

# The Almanac

NONPROFIT LOCAL NEWS FOR THE MIDPENINSULA

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## High school district and Atherton pay \$560K to settle student's lawsuit

Menlo-Atherton student was pinned down, arrested at bus stop in 2023

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

The town of Atherton and the local high school district are spending more than half a million dollars to settle a student's lawsuit over allegations that police used excessive force when arresting him. After two years of litigation, on Feb. 27, the town and Sequoia Union High School District agreed to pay a total of \$560,000 to resolve the case.

In April 2023, a Black Menlo-Atherton student identified as K.C. had his water toy confiscated by school staff when students were playing a game called "Senior Assassin." K.C. was allegedly the only student who was unable to get his toy back at the end of the day. According to the lawsuit filed in 2024, when school administrators refused to return it to him, K.C. began to experience emotional frustration and distress.

Despite knowing that K.C. was a special education student,

school staffers called the police instead of bringing in a special education teacher to de-escalate the situation, the lawsuit alleges.

Atherton police sent out a news bulletin saying that during K.C.'s emotional disturbance, he physically assaulted a school administrator by pushing them into a wall, spitting on them and calling them homophobic slurs. The student's attorneys denied that K.C. touched or spit on anyone.

K.C. walked out of the office to remove himself from the upsetting situation, according to the lawsuit, and was approached by Atherton police officers at the bus stop on Middlefield Road, where he was arrested.

A viral video of the incident showed K.C. being pinned to the ground by police officers as he yelled, "Get off of me! My hernia! My stomach!" Students can be heard telling officers that K.C. was recovering from



Magali Gauthier

The Sequoia Union High School District and the Town of Atherton agreed to pay a Menlo-Atherton student \$560,000 to settle a lawsuit stemming from a 2023 altercation and arrest.

See **LAWSUIT**, page 18

## East Palo Alto councilman rejects calls to resign over writing letter for child sex abuse defendant

Carlos Romero is under fire over his character reference for ex-city employee facing felony charges

By Arden Margulis

Two East Palo Alto City Council members are calling for their colleague Carlos Romero to resign after learning that he wrote a character reference for a city employee accused of child sex abuse. Mayor Webster Lincoln and Council Member Mark Dinan also called for an investigation into Romero and the city's hiring process.

"I disavow that letter. It does not represent my views and does not represent the position of this city," Lincoln said in a public statement released on Feb 24.

The Almanac reported on Feb. 23 that Romero had submitted a character reference letter in the criminal case of Redwood City resident Rafael Prado, a now-former city employee awaiting trial on five felony charges related to having sex with a middle school boy.

Following that revelation, the East Palo Alto City Council updated its March 3 meeting agenda to include an



Carlos Romero

informational report on The Almanac's story.

Before the meeting, Dinan said he planned to ask Romero to step down at the meeting. "I will be calling for his resignation. If he does not resign, he should be recalled. This is a complete breach of trust with the community," Dinan said. "What he did was appalling, unethical, and an extreme disservice to the voters who elected him."

Lincoln also said Romero should go, saying, "I think he should resign. It's a cumulation of behavior that's unbecoming

of a council member," citing incidents when Romero insulted Dinan's son and made "derogatory" statements toward Lincoln.

"This is probably the biggest scandal since I have lived in the city, and maybe in its history," Dinan added.

Romero rejected the calls to step down.

"It is an absurd request to ask for my resignation because I choose to believe people are considered innocent until proven guilty," Romero said in a statement when asked about Lincoln and Dinan's statements. "There

is a legal process that is currently taking place and I will not participate in their political theater that interferes with that process."

"If anything, we should be focusing on the victim," he added.

Romero previously defended writing his reference letter, saying everyone deserves a fair trial, and that it only spoke to his personal interactions with Prado and not the allegations against him.

