R-1A zoning district. Zoning Code Section 17.40.040(A) requires that accessory buildings or structures must be set back 120 feet from the front property line, or 30 feet behind the front line of the main structure, whichever is less. On flag lots, the front setback for accessory buildings and structures may be consistent with the front setback required for the main residence, upon issuance of a Special Structures Permit. The subject property is a flag lot, with the front of the lot designated as the narrowest property line abutting the access area. The proposed main residence provides a code-complying front setback of 92 feet and 4 inches, greater than the required 60 feet. The Special Structures Permit seeks to allow a detached garage located 14 feet and 9 inches behind the front line of the main residence, where 30 feet is required. The proposed detached garage would be set back a total of 107 feet and 1 inch from the designated front property line, and 473 feet and 7 inches from the street-abutting entrance of the property. This proposal has been determined to be categorically exempt from further environmental review pursuant to: CEQA Sections 15303 (New Construction). If you have any questions on the item, please contact Gerry Martin, Assistant Planner, at [gmartin@athertonca.gov](mailto:gmartin@athertonca.gov) or (408) 809-9513.

C. Consideration of a resolution recommending **amendments to the Atherton Municipal Code (AMC) to adopt an ordinance in response to the "Abundant and Affordable Homes Near Transit Act"** passed as Senate Bill (SB) 79 by the state in 2025. Pursuant to SB 79, properties within one quarter-mile of a transit stop, such as the Menlo Park Caltrain station, are eligible for development of up to 120 dwelling units per acre (du/ac) with height limits no less than 75-feet, beginning July 1, 2026. The City Council held a study session on December 3, 2025, to review the newly adopted state law and subsequently directed staff to put forward development standards that will respond to the state-enabled massing and density, as it applies to properties in the Town of Atherton. The Planning Commission will consider development standards and provide a recommendation to the City Council. After the Planning Commission meeting the ordinance may proceed to the City Council for consideration and final adoption. Additional information on SB 79 is available on the Town's website at: <https://www.athertonca.gov/672/Multi-Family-Housing>

If you have any questions on the items above, please contact Brittany Bendix, Consulting Town Planner, at [bbendix@ci.atherton.ca.us](mailto:bbendix@ci.atherton.ca.us) or (408) 688-2432.

The agenda for this meeting with links to related staff reports can be found online by **Friday, January 23, 2026**, here: <https://www.ci.atherton.ca.us/641/Agendas-Minutes>

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

ATHERTON PLANNING COMMISSION

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

*/s/ Brittany Bendix*  
Brittany Bendix, Consulting Town Planner

**TOASTMASTERS**

*continued from page 1*

already noticed a difference.

“I think I am more comfortable when I get up and speak in front of a group. In tech, you don’t get as much of an opportunity to just go out there and give a speech off the cuff,” Lim said.

Donne Davis, the club’s longest-attending member, joined in 2009 and credits the club with helping her overcome a lifelong fear of public speaking.

“When I first joined, I was, like most people, terrified of public speaking even though I’d had to do a lot of it. I worked at Foothill College for 15 years as an outreach counselor, and I used to go out to high schools and talk to students. I’d be in front of these huge audiences, and my heart would just be pounding,” Davis said.

Davis said that with large audiences, speakers can feel alone and judged but when speaking at club meetings, everyone supports each other.

“When I joined Toastmasters, people made me feel comfortable and like they were cheering for me when I got up to speak,” Davis added.

She later became a mentor, helping other club members inside and outside of meetings.

“I tell every new member, ‘I’m available to help you’ and people would ask me to be their mentor... so I will get together with them outside of the meeting, and I might brainstorm with them, or we might work on a specific project or presentation,” Davis said.

Davis became a Distinguished Toastmaster, the highest level of educational achievement in the club, by giving over 50 speeches and leading local clubs for over a year.

“It’s just another feeling of reward to know that you’ve helped people who have a goal and want to improve their lives, want to better

themselves,” Davis said.

Some of the club’s members joined after moving to the United States.

“I used to live in Norway and we’re not as communicative. So when I moved here, there was a lot of communication that I wasn’t used to, so I had to find a way to understand and how to connect with people in a way that was not common for me,” said Nini Che, who joined the club in 2019 and is now one of its officers.

Che said that not only did her confidence improve, Toastmasters helped her to explore new career paths. When she moved here from Norway, Che was a dental hygienist. Now, she’s a professor at College of San Mateo teaching dentistry and health care communication.

“There’s a lot of communication in health care. It’s very important how we communicate to provide the best care for our patients. We need to be careful about how we explain things, how we pick up on body language clues, and also be very mindful about HIPAA and confidentiality,” Che said.

**Speeches, grammarians and ‘ah-counters’**

At the Menlo Park Toastmasters Jan. 6 meeting, new member Jen Zou gave her first speech in front of club members. Davis was assigned to evaluate it, but all club members were encouraged to give written feedback.

“Before I walked in, I was thinking, ‘I can’t believe I am doing this.’ ... But then I felt a sense of calm because everyone here is so encouraging, and truly, that was my first speech ever. So if it was terrible, it would be okay. I can just improve,” Zou said afterward.

Zou joined the club about a month ago. “Like everyone, there are moments when I feel like my voice is caught in my throat and I have this inability to express myself,” she said.

Davis says the most important step is walking in the



Photos by Seeger Gray

Above: A whiteboard with the word of the day at a Toastmasters meeting at Bethany Lutheran Church in Menlo Park on Jan. 6. Below: Kassie Perlongo attends her first Toastmasters meeting.

door. “It takes a lot of courage to come to a meeting. You’re getting up there, you’re vulnerable, you’re not naked, but you feel like that,” Davis said.

Kassie Perlongo, who attended her first Toastmasters meeting on Jan. 6, agreed. “I almost canceled. I told my partner earlier today that, ‘I don’t know if I’m gonna go.’ He goes, ‘Just try.’ And so for me to just walk through the door, that’s the hardest part,” she said.

Following prepared speeches, the club’s meeting turns to impromptu speaking, when members are given the option to give off-the-cuff answers to prompts.

Several members serve in feedback roles during each meeting, including a grammarian who listens for grammar and word choice, and an “ah-counter” who tracks filler words and false starts. Toward the end of the meeting, they report their findings to the group to help speakers refine their skills.

“I’ve never been one to sugar-coat but I also always start with



a positive. It’s kind of like the sandwich — positive, suggestion, positive. We never use the word critique or criticize, and it’s always with the goal of encouraging the speaker to speak again,” said Davis.

The club allows visitors to attend three meetings before becoming members, which costs \$60 for six months. Members also get access to the Pathways Learning Experience, an online self-paced program

that includes videos, worksheets and lessons.

Menlo Park Toastmasters meets every Tuesday at 7 p.m. at Bethany Lutheran Church, 1095 Cloud Ave. The club is hosting an open house for prospective members there on Jan. 20, also at 7 p.m. For more information, visit [menlopark.toastmost.org](http://menlopark.toastmost.org). ■

Email Staff Writer Arden Margulis at [amargulis@almanacnews.com](mailto:amargulis@almanacnews.com).

**REGISTRATION**

*continued from page 5*

the program is set to take place on March 30 at 9 a.m.