San Mateo County prosecutors

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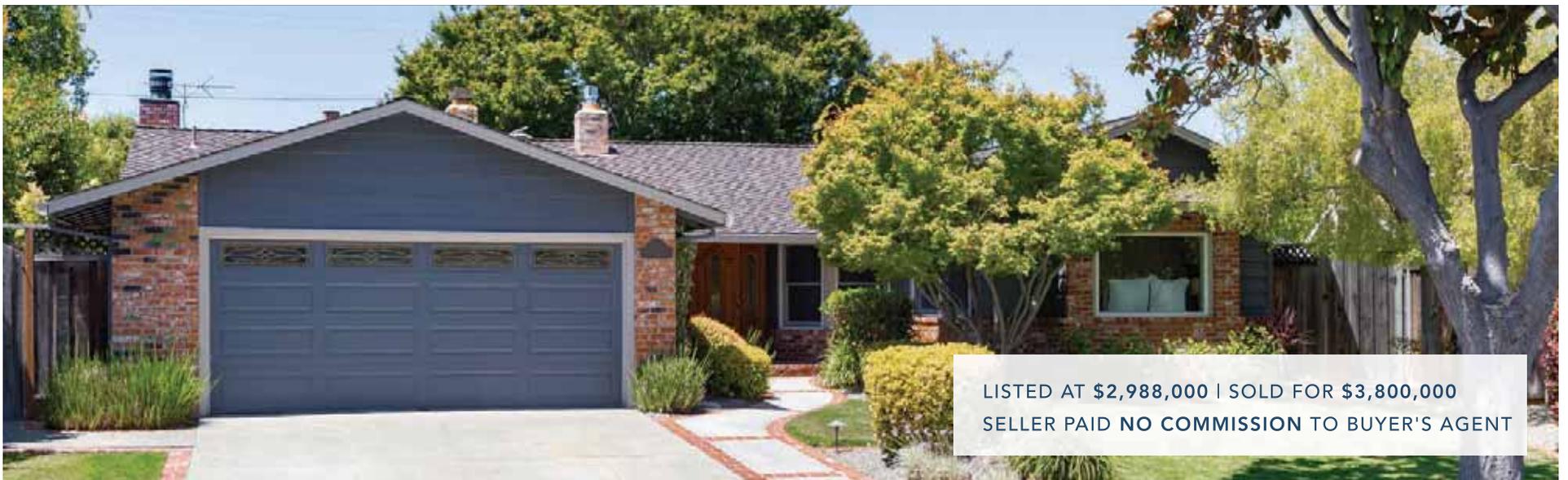
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Anna Hoch-Kenney

A cyber truck drives past a crowd of anti-Musk protesters in front of Tesla's engineering headquarters in Palo Alto on Dec. 28.

## Distrust of tech helps drive 'populist fervor' in Silicon Valley

New report details rising inequalities, wealth concentration

By Hannah Bensen

Life in Silicon Valley is extraordinary, with 80% of the population in good health and average wages at \$189,000 per year. Innovation is at a high, with 23,000 patents issued to inventors in the region, according to a new report. Market caps and private funding are off the charts.

Life in Silicon Valley is challenging. Housing remains among the costliest in the country, with 44% of renters being rent-burdened. Permits

for low-income housing are lagging behind targets. And 410,000 area jobs involve tasks that AI can now perform.

Data from the Silicon Valley Index, a highly regarded annual report composed by the think tank Joint Venture Silicon Valley, supports strikingly different stories about this region. Historically, rising inequality has helped drive social instability, Joint Venture Silicon Valley President and CEO Russell Hancock said during a recent call with reporters.

The growing gap between the rich and the poor is a theme that has been central to the Silicon Valley Index again and again and again. This year's Index contains clues that the striking degree of inequality in Silicon Valley, paired with cultural factors such as ethnicity and tech skepticism, could contribute to populism, an ideology that pits the "corrupt elites" against the "pure" everyman.

"Not surprisingly, we have

See **TECH**, page 16

## Portola Valley honors historian Nancy Lund with Founders' Award

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

Nancy Lund is well known for her role as Portola Valley's historian, but did you know that she's also an author and a former educator? In recognition of her 50 years of civic, educational and historical contributions to the town, the Portola Valley Town Council presented Lund with the Founders' Award on Feb. 25.

"I have felt that serving in this wonderful volunteer job all these years has enriched my

life a great deal," Lund said in a speech. "I've learned so much and I have met wonderful people who have served on the committee with me all these years, people who are doing things out and around town, and it's made my life richer."

In 1982, Lund was the first person to join the archives committee, working alongside other committee members to organize piles of newspapers and documents stored in a file cabinet and a closet located in the old council chambers. The

committee was renamed the Historic Resources Committee in 1994 when the Historic Element was added to the town's General Plan and later became a "working group" in 2024.

Sometime after joining the committee, Lund succeeded former town historian Dorothy Regnery, who died in 1990. Regnery began researching Portola Valley's history in the late 1950s and contributed two file cabinets' worth of historic

See **AWARD**, page 7

## Cops offer a crash course in real world policing at Menlo Park's community academy

By Arden Margulis

"Taser! Taser! Taser!" people yelled as many of them deployed a yellow Taser for the first time. At one of the final sessions in a six-week Community Police Academy run by the Menlo Park Police Department, participants got a hands-on lesson in law enforcement tools.

The inside look at the department offers a chance to learn about every unit of Menlo Park's police force and policing as a whole. Participants went on ride-alongs, watched presentations and had conversations with officers as part of the academy, which wrapped up on Feb. 18.

Participants learned how to properly deploy a Taser.

"It was very eye-opening," said academy participant Sheng Song, who deployed the Taser inside a classroom at the Arrillaga Family Recreation Center at Burgess Park. "We see Tasers in movies all the time but no one explains how they work... I really liked the hands-on experience."

Before using the Taser, members of the department presented to the group of around seven people about Menlo Park's policies on the use of force. Officers said that when they use a Taser, they aim to have one probe go above the waist and another go on the thigh. However, they try to avoid the chest and groin areas.

"The Taser's job is to cause muscles to constrict so by 'splitting the waist' we get the best surface area under control," one officer said.

Participants of the community academy are there for different reasons. For some, it is a way for people considering joining the police force to get to know different agencies.

Sarishma Maharaj applied to join the San Francisco and Oakland police departments but after attending the community academy, she intends to apply to Menlo Park as well.

"I always wanted to be a detective, so this experience was very important to me and they were professional and answered my

questions," Maharaj said. She said the experience helped her better understand the department and the benefits of a smaller agency like Menlo Park.

Acker said that the academy has proven to be a successful recruiting tool both for officer vacancies and finding dispatchers and civilian staff.

"I think a lot of people don't know the various roles that the department has. If somebody is looking for a career in public safety, it's not just being a police officer and dispatcher. There are a lot of support roles in the department," Acker said. Civilian roles at Menlo Park include code enforcement officers, community service officers, parking enforcement officers and records and evidence staff.

As part of the community academy, participants can go on ride-alongs with officers to get a firsthand look at policing. Acker said that the department does not do many civilian ride-alongs due to staffing challenges, so the community academy offers a rare opportunity.

"They're able to really sit in a vehicle for four hours with an officer, go to calls and see how officers utilize their skills and things that they've learned in the academy. Especially those who want to be a police officer, I think they really get a thrill in going on a ride-along and just seeing what they're going to be exposed to on the job," Acker said.

Other participants said they wanted to better understand the department. Song said he signed up for the academy after moving to Menlo Park from Mountain View.

"We have seen many police scenes in the movies but in real life, police officers and procedures are very different," Song said. "Because in the movies, it's very action-packed. They solve everything and are like superhumans. But as they explained in the class, they take a very nuanced approach and explain how they enforce the law and respect human rights and constitutional rights."

See **ACADEMY**, page 8

# San Mateo County health officials warn of measles exposure at Burlingame restaurant

The county's second confirmed case this year was an adult from Santa Clara County who recently traveled abroad

By Bay Area News Group

A confirmed case of measles has been reported in someone who came back from traveling abroad and visited a restaurant in Burlingame earlier this week, San Mateo County Health officials announced Feb. 27.

The case involved an adult who is a Santa Clara County resident and is vaccinated against the virus. The person visited the Panda Express restaurant at 1453

Burlingame Ave. on Monday and Tuesday, Feb. 23 and 24, so people who were there between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. on those days may be at risk.

The person whose measles case has been confirmed is now isolating at home, San Mateo County Health officials said.

The county health department said anyone who was at the restaurant during those days and times and develops symptoms should stay at home and

call their health care provider immediately.

Symptoms can include fever, cough, runny nose, red eyes, and a rash that spreads over the body. People who have been symptom-free for more than 21 days after being exposed are no longer considered at risk.

There have been two confirmed cases of measles in San Mateo County in 2026 after one case was reported in 2025. Santa Clara County officials said it

was the first case in their county since May 2025. Before that, the last case in the county was in 2019.

Officials from San Mateo and Santa Clara counties said both counties follow state vaccination guidelines and say the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine and other recommended vaccines are covered by health insurance for almost everyone in California and help avoid preventable diseases. ■

## Measles is back in California. Health departments are fighting it with less.

By CalMatters

When a possible measles case is identified in California, a phone rings at the local health department and the clock starts ticking.

Laboratory workers need to process samples as soon as possible to confirm the case. And a public health nurse must call the patient to find out where they've been and who they've been in contact with recently.