Families who are new to the Spanish immersion program must attend a mandatory information meeting on the following dates:

- Feb. 10 at 6-7 p.m. in the Teacher Education Resource Center at the MPCSD office, 181 Encinal Ave., Atherton
- March 19 at 6-7 p.m. in the Teacher Education Resource Center

For more information, visit [district.mpcsd.org](http://district.mpcsd.org) or contact the district registrar at 650-321-7140 ext. 5600 or by emailing [registrar@mpcsd.org](mailto:registrar@mpcsd.org).

**Portola Valley School District**

Registration for new students at the Portola Valley district opened in December for TK through eighth grade.

Forms may be completed online and hard copy documents must be submitted in person. For more information visit [pvpsd.net/student-registration/pre-registration](http://pvpsd.net/student-registration/pre-registration).

**Woodside School District**

The Woodside district opened registration for new students on Jan. 9. Families interested in enrolling their child for kindergarten and TK can sign up to attend orientation meetings on the following dates:

- Kindergarten orientation: Jan. 29 at 8:30-9:30 a.m. in the school library
- TK orientation: Jan. 30 at 8:45-9:45 a.m. in the school library

The district is hosting school tours through May, at 8:45

a.m. on the first Wednesday of the month. For more information on enrollment, orientation and school tours, visit [woodsideschool.us/District/Student-Enrollment/index.html](http://woodsideschool.us/District/Student-Enrollment/index.html).

**Las Lomas Elementary School District**

Registration for new Las Lomas students in all grades will open on Feb. 1. Details about registration will be uploaded to the district’s registration page on [llesd.org/Families—Students/Parent-Resources/Registering-a-Student/index.html](http://llesd.org/Families—Students/Parent-Resources/Registering-a-Student/index.html).

For questions about the registration process, contact the school sites or email the district at [registration@llesd.org](mailto:registration@llesd.org).

**Ravenswood City School District**

The Ravenswood district enrollment details will be available in February on the district’s registration page on [ravenswoodschools.org/Students—Families/Registration](http://ravenswoodschools.org/Students—Families/Registration). ■

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



## Ruth Allen Barker

June 14, 1930 – November 6, 2025

Ruth Mary Allen Barker passed away peacefully at age 95, supported by her family's love, and with her beloved dog, Bucky, by her side. Born in San Francisco to Mary Beulah Gibbons Allen and James Hamilton Allen, she attended Miss Burke's School for Girls through 12th grade. Ruth had one sister, Margery (pre-deceased) and one brother, Wyatt. Summers were spent at the family ranch in Napa Valley, where her mother taught the children to ride horses and shoot occasional rattlesnakes, as well at the family cabin at Huntington Lake. One hundred years ago, Ruth's maternal grandparents established a cabin at the lake, which is in the Sierra National Forest. There, Ruth developed a lifelong appreciation for the mountains, learning how to fly fish, sail, hike, camp, chop wood, and identify every tree, flora, and fauna along the trail.

Ruth went to Stanford University and met Arthur Barker, who caught the sparkle of her eye. They were married in 1950, had three children — Peggy, Neill, and Kathy — and built a home in Woodside in 1960 where they raised their children. Ruth returned to college earning a master's degree in Speech Pathology. Her 25-year career in the Menlo Park Elementary School District as a Speech Therapist touched many children's lives.

Ruth was a courageous trailblazer. She was a Girl Scout leader, organized annual backpack trips in the high Sierras, and was a mentor to family and young friends. At 60, she planned and completed a 210-mile backpack journey on the John Muir trail. As life-long learners, she and Art enjoyed many Elder Hostel tours. They later joined friends to circumnavigate the entire globe in an extensive journey.

The Century Club of California (CCC) was an especially important part of Ruth's life. In 1888, Ruth's maternal grandmother was a founding member of this social club for San Francisco women. Ruth held every office in the club, including President, and was instrumental in preserving and archiving club history. Ruth and Art were also avid supporters of the San Francisco Symphony.

Ruth and Art envisioned large, annual family gatherings at the lake cabin, which needed transformation as the family grew. They led a five-year remodeling project with most family members contributing to the effort. At age 85, Ruth became a stonemason and personally built a rock foundation wall 6 feet tall, as well as a large rock wall around the cabin's fireplace. Just five years later, the Creek Fire of September 2020 completely destroyed the beloved family cabin, along with 40 nearby cabins. After the initial shock, Ruth bounced back and acquired a new cabin, to continue and cherish her memories made at the lake.

Ruth is survived by her brother, Wyatt (Alisanne) Allen; children: Margaret, Neill (Pamela), and Kathleen (Ken Hayes), seven grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

A celebration of Ruth's life will be held January 24, 2026, at 1:00 at the Woodside Village Church Chapel, 3154 Woodside Road, Woodside.

Donations in her memory may be made to the Century Club of California, the Rotary Club of Woodside/Portola Valley, or Redwood Hospice.

PAID OBITUARY

## Annina Ruhe Hardenbergh Demmon

1933-2025

On December 20, 2025, Annina passed away in Palo Alto, CA, surrounded by her loving family. Annina, or Nina as she was known to family and friends or "GG" to her 12 grandchildren, was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Henry Hardenbergh, and was born in Bronxville, New York, on July 4th, 1933. Yes, Nina was a firecracker baby who hosted a 4th of July party for her family and friends on her birthday most years. Nina is predeceased by her husband of nearly 57 years, Roy Earl Demmon Jr., her brother Mark Hardenbergh, her sister-in-law, Tina Hardenbergh, and her nephew, Michael Hardenbergh.

Nina is survived by her 4 children (and spouses), Linda Demmon Walsh (Thomas Walsh), Roy E. "Terry" Demmon (Myn Demmon), Charles Demmon (Barbara Demmon) and Nancy Demmon Clifford (John Clifford), and by her 12 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren: Scott, Sarah, James and Bryan Walsh, Emily, Sarah and Troy Demmon, Kathy Demmon-Harison and Greg Harison, Brooke and Maisie Demmon-Harison, Charles and Liz Demmon, Bailey Fowlkes, George Fowlkes, and Lucy Fowlkes Bell and Stephen Bell and Winston and Georgia Bell. When Nina and Roy were married, Nina said she wanted to have a big family and that is exactly what she got. Nina is also survived by her nieces/nephews, Steven Hardenbergh, Laura Hardenbergh Gifford, and Holly Hardenbergh.

After going to grade school in Bronxville, NY, Nina graduated from the Emma Willard School in 1951 and from Vassar College in 1955. Later that year, on September 10, 1955, Nina and Roy wed in the Reformed Church in Bronxville. In 1957, Nina and Roy followed the New York Giants in moving to the San Francisco Bay Area to start a new life. Roy's mother, Betty Lucille Demmon, would follow them from Bronxville to the West Coast a few years later. They would go on to be San Francisco Giants season ticket holders

from 1961 to today, and Nina could be seen keeping score at games throughout her life. It is somewhat poetic that Nina passed away in the exact same room at the Vi Nursing Home where one of her heroes passed away, Willie Mays.

While raising 4 children, Nina found time to volunteer for the Hillview School PTA and the Junior League of Palo Alto, becoming the President of both. She also served on the board of the Children's Health Council. While Nina and Roy were living in Washington, DC, in the 1980s, Nina served on the Board of the



Washington Opera and became very active with the Corcoran Gallery of Art, where she chaired the gallery's Annual Ball, its biggest social event and largest fund-raising event of the year.

Moving back to the Bay Area in 1991, Nina volunteered her time mentoring grade school-age children at the Boys and Girls Club of the Peninsula, a call to service she shared with Roy. Nina

also doted on her grandchildren attending countless sporting events, plays and birthday parties. Nina and Roy loved to travel and shared this love with the family as well as their friends. Nina went on intrepid trips with Roy around the world: by train from Beijing to Moscow and another trip by car from Aman, Jordan to Cairo across the Sinai Peninsula. Nina and Roy took the entire family, 22 children/spouses and grandchildren, on cruises, family holiday trips, an African safari and several Summer Olympics.

As an avid sportswoman, Nina was a daily jogger, tennis player, golfer and bridge player. Nina honed her athletic skills, as well as entertaining family and friends, over the years at the Circus Club, Menlo Country Club, Franciscan Club, Cypress Point Club, Chevy Chase Club and Sulgrave Club. Nina's favorite vacation spots featured not only her athletic interests but featured ocean views and warm sunshine: Hawaii, where Nina and Roy spent their honeymoon (and countless anniversaries), Carmel and the Bahamas. On their beloved Harbour Island, Nina and Roy could be found there from January to March most years, accompanied by many visiting family and friends.

Nina's children and grandchildren would like to thank the caring nursing and administrative staff at Vi Living, where Nina lived for the past 14 years. We would also like to thank our friends, young and old, who have reached out with prayers, visits and support. God bless you all.

May Nina rest in peace at the side of her beloved, Roy, in the town where they grew up, met and wed.

The family is planning a celebration of life for May 30, 2026, in Menlo Park, CA. Please email any memories or photos of Nina to [Kathy@demmonpartners.com](mailto:Kathy@demmonpartners.com). Nina's ashes will be interred with her husband Roy's ashes and her parents' ashes at the Reformed Church in Bronxville, NY.

If you are so inclined, please make a donation in Nina's memory to the Boys and Girls Club of the Peninsula or the Merola Program at the San Francisco Opera, two causes Nina cherished and supported in life.

PAID OBITUARY



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



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

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**The Almanac**



**The Almanac Holiday Fund**

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The Almanac Holiday Fund is sponsored by the Embarcadero Media Foundation, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charitable organization, allowing your donation to be tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law. Tax ID #85-0941500

### **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.

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# The Almanac Holiday Fund

**THANK YOU FOR DONATING  
TO THE HOLIDAY FUND**

## Almanac Holiday Fund Donor List

As of Jan. 12th, 136 donors have contributed \$196,181 to the Holiday Fund.

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\* Donor did not want to publish the amount of the gift.

## Stanford researchers use AI to monitor rare cancer

Computer vision model identifies a cancer-related complications with 85% accuracy

By Hannah Bensen

After radiation therapy, certain cancer patients face a lingering question: Is a troubling lesion a return of the cancer, or is it damage caused by treatment? At Stanford, researchers are testing an artificial intelligence model designed to help doctors tell the difference.

Dr. Michael Chang is an assistant professor in the department of otolaryngology at Stanford University School of Medicine, where he practices medicine as a specialized ear, nose, and throat doctor called a rhinologist. In December, Dr. Chang and a team of researchers published a study which found that an AI model could identify a serious radiation-related complication called skull base osteoradionecrosis with 85% accuracy — roughly on par with the abilities of experienced clinicians, Chang said.

“The major finding was that this is a very feasible way that we can apply AI in this area of health care,” Chang said. “Because a lot of what we do is very reliant on images and interpretation of images, there’s a lot of opportunity for computer vision to help augment clinicians’ ability to diagnose, to treat and to surveil different disease processes.”

The model focuses on nasopharyngeal carcinoma, a rare but deadly cancer that disproportionately affects Asian American communities. The tumor develops deep behind the nose and symptoms can be subtle, and many cases are diagnosed late.

In the study, a computer vision model was trained on about 1,500 endoscopic images of the nasal pharynx from 192 patients. While the model performed strongly at detecting osteoradionecrosis versus healthy tissue, the system showed moderate accuracy in identifying recurrences of nasopharyngeal carcinoma. At times, the model confused recurrent NPC with radiation-related damage or normal-appearing tissue. Still, Dr. Chang said with a larger dataset, the models could perform even better. The research was funded by the Center for Asian Health Research and Education, a medical center at Stanford dedicated to

advancing the health of Asian people worldwide.

There are 100,000 new cases of nasopharyngeal carcinoma, Dr. Chang said, and the NIH estimates that roughly 80,000 people die from the cancer each year. While NPC is generally treatable with radiation treatment if diagnosed early, the cancer is often not detected until more advanced — and deadly — stages. While previous AI medical research has focused on making an initial diagnosis, Dr. Chang’s research breaks new ground by using AI to identify images after treatment.

Dr. Chang’s research can help improve health equity in several areas. For one, it can bolster health outcomes for people of Asian descent in a cancer with a high fatality rate. More broadly, Dr. Chang expects that AI can bridge discrepancies in health care by democratizing expertise. AI imaging models may also be a more objective system than human clinicians whose judgment may be subjective.

“A patient getting treated at Stanford is going to have access to all the expert surgeons and pathologists and radiologists,” Dr. Chang said. “But a patient somewhere else may not be able to have the same access to that level of expertise.”

Dr. Chang expects the overall impact of AI in the medical field to be “enormous in all aspects of health care.” AI can help automate tasks like billing or charting that are time-intensive and, as his research shows, assist with medical decision-making. Though physical AI — technology that works in physical space like robots — is less advanced, Dr. Chang said he can envision AI being co-pilots for surgeons in the future. But he doesn’t intend for AI to replace clinicians or replicate the doctor-patient relationship.

“The goal is to have AI augment the clinician’s decision-making,” Dr. Chang said. “I think there is certainly a big role for AI in diagnosis and in treatment and surveillance.” ■

*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](mailto:hbensen@almanacnews.com).*

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## OBITUARIES

Local residents who died recently include:

**Nancy Faisant**, 89, of Portola Valley and former president of the no-kill animal shelter Pets In Need, who began her career as an interior designer and later owned a telephone answering service in Menlo Park, and who was known for oil paintings inspired by global travels and her deep Christian faith, died on Nov. 18, 2025.

**Donald Hugh Mac Millan**, 90, a U.S. Army veteran, commercial real estate executive and longtime Rotarian in San Jose who played Cold War-era football in Europe and studied international trade in the Netherlands, was known for his deep friendships, adventurous travels with his wife Judy across six continents, and a lifelong love of golf. He died on Dec. 9, 2025.

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

## COMMUNITY BRIEFS

**Caltrain MLK Celebration**

Caltrain will operate its free NorCalMLK Celebration Train to take riders to San Francisco's annual Martin Luther King Jr. March on Monday, Jan. 19. The train will depart San Jose Diridon Station at 9:20 a.m. with stops in Palo Alto at 9:45 a.m., San Mateo at 10:02 a.m and Millbrae at 10:08 a.m before arriving in San Francisco. The ride is free and requires advance registration.

Attendees will get commemorative tickets, and participate in onboard activities, as part of the annual MLK observance hosted by the Northern California Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Foundation since 1985.