If test results are positive, the communicable disease team has 72 hours or less to identify anyone who has been exposed and may be at high risk of infection or serious illness. Those people must quarantine or take a dose of a post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent spread. For the next 21 days nurses will monitor the group for symptoms.

Measles is the most contagious

vaccine-preventable viral infection in the world, and California is fighting multiple outbreaks. In a room where one person is infected, nine out of 10 unvaccinated people will also contract the disease. The viral particles also linger in the air long after the contagious person leaves, risking exposure to those who enter the room up to two hours later.

"That's ridiculously infectious," said Dr. Sharon Balter, director of acute communicable disease control with Los Angeles County public health. "It balloons very quickly, and because measles spreads very fast we have to get on it right away. We can't say we'll wait until tomorrow."

California has a high enough vaccination rate — about 95% of kindergarteners — to provide herd immunity against measles, but throughout the state pockets

of unvaccinated communities drive outbreaks, experts say.

Shasta and Riverside counties are working to contain localized outbreaks. These are the first measles outbreaks in the state since 2020 and are happening at a time when health departments have less money and fewer staff than in recent years. In total, seven counties have reported a total of 21 measles cases this year, according to the California Department of Public Health.

Throughout the country, 26 states have reported measles cases since the start of the year, including a massive outbreak in South Carolina where officials identified nearly 1,000 cases, mostly among unvaccinated children. It is the largest outbreak since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention declared measles eradicated more than 25 years ago.

"The United States is

experiencing the highest numbers of measles cases, outbreaks, hospitalizations and deaths in more than 30 years, driven by populations with low vaccination rates," said California Public Health Officer Dr. Erica Pan in a statement earlier this month. "We all need to work together to share the medical evidence, benefits, and safety of vaccines to provide families the information they need to protect children and our communities."

### Containment comes with high costs

Investigating any communicable disease is time-intensive and expensive. The first three measles cases reported in L.A. County this year cost an estimated \$231,000, according to a health department analysis.

Why does it cost so much?

See **MEASLES**, page 17

## Police: \$2K in Labubu toys stolen in downtown Menlo Park

By Arden Margulis

Four Labubu toys worth a total of \$2,000 were reported stolen from an office in downtown Menlo Park, the Menlo Park Police Department said.

Officers responded to the 600 block of Oak Grove Avenue at 7 p.m. on Feb. 25 after someone entered the victim's office and took four Labubus and their clothes, spokesperson Nicole Acker said.

Acker said police found no signs of forced entry. No arrests have been made.

Labubus are a line of collectable plush toys that have

exploded in popularity in recent months, especially among young adults and teens.

The toys are sold by Chinese retailer Pop Mart, typically in "blind boxes" that can range in price between \$20 and \$30. Customers don't know the type or design of the Labubu until they open the package.

Limited edition or rare designs have fetched over five figures on the resale market.

Acker said police did not know what type of Labubus were stolen or what kind of business operates out of that office. ■

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



Courtesy Declan Sun via Unsplash

Labubu toys can command a high price on the secondary market. The Labubus pictured are not the ones reported stolen in Menlo Park.

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# 'McSteamy' actor Eric Dane's past as a Peninsula high school student

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

The Bay Area has been home to many of Hollywood's famous actors, including "Grey's Anatomy" star Eric Dane, who died on Feb. 19 at the age of 53. Growing up in the Peninsula, Dane attended Sequoia High School in Redwood City from 1987 to 1990 before transferring to San Mateo High School during his senior year.

While he was at Sequoia, Dane went by his stepfather's last name: Feldman. He can be spotted in Sequoia High yearbooks that include his time on the school's water polo team.

Dane also played baseball with the San Carlos Little League team in 1985, according to a social media post. Dane reportedly caught the acting bug after performing in a production of "All My Sons" while attending San Mateo High. In 1991, Dane booked his first onscreen role as a volleyball player on "Saved by the Bell."

In November 2024, he was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). The fatal condition affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord,



Left: Eric Dane speaking at the 2017 San Diego Comic Con International. Courtesy Gage Skidmore. Center: Dane, who went by Eric Feldman, in a Sequoia High School yearbook in 1988. Courtesy Sequoia High School. Right: Eric Dane (Feldman) on the Sequoia High School water polo team, second from left in the back row, in 1990. Courtesy Sequoia High School.

impacting muscle control and has an average life expectancy of two to five years after diagnosis. People Magazine recently reported that Dane's cause of death was respiratory failure.

After his diagnosis, Dane became an advocate for the ALS community, partnering with nonprofit Target ALS to launch "Ending ALS Starts with You," a campaign to raise \$500,000 for research by December 2025. The successful campaign raised over \$670,000.

He also served as a spokesperson for I AM ALS, an advocacy

organization, and its three-year campaign called "Push for Progress," which aims to raise money to accelerate research, expand access to therapies and secure more than \$1 billion in federal funding for research. The organization has exceeded its goal and raised over \$200,000.

"Eric used his platform not for attention, but for action," wrote I AM ALS in a statement after Dane's death. "His impact will live on in the research being funded, the policies being advanced, and

the community he helped grow by his honesty, his bravery, and his belief in a better future for anyone struggling with this diagnosis."

Dane was also named Advocate of the Year by the ALS Network in September 2025.

With nearly 50 productions under his belt, Dane was best known for his role as Dr. Mark Sloan, also known as "McSteamy," on the medical drama "Grey's Anatomy." He's also highly recognized for his role as Cal Jacobs on the HBO series "Euphoria" and as Tom

Chandler on "The Last Ship." Dane also appeared in movies such as "Marley & Me," "X-Men: The Last Stand" and "Valentine's Day."

Dane is survived by his wife Rebecca Gayheart and their daughters Billie and Georgia. A GoFundMe in his honor has already raised over \$476,000. For more information visit [gofundme.com/f/in-honor-of-eric-dane](https://gofundme.com/f/in-honor-of-eric-dane). ■

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## AWARD

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documents, maps and photographs to the town. Lund said that she spent many years looking through Regnery's archives, learning about the town's past: Chinese strawberry farmers, the Italian and Irish community that farmed on Windy Hill and the barkeeps at Rosotti's Alpine Inn.

Lund is best known for writing two books including "Ladera Lore," which she co-authored with Hallis Friend, and "Life on the San Andreas Fault: A History of Portola Valley." According to Council Member Mary Hufty,

Lund has also written books about Palo Alto, Hillsborough and Los Trancos and is currently working on a piece about Stanford University's Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve.

While teaching at La Entrada Middle School in Menlo Park, Lund gained an interest in California history and did a project on Ladera for a course at Foothill College, according to a 2003 story in The Almanac. She also taught at Ladera Elementary School for over a decade, before it closed in 1989.

Through the town's Cultural Arts Committee, Lund also co-founded Blues and Barbecues, an

annual community fundraiser, said Hufty. She also notably lobbied for a dedicated space to store archives during the building of the new Town Center, giving historical documents a home in the Portola Valley Library's Heritage Room.

"She is a true leader," wrote Portola Valley resident Gary Nielsen in a letter nominating Lund for the award.

Other local residents called her an "irreplaceable gem" and "embodiment" of the Founders' Award.

"It is an honor to recognize someone whose dedication to our community spans nearly five decades; someone who has quietly and persistently worked to ensure that Portola Valley's history is not just remembered but preserved for generations to come," Parks and Recreation Committee Chair Patty Dewes wrote in her letter of recommendation to the council.

Historic Resources Working Group member Jim Lipman outlined in his letter the many accomplishments that the committee has been able to achieve with the help of Lund at the helm of the historical group. He added that Lund spends countless hours updating the town's records and correcting entries.

Lund was happy to announce that the committee is actively working on digitizing all of its

archives to make the town's history more accessible and continue to preserve the town's history as it progresses through present day.

"We are recording our era so that when the next generation comes to take over to be stewards of the land, hopefully they will

understand our era as we understand the era of the people who came before us," said Lund in her speech. ■

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Magali Gauthier

Founders' Award winner Nancy Lund, in the white jacket, is surrounded by members of the Portola Valley Town Council at a Town Council meeting on Feb. 25. From left, the council members are Helen Wolter, Vice Mayor Mary Hufty, Mayor Craig Taylor, Judith Hasko and Rebecca Flynn.

## REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman

### Over Improving a Rental Property



**Dear Monica: My father, a widower, has owned his home for 50 years but has moved to assisted living. I want to rent it but it needs significant work. What do you advise? Barbara T.**

Dear Barbara: A common issue for some homeowners is how much to improve a property to rent it. The desire to rent is usually to avoid capital gains because the owner has owned the property for a long time. When the owner dies, the beneficiaries won't pay capital gains because of a step-up in basis.