There will not be a special southbound train but celebration tickets will be accepted for southbound service starting at 1 p.m. Caltrain will operate on a special schedule due to the holiday. To register, visit [mlk2026celebrationtrain.eventbrite.com/](https://mlk2026celebrationtrain.eventbrite.com/).

— Arden Margulis

**Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service**

Canopy is hosting a day of service on Monday, Jan. 19 from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. The volunteer event is in celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day with a mission focused on renewal, learning and community care.

Community members can join the nonprofit and its partners in planting trees, park cleanup and a resource fair. The event is supported by the city of East Palo Alto, Kidango Ravenswood and Friends of MLK Park.

Volunteers meet at the Ravenswood Child Development Center, 951 O'Connor Street in East Palo Alto, to check-in before the event. The city is providing shuttles for volunteers to travel between service sites.

Register for the day of service on [canopy.org/volunteer-signup](https://canopy.org/volunteer-signup).

**Portola Valley school seeks STEAM fair judges**

Corte Madera School in Portola Valley is looking for volunteer judges to review 100-plus student projects that will be displayed at the STEAM fair on Feb. 3, the day before the actual event.

Volunteers will be asked to sign up for a one-hour block any time between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. in preparation for the fair on Wednesday, Feb. 4, from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Interested volunteers can register on [tinyurl.com/STEAMfairjudges](https://tinyurl.com/STEAMfairjudges).

**Woodside Planning Commission applications**

The town of Woodside is accepting applications for the District 1 and 3 seats on the Planning Commission. The deadline is 5 p.m. on Feb. 4. Interviews and appointments by the Town Council will take place at 7 p.m. on Feb. 10.

The Planning Commission meets every first and third Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m. Members are responsible for the administration of planning laws and policies as well as conducting public hearings.

Anyone interested should check residency requirements, request information and submit applications to Town Clerk Jennifer Li at [jli@woodsideca.gov](mailto:jli@woodsideca.gov).

— Jennifer Yoshikoshi

# OpenAI, childrens' advocates join forces on chatbot restrictions

## Ballot initiative aims to protect kids

By CalMatters

**K**ids safety advocate Common Sense Media and ChatGPT-maker OpenAI joined together Monday, Jan. 12, to advance a ballot measure that would amend the California Constitution in order to protect kids from companion chatbots online.

The two previously planned to place competing initiatives before voters, each stipulating that the one that got the most "yes" votes would win. OpenAI's proposal largely reflected existing law, while the Common Sense measure included new bans on what AI systems children could access.

The merged measure is known as the Parents & Kids Safe AI Act. It would, among other things:

- Require chatbot developers use technology to estimate a user's age range and apply filters and protective settings for people with an age predicted under the age of 18
- Require AI systems to undergo independent audits to identify child safety risks and report them to the California attorney general
- Ban child-targeted advertising and the sale or sharing of kids' data without a parent's consent
- Stop manipulation through emotional dependency by preventing AI systems from promoting isolation from family or friends, simulating romantic relationships with kids, or claiming that they're sentient

A Common Sense spokesperson said the measure was filed Thursday afternoon. It's not yet visible on the attorney general's website but you can read a copy obtained by CalMatters here. As described in a press release, the combined measure drops a ban on student smartphones in K-12 California schools and prohibition on minors using chatbots capable of engaging in erotic or sexually explicit talk that were

part of Common Sense Media's original initiative.

The initiative must receive 546,651 signatures in order to come before voters in November. California Secretary of State Shirley Weber has until June 25 to determine if it reaches that threshold or qualifies for the ballot.

Common Sense put forward its original ballot initiative, the California Kids AI Safety Act, last fall, not long after the Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed a bill the nonprofit had authored that contained similar provisions.

In response, in December 2025, OpenAI put forward a competing ballot measure that mirrors a bill that Newsom signed into law last October, requiring companion chatbot providers to enact a suicidal ideation protocol and inform people every three hours that they're speaking with AI. Critics called that move manipulative and designed to thwart stronger protections for kids.

Common Sense Media research has found that seven in 10 teens have used companion chatbots and that the tech is too dangerous to be used by minors. In promoting its original ballot initiative, the group warned that without action the tech could lead to more harm and addiction for young people. In one well-publicized case, the parents of California teen Adam Raine sued OpenAI, alleging Raine was coached by OpenAI's ChatGPT to commit suicide.

OpenAI's willingness to compromise marks a contrast with how tech companies banded together to get their way in a policy fight in 2020. That year, major gig economy players like DoorDash, Instacart, Lyft, and Uber spent \$200 million bankrolling a successful ballot initiative regulating gig work, Proposition 22. It effectively exempted them from a state law that would have required the companies to provide full employment benefits to their drivers.

Sen. Steve Padilla, the Chula Vista Democrat who carried the chatbot bill signed by Newsom, called the merged

ballot measure a significant breakthrough. But he added that he thinks the matter should be handled by lawmakers and the governor instead of directly by voters. Since the ballot initiative would amend the state constitution, Padilla said it "would create an unnecessarily high-bar to revise and update that law in the future. Moreover, legislative hearings will provide the broader public an opportunity to comment and provide input on this important issue."

In recent weeks, Padilla has proposed a bill with a four-year moratorium on the sale of toys with companion chatbots inside. OpenAI signed a partnership with Barbie-maker Mattel but has yet to produce any products.

OpenAI's fight at the California ballot box isn't limited to kids' online safety issues. One proposed ballot initiative would give a state commission the power to slow or stop AI model development if commission members suspect catastrophic risk of harm to Californians. Two other proposals target corporate conversions from nonprofit to for-profit companies, as OpenAI has planned. The initiatives compel nonprofits that restructure in such a way to dedicate all their assets to the public benefit of humanity. To reach that goal, the initiatives would create a commission that has the power to shut down AI models and that hosts competitions that invite the public to propose ways AI can help humanity. Under one of the initiatives, the commission would also have the power to revoke nonprofit conversions.

OpenAI was founded about a decade ago with a charter stating its purpose was to benefit humanity. Its plans to convert to a public benefit corporation led to heavy criticism from nonprofits and scrutiny by attorneys general in California and Delaware. Both states eventually reached agreements with OpenAI to allow a restructuring after the company agreed to place roughly 25% of its assets into a nonprofit. ■

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Left: Dozens of protesters overtook two blocks of El Camino Real midday on Jan. 10 to protest aggressive actions by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and President Trump's agenda. Photo by ProBonoPhoto/Sonny Mencher. Right: Demonstrators walked back and forth across the crosswalk, holding homemade signs. Photo by Miranda de Moraes.

**PROTEST**

*continued from page 1*

Indivisible Mid-Peninsula and Indivisible Portola Valley, local groups dedicated to progressive, grassroots activism, coordinated the Saturday protest and will have many more planned this month.

A “No War on Venezuela!” event, for one, will be held on

Saturday, Jan. 17, from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at 1250 Jefferson Ave., as part of Global Day of Action, when other resisters across the country will speak out against the president. The demonstration is based on President Trump's polarizing direction on Jan. 3 to capture the president of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro, in his stated interest to capitalize on the

country's rich oil reserves and address alleged narco-trafficking national threats.