If the property is in a good location, it should rent easily. I would advise you to do basic prep work but not to do more than necessary. The standard for a rental is to make it clean and functional. Given the circumstances, that is all you need to do.

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# North Fair Oaks council recommends denying Synapse campus at SportsHouse

Residents cite parking overflow, traffic and strain on neighborhood ahead of zoning hearing

By Sebastian Miño Bucheli / Contributor

The North Fair Oaks Community Council voted 4-2 Feb. 26 to recommend denial of a proposal that would allow Synapse School to open a second campus inside the SportsHouse's recreational facility on Edison Way, following mounting concern from nearby residents over parking, traffic and neighborhood safety.

The vote is advisory. The proposal will move forward to a March 19 hearing with the county's Zone Hearing Officer, who will make the final decision.

The application would renew SportsHouse's use permit and amend it to allow Synapse to establish a second campus or Campus No.2, a K-8 school at 3151 Edison Way. The plan would convert 9,260 square feet of interior space into six classrooms for up to 140 students and 15 staff members, while reducing parking from 125 spaces to

107 to create outdoor play and classroom areas.

The debate centered less on the school's academic program and more on whether North Fair Oaks — an unincorporated, largely working-class neighborhood — should absorb additional traffic and parking impacts from a facility residents say already strains during peak events.

In the days leading up to the meeting, North Fair Oaks resident Gabriela Valencia submitted written public comment to county code compliance officials, planning staff and Supervisor Lisa Gauthier outlining what she described as ongoing public safety and quality of life impacts tied to SportsHouse operations.

In her letter, Valencia cited blocked fire hydrants, vehicles parked too close to corners, obstructed driveways and long lines of cars waiting to enter and exit the facility. She said SportsHouse's 2020 conversion

of parking spaces into outdoor volleyball courts worsened overflow parking, particularly on weekends.

"These issues have created a constant state of irritation and stress for residents and have significantly affected the overall sense of our community and our quality of life," Valencia wrote.

North Fair Oaks is an unincorporated county community where roughly three-quarters of residents identify as Latino, according to U.S. Census data. Median household income in the area is lower than in neighboring Redwood City and Palo Alto.

Several residents said they worry that expanding a private school with annual tuition exceeding \$40,000 would intensify traffic and parking pressures in a neighborhood that already feels stretched. Valencia said the impacts fall largely on families who are not the ones benefiting from the school's presence.



Courtesy Google View

A Google View screenshot of Synapse School No. 1 on Edison Way.

Another resident, Stephanie Barrales, emailed county officials ahead of the meeting, questioning whether the school's dismissal times would truly avoid overlap with SportsHouse's after-school sports traffic.

"We don't believe there is no overlap," Barrales wrote, calling for traffic and community impact assessments before approval.

County Planner III Kanoa Kelley said the project complies with zoning and parking regulations. The applicant, Jim Eagen, head of school for Synapse, said the school plans to enter a

reciprocal parking agreement with Synapse Campus No. 1 that would make 60 additional spaces available during school hours for a total of 167 parking spaces.

SportsHouse operations typically run from 4 to 10 p.m. on weekdays and begin at 9 a.m. on weekends.

Kelly said that conditions could be added to address neighborhood concerns, including employing staff to patrol and direct parking to shared lots, posting signage to identify

See **SPORTSHOUSE**, page 10

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## ACADEMY

continued from page 5

He said the experience helped him better understand police procedures and how policing works.

"I have a lot stronger respect for the police now," Song added.

Social worker Jaemi Hagen joined the citizen academy to help her understand what her patients and families might be going through.

"I work with families who are involved in the foster care system, or involved in the legal system somehow, and this helps me get a better understanding of what their experience with police could have been like," Hagen said.

Acker, who is the department's internal services manager, said the academy helps demystify policing.

"If you met a police officer in public, I think a lot of people wouldn't feel like they're approachable and are just intimidated — what this program does is it allows you to actually get a firsthand experience with the officers. You see them as people, see them as trained, educated and skilled people that you can trust," said Acker.

Participants meet in the

evening once a week for six weeks from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Every unit of the department gives a presentation, from well-known units like patrol and traffic enforcement, to the lesser-known groups like the records unit and dispatch.

"The goal is to get our community members engaged with us and to get to know us, plus get a bird's-eye view into the department," said Acker.

"We are very enthusiastic about meeting the community and helping them learn about how the police department operates. I think a lot of people have a basic understanding of us. So the citizen academy is a tool that can kind