Concerned that we're “already in fascism,” Leslie McNeil, 70, said she's not close to backing down. The Palo Alto resident who came out to Redwood City on Saturday is planning to attend a protest outside the headquarters of Palantir Technologies Inc., a

powerful data analytics company that partners with the U.S. government and military. Organized by the nonprofit Women's March, the “No Tech for ICE” protest will be held on Jan. 20 from 2 to 5 p.m. at 100 Hamilton Ave. in Palo Alto. ■

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

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# Public Notices

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)

FERNANDEZ PSYCHIATRY  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-302571

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

1.) FERNANDEZ PSYCHIATRY , located at 120B Santa Margarita Ave, Suite 112, Mailbox 62006, Menlo Park, CA, 94025.

Registered owner(s):  
LUIS FERNANDEZ

120B Santa Margarita Ave, Suite 112,  
Mailbox 62006

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 January 05, 2026.

(ALM Jan 16, 23, 30 and Feb 6, 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)

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)

DAVID JACOBS BUSINESS BROKER  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-302598

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

1.) DAVID JACOBS BUSINESS BROKER , located at 209 Durham Street, Menlo Park, CA 94025.

Registered owner(s):  
DAVID JACOBS

209 Durham Street  
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 January 07, 2026.

(ALM Jan 16, 23, 30 and Feb 6, 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)

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 08, 2025.

(ALM Dec 19, 2025, Jan 2, 9 and 16, 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. (DOE7)**

YOU ARE BEING SUED BY  
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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):  
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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)

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Elizabeth K. Hwang  
Hwang Law Group LLP  
420 Kit Fox Ct.  
Walnut Creek, CA 94598  
925-818-8375

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(Secretario) (Adjunto)  
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## Palo Alto-raised author-illustrator Chanel Miller explores the messiness and magic of middle school

Miller will discuss her new novel, 'The Moon Without Stars,' in Los Altos on Jan. 21

By Karla Kane

In her sensitive new middle-grade novel, "The Moon Without Stars," Palo Alto-raised author-illustrator Chanel Miller delves into the confusing, exciting, sometimes hilarious and often-overwhelming world of early adolescence. The story is narrated by Luna, a quiet seventh grader who unexpectedly finds herself being absorbed into her school's popular crowd, thanks to her talent for making zines with her kindhearted best friend Scott. As Luna's world expands and complicates, she grapples with discovering who she really is and wants to be. Her journey to finding herself is set amidst the highs and lows of puberty, school stress, peer pressure and family life, with Luna's feelings and exploits expressed in Miller's vivid, playful and thoughtful style.

Miller became a bestselling

author with her powerful memoir "Know My Name," and first delved into children's literature with the Newbery Honor book "Magnolia Wu Unfolds It All." She will discuss "The Moon Without Stars" at an event presented by Linden Tree Books at Christ Episcopal Church in Los Altos on Jan. 21.

We caught up with Miller via email interview, in which she shared what inspired her to tell Luna's story, how growing up in Palo Alto continues to influence her and why she wants kids to know that "writing is always there for them." She even answered a few bonus questions from a real-life middle school reader.

*(The Q&A has been lightly edited for style and length).*

**The Almanac: What made you decide to write this story for your next book project?**

Chanel Miller: Adults' lives can plateau or be broken down

into well-worn routines; meanwhile kids are navigating these daily, seismic changes. They're studying multiple subjects, adjusting to shifting social hierarchies, all while their bodies are developing. When there's constant flux, it's easy to feel vulnerable, and that's what appealed to me, that raw stage where nobody has quite settled into themselves yet. When I wrote my first book, "Know My Name," it was about excavation, scooping out all the dark matter. Then I wrote "Magnolia Wu Unfolds It All" to reintroduce a sense of play into my life. Writing "The Moon Without Stars" was my attempt at honoring the inner lives of young people. How they process the chaos of the world layered onto how difficult it is just to be a growing human. So I sat down at my desk, stuck a faucet in that portion of my memory, and let the recollections pour out. Those facts nourished the fiction.

**The Almanac: How do you get into the right mindset to write from the point of view of a middle schooler?**

Chanel Miller: I'm lucky one of my friends who I've known since childhood now teaches sixth and seventh grades, Ms. Binkley; she's the best. She allowed me to come observe her class and eventually opened

up the floor for questions. I asked the kids what they looked forward to everyday, what they dreaded, what kind of keychains they had on their backpacks, what brands they were wearing, what the dances were like, and then I just listened. It's an honor when anyone lets you in on the daily minutiae of their life. One student told me to make sure that my protagonist was "flawed," because a perfect character wouldn't be helpful to her. I honored her request as much as I could.

**The Almanac: What's it like coming back to the Peninsula now as a professional author?**

Chanel Miller: In Palo Alto, I revert to past versions of myself. My memories are peppered everywhere and my current self dissolves. In New York, I enjoy life as an author, going into the Penguin Random House office, attending book readings of friends. But in Palo Alto I just think about driving around my old SAAB convertible, studying AP French at Happy Donuts at 2 in the morning.

I do feel emotional thinking about all the English teachers who prepared me for the turbulent wider world. They equipped me with confidence

See **CHANEL MILLER**, page 21



Courtesy Penguin Random House

Chanel Miller wrote and illustrated the story of shy middle schooler Luna, who begins to find herself as she discovers her talent for writing.



Courtesy Mariah Tiffany

Author-illustrator Chanel Miller grew up in Palo Alto. Her newest book is the middle-grade novel "The Moon Without Stars."

## The return of Title Pages

Not only is January the month of fresh starts and setting goals, but it also brings weather that can be particularly inspiring for staying in and picking up a good book. That dovetails nicely with many a New Year's resolution to read more.

With that in mind, we're kicking off 2026 by reviving our Title Pages section, highlighting new works by local writers. Look for this section quarterly, though we'll still have stories about books in our regular coverage, too.

**In this section ...**

Palo Alto-raised author Chanel Miller discusses her new YA book and Los Altos writer Elizabeth Kemp shares the inspirations for her Silicon Valley-set thriller. Read on for a sampling of recent releases or soon-to-be-published works by Bay Area authors, and visit [almanacnews.com/arts-culture](http://almanacnews.com/arts-culture) to find more new titles by area authors and a listing of special book events.

A book with a title that seems perfect for any time of year, but perhaps especially now, **How to Live a Meaningful Life** channels the minds behind the Stanford Life Design Lab, Bill Burnett and Dave Evans, into a guide for how to find purpose, but also wonder and community. Burnett and Evans are the bestselling authors of "Designing Your Life." *To be published Feb. 3; Simon & Schuster*

For bird-watchers or just those who'd like to learn more about our local fauna, photographer Dick Evans, writer and nature guide Hannah Hindley and environmental writer Mary Ellen Hannibal explore the lives of many of San Francisco Bay's avian residents. **In the Shadow of the Bridge: Birds of the Bay Area** tracks its subjects all around the bay, from far-flung bits of the region's wilderness to the marshes near Oakland Airport. *Published November 2025, Heyday Books*

Bay Area author Susie Nadler drew on her own memories of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake with her YA book **The Lies We Tell About the Stars**.

See **TITLE PAGES**, page 20

# In Los Altos novelist's debut, an ex-hostage negotiator tackles motherhood and murder

Elizabeth Kemp's 'Tread Lightly' is a mystery set in 2007 Silicon Valley

By Karla Kane

With her debut novel, the thriller "Tread Lightly," Los Altos author Elizabeth Kemp offers a peek into the fictional enclave of Park View, featuring a protagonist who must confront her own inner demons as she navigates the everyday struggles of parenthood and the not-so-everyday mysteries cropping up in her new hometown.

The year is 2007 and former hotshot hostage negotiator Tierney Gillespie is attempting to settle into her life as a stay-at-home mom in Silicon Valley while still haunted by the trauma and loss that ended her law-enforcement career in Dublin, Ireland. Having left police work years before, Tierney expects the biggest source of drama in her life to be trying to make headway into the cliquey parent

volunteer world of her kindergarten's new private school, but when a lifeguard is found dead at the community pool where Tierney often swims, she's unexpectedly drawn back into a world of intrigue and danger.

Kemp grew up in Los Altos (where she also resides currently), is a graduate of Mountain View High School and has lived in other local towns including Palo Alto, Cupertino and Sunnyvale.

Affluent Park View is a fictional amalgamation of the various local places in which she's spent time. Tierney's son's private school, Apricot Grove, is a product of Kemp's imagination, but other elements of the book are less fictional, such as a stock backdating scandal that really did rock Silicon Valley, just as it does in the book.

While it was fun for Kemp to include nods to the setting and time period, the heart of

the story is Tierney herself. The reader is brought along on the protagonist's journey toward confronting some of her festering pain, fear and guilt as she also grapples with recovering her own sense of self as a mother, and the ingrained stigma she feels about mental health issues and asking for help.

"I love my character and I think a lot of readers are really resonating with her," Kemp said. "The struggle between finding a balance between work and family life, it's kind of a universal struggle."

Kemp drew on her own experiences as a young mother when writing (and her cats helped inspire the feline character Louie). And like Tierney, Kemp is an avid lap swimmer who relies on swimming as a physical and mental outlet.

"A lap lane is really where I would swim my way through ideas or plot points or things I struggle with," she said. Also like Tierney, Kemp is a member of an active book club. Recently, the club chose "Tread Lightly" as its featured read, which gave Kemp's club friends the chance to ask questions about the writing and publication process in addition to discussing the story.

"The most fun for me was hearing who they thought the murderer might have been," she said.

When it came to crafting the plot, Kemp wanted to keep readers on their toes.

"I think, having enjoyed mysteries for so long, something I really wanted to hit home is to have a story where it's not easy to guess (the plot)," she said. "I just wanted to make sure I wrote a story that would be more challenging for the reader. Deciding where to put the red herrings, I think, is the trickiest part."

Growing up, Kemp favored English classes and was year-book editor her senior year of high school. "I just like working with words," she said. After college, she used her writing skills during her career in high-tech marketing and communications but it wasn't until she became a stay-at-home parent that she rekindled her love of reading — in particular reading suspense and mystery novels — and began to think about writing her own. What eventually became her first published book was many years in the making.



Courtesy Elizabeth Kemp

Elizabeth Kemp is a Los Altos writer.

"I got the idea for the murder-mystery piece of 'Tread Lightly' literally 20 years ago, when we were on a cruise to Alaska celebrating my parents' anniversary," she recalled. She found herself jotting down more ideas on scraps of paper while attending her children's soccer practices and dance rehearsals, compiling her notes into what she called, with a laugh, "a giant pile of ridiculousness."

She continued dabbling, writing chapters here and there, until the pandemic hit, when her now-grown children came back from college and the family was homebound, carving out areas of the house in which to do their respective work. "I got the dining room table, which was great," Kemp said. She decided to use the time to buckle down and get to work on her novel in earnest. In 2021, she took a course on jumpstarting a novel from Stanford Continuing Studies and began building community with fellow writers and attending conferences,

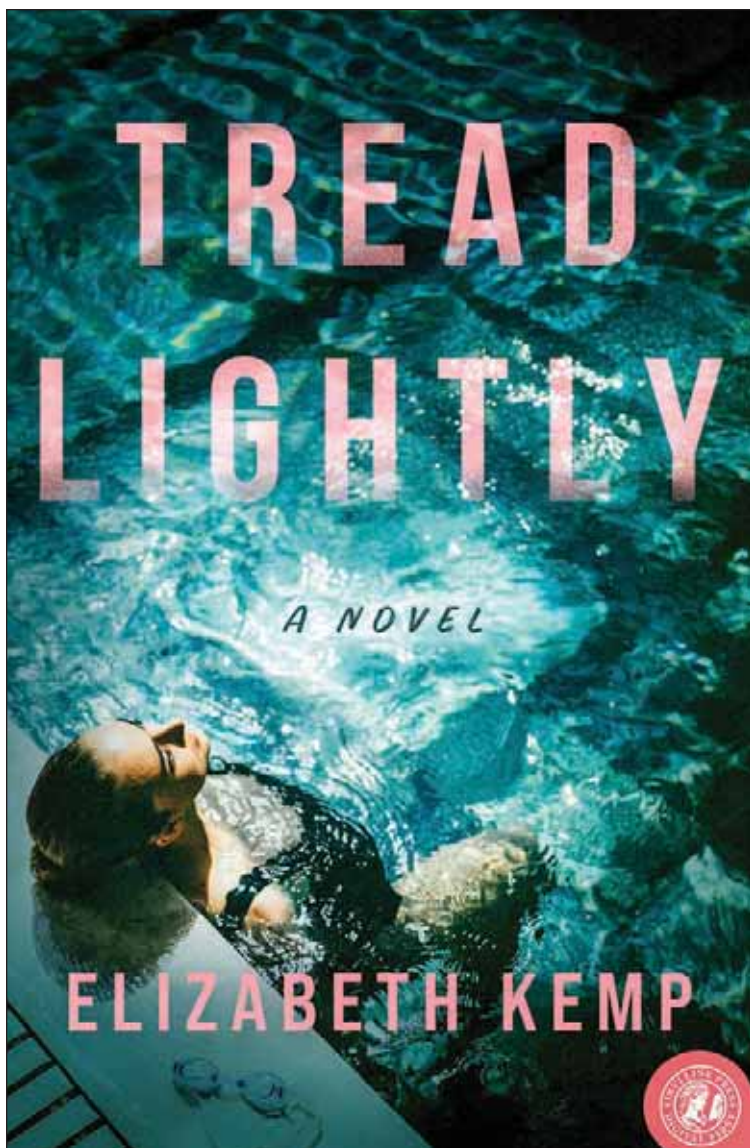
seeking a developmental editor and later taking another Stanford course, this time on preparing a manuscript for submission to agents and small presses. The work paid off, and "Tread Lightly" was published by Sibylline Press in October.

The book launched with an event at Books Inc in Campbell in the fall, and, in addition to speaking at book clubs, Kemp will also attend the Left Coast Crime conference in San Francisco in February and speak at Leigh's Favorite Books in Sunnyvale on March 5.

While she's deep into the promoting and sharing of "Tread Lightly" for now, Kemp said she does have some ideas for a sequel, as well as a potential spin-off starring another character from the world of "Tread Lightly," brewing. "There's definitely going to be more from me," she said. ■

More information is available at [elizabethkempwrites.com](http://elizabethkempwrites.com).

Email Assistant Lifestyle Editor Karla Kane at [kkane@almanacnews.com](mailto:kkane@almanacnews.com).



Courtesy Sibylline Press and Elizabeth Kemp

For her thriller set in Silicon Valley, Peninsula author Elizabeth Kemp created a fictional neighborhood inspired by local places.

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Presented by *The Almanac*

# In new show, pianist and actor takes on tough role: himself

‘The Piano and Me’ follows the life of TheatreWorks favorite Hershey Felder

By Angela Swartz

**P**rolific TheatreWorks Silicon Valley performer Hershey Felder is back at the Mountain View nonprofit theater company on Jan. 17 for a production people have been asking him to do for years: a look into his own personal life.

The actor, pianist and writer will debut “Hershey Felder: The Piano and Me” at TheatreWorks. The show, making its world premiere at the company, follows his upbringing by Polish and Hungarian immigrants in Montreal, and discovering the piano, an experience which opened him up to what he described as “adventure, heartbreak and connection.”

Unlike Felder’s previous plays, in which he portrays one composer, such as Frederic Chopin or George Gershwin, and performs their works, this production will feature him portraying about a dozen composers, including Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, Rachmaninoff and Bartók and performing their works.

“I’ve been asked for years to tell my own story,” said Felder, who started working on the show 10 months ago. “I avoided it for many years; I don’t think it’s remotely interesting. People

kept on pestering me. ... It’s a story I know.”

To create the two-hour show, Felder carefully chose elements of his story that would resonate with audience members. It, in part, follows his journey to the United States at age 16 to study as a private student under Jerome Lowenthal, a pianist and professor in the Juilliard School’s Department of Music in New York City.

“There are a lot of fun stories I could tell, but they don’t advance the story,” he said. He declined to share the overall theme of the work, noting that people will have to come and see it to find out. “I hope people find it interesting. I’m telling an honest story. The music is good because it’s by the greatest composers.”

Felder, who has performed for 11 years at TheatreWorks, plays himself as well as the people he’s met during his life as an artist.

Felder holds TheatreWorks’ top box office record for highest total ticket sales of all-time and is an audience favorite, according to the Mountain View nonprofit.

His past productions include: “Hershey Felder: Rachmaninoff and the Tsar;” “Hershey Felder as George Gershwin Alone;” “Hershey Felder: Chopin in Paris;” and “Our Great Tchaikovsky.” According to TheatreWorks, he has played 16 musical protagonists, given 6,000 live performances, made 18 musical films, and created 30 hours of musical repertoire.

Mountain View Center  
for the Performing Arts,  
500 Castro St., Mountain View.  
Jan. 17-Feb. 8. Tickets: \$34-\$115.  
theatreworks.org.



Courtesy Stefano DeCarli

Actor, pianist and writer Hershey Felder will talk about his life and the many composers he has portrayed in the world premiere “Hershey Felder: The Piano and Me.” Felder is seen here in his show “Hershey Felder: Rachmaninoff and the Tsar.”

Felder generally starts building a show around the music and said that if the music is “exciting and interesting” the public wants to hear it.

Outside of visits to the Bay Area and tours elsewhere, Felder divides his time between Los Angeles and Italy.

Felder, who is fluent in Italian, is the artistic director of FirenzeOnStage, directing the Teatro Niccolini and Teatro Nazionale/Della Signoria, both in Florence, Italy. He opened the 2024-25 season with Emmy- and Oscar-nominated actor Jeff Goldblum performing jazz

piano. For the 2025-26 season, he premiered “Caligula: The Ultimate Cut” in Italy. He followed up the show with an audience discussion with actors Malcolm McDowell and Helen Mirren. ■

Angela Swartz is a Contributing Writer.

## Employment

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### TITLE PAGES

continued from page 18

Set in San Francisco in the near future, the novel follows teen Celeste as she grapples with the devastation after a massive earthquake hits the Bay Area. Her journey to reunite with her missing best friend takes her to some surprising places,

including the launchpad to an upcoming mission to Mars. *To be published March 3; Penguin Young Readers.*

Menlo Park author Scott D. Carlson drops a famous socialist into one of the United States’ early capitalist free-for-alls, the 1849 California Gold Rush, with **Karl Marx and the Lost California Manifesto**. The

book is a speculative adventure that imagines Marx joining the prospectors seeking gold as he tries to escape debtors’ prison and get cash for the revolution. *Published October 2025, Chucklehead Press.* ■

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**CHANEL MILLER***continued from page 18*

in my voice that has carried me through. I hope when they see that I'm still writing, it's my way of saying thank you. You always want your home town to be proud of you. And I hope I've been able to reflect back all that was given to me.

**The Almanac: What memories of growing up here influenced the book (to me, the redwood tree and eucalyptus grove at Luna's school feel very evocative)?**

Chanel Miller: My first children's book, "Magnolia Wu Unfolds It All," was actually named after the magnolia tree in my Grandma Ann's backyard in Palo Alto. My sister and I used to climb it all the time, and I loved having this sacred and elevated place adults couldn't access because the limbs couldn't bear their weight; it was only for us and I could see so far! When I drive around Palo Alto, I don't give a hoot how nice your house is, I'm only looking at your trees. If you've got a shoebox-sized house with a towering cinnamon redwood, you're tree rich. Loquat trees, lemon trees, Japanese maples, incredible. But if you've got a big fancy house with nothing but a square of grass, that's a

mega bummer.

**The Almanac: What message would you give your seventh-grade self? What do you hope young readers come away with from the book?**

Chanel Miller: Adults are not smarter, just older. I grew up thinking I just needed to be an adult to unlock all the answers, then I got to adulthood and realized no one really knows what's going on. Adults have more experience, which helps, but we're still lost and getting it wrong half the time. Whenever I do school visits, I tell kids that they're all already writers; they don't need literature degrees or external permission to begin articulating how they see the world. What they're going through is real and valuable and deserves to be expressed and preserved.

**The Almanac: Luna finds that her writing gives her a lot of power. She says: "The world had been one way, then I wrote something, and that world had imperceptibly shifted. My words had created a new reality ... A voice, that's what happened, that's what I had." Could you share a bit more about the importance of writing and words to your life?**

Chanel Miller: I want children to understand that writing is always there for them. Especially

if you're not assertive in everyday life, the page is a protected place where you can vocalize your truest thoughts and questions, unrushed and unwitnessed. It lets your thoughts breathe, rather than staying isolated and cooped up in your head. A blank page to me feels like an empty field; I get to wander in any direction with no one telling me where I need to go.

**The Almanac: In the book, Luna is a writer and Scott is an illustrator. In real life, you are both. Are you planning on making graphic novels or more illustrated works in the future? How do you decide which medium suits your story ideas or what message you want to impart best?**

Chanel Miller: First figure out what you want to say, then figure out how to say it. The "what" always has to come first, the "how" is just the vessel it's going to live inside. I will say that graphic novels are harder for me because the text is more sparse. Right now, making illustrated chapterbooks are perfect, because I can write as much as I want and intersperse my drawings here and there.

**The Almanac: Luna becomes known around her school as a "book doctor," helping match her fellow students with books**

**that will bring them comfort or insights into situations in which they find themselves. Have there been book doctors in your life?**

Chanel Miller: I grew up going to the Mitchell Park Library. I remember in the summertime if you read enough books you could get a coupon for a free personal pizza at Round Table and tickets to the Oakland A's games. That was dreamy, the way reading was a kind of currency and could unlock real world activities. We're all so lucky to have librarians.

**The Almanac: I read "The Moon Without Stars" with my daughter, who just turned 12, so here are a few bonus questions from a real-life middle schooler!**

**Luna's mom is a ceramics artist. Is that another type of art you've done?**

Chanel Miller: Yes! I took ceramics classes in San Francisco. If you don't have access to a kiln to fire your pieces, you can use Sculpey clay and bake it in the oven. I've used clay to make a monkey with a looped arm that functioned as a toothbrush holder and made little bowls to hold my earrings.

**The Almanac How do you decide on the names for your characters?**

Chanel Miller: I collect an ongoing list of names; when I go on walks in different neighborhoods I pay attention to the street signs, like Waverley, Emerson, Channing. If there's a house for sale, I look at the agent's name on the real estate sign and those are usually good. If I see unique ingredients on a menu at a restaurant, I think about using them for last names or pet names, like yuzu, nettles, parsley.

**The Almanac: Will you consider writing a sequel?**

Chanel Miller: I have so many ideas right now, there are so many things I want to create!! My hope is that when you finish my book, you'll start to think of all the stories you might write about your unique and colorful life. ■

*Email Assistant Lifestyle Editor Karla Kane at [kkane@almanacnews.com](mailto:kkane@almanacnews.com).*

Chanel Miller will be in conversation with author Joanna Ho, take questions from the audience and sign books at an event on Jan. 21 at 6:30 p.m. at Christ Episcopal Church, 1040 Border Road, Los Altos, presented by Linden Tree Books. Tickets are \$20, which includes admission for two, plus a copy of "The Moon Without Stars." [tinyurl.com/ChanelMillerLindenTree](http://tinyurl.com/ChanelMillerLindenTree).



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# Food & Drink

## 'THE END OF AN ERA'



### After 36 years in Palo Alto, Il Fornaio prepares to close

Il Fornaio, an Italian restaurant in Palo Alto since 1989, will have its final day of service Sunday, Jan. 18.

Story by Adrienne Mitchel |  
Photos by Seeger Gray

For 36 years, Il Fornaio has served Italian classics in downtown Palo Alto, garnering longtime employees and regulars. Servers say it's where Steve Jobs chatted with Tim Cook and where Hall of Famers, tech executives and government leaders would go to dine.

But after service on Sunday, Jan. 18, the once buzzy Italian restaurant will permanently close.

"It's the end of an era," said Karen Roth, a server at Il Fornaio Palo Alto for nearly 30 years.

An official press release confirming the upcoming closure did not provide a reason for the decision, noting that the Palo Alto restaurant, as well as its 43-year-old Beverly Hills location, are closing as their leases conclude.

Il Fornaio is the restaurant tenant at the el PRADO Hotel,

'(Il Fornaio) really hasn't changed much, and I think that's its blessing and its curse.'

DAN SNYDER, PATRON

which said in an emailed statement that it is "actively sourcing long-term renovated F&B (food and beverage) concepts for the space."

For Palo Alto resident Dan Snyder, Il Fornaio's closure is sad but not surprising. Snyder has been a regular at the restaurant for 20 years, first frequenting the establishment after graduating from Stanford University. Now, he lives just eight blocks from Il Fornaio and enjoys the social atmosphere and sense of community.

"(Il Fornaio) really hasn't changed much, and I think that's its blessing and its curse,"



Il Fornaio Palo Alto is the restaurant tenant of el PRADO Hotel.



Clockwise from top left: The tiled patio at Il Fornaio in Palo Alto; bartender Gabriel Arreguin pours a glass of wine; an antipasto of charcuterie; the restaurant's main dining room.

he said. "How much do you cater to what people are used to and what they want to be able to have every time, and how do you embrace change and improve?"

He thinks the pandemic probably took a toll on the old-school Italian restaurant, but noted that he knows of regulars who still go every day. What makes Il Fornaio really special, he said, is the staff, which includes many who have been there 30 or more years.

"You get to know these people. I've seen these people have kids and grandkids, and we're friends on Facebook, and they bring in the kids and (say), 'Oh, this is my grandkid,'" Snyder said.

Roth said working at Il Fornaio is like being part of a family.

"The bartenders have been there for almost 30 years. Servers have been there for a gajillion years. And servers, who used to be servers in the '90s, have gone on to be managers," Roth said. "It's like family."

While it petered out over time, she recalled Il Fornaio having a buzzy, startup energy in its early days.

"There used to be a line out the door of people trying to get in for the 7 a.m. breakfast,"

Roth said. "And people would order their breakfast and never eat it. They'd stay there for three hours talking about their startup deals, but never ate."

Years ago, Il Fornaio had a new multicourse menu every month featuring a specific region of Italy, she said. But over time, it was removed for a more standard menu featuring antipasti, fresh handmade pasta, housemade thin-crust pizza and rotisserie and grilled items. Another notable change was that the restaurant switched from baking on-site to receiving baked goods from a centralized commissary kitchen, she added.

Il Fornaio Palo Alto was the go-to place for deals to be made: Steve Jobs dined with Tim Cook at table 11, and Jeff Bezos would have work dinners there back when Amazon only sold books, Roth said. She recalls the U.S. secretary of energy coming in with various security agents.

"Very interesting things that happen in the world start with dinners at Il Fornaio," she said.

Luis Guzman, who has been a server at Il Fornaio for nearly 30 years, said he's seen notable names such as Oliver Stone, Sharon Stone, Morgan Freeman,

**'Back then it was one of the hottest restaurants, one of the best places in Palo Alto.'**

LUIS GUZMAN, SERVER

Joe Montana, Al Gore, Chelsea Clinton, Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg dine over the years.

"Back then it was one of the hottest restaurants, one of the best places in Palo Alto," Guzman said, noting that he thinks the pandemic played a role in its downfall.

Guzman said he has friends who have worked at the restaurant longer than he has. While he now works at Il Fornaio part time and has another job, for some of his friends, the closure of Il Fornaio means losing their only source of income. He said in a phone call Jan. 6 that staff had not yet been notified of any transfer options.

In an official statement, Il Fornaio said, "We are saddened that we will be saying goodbye to many of our wonderful employees, many of whom have



Jose Gaona prepares a pizza at Il Fornaio in Palo Alto.

been with us for decades, while some will be moving to our other locations in California."

Il Fornaio continues to operate locations in Mountain View, Santa Clara and Burlingame.

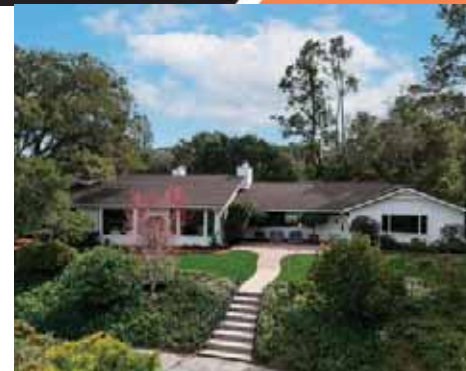
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*exclusive interviews and keep up on the trends affecting local restaurants. ■*

*Email Food Editor Adrienne Mitchel at [amitchel@almanacnews.com](mailto:amitchel@almanacnews.com).*

Il Fornaio, 520 Cowper St., Palo Alto; 650-853-3888, Instagram: @ilfornaioalato. Through Jan. 18, open Monday to Wednesday from 5-9 p.m. and Thursday to Sunday from noon to 9 p.m.

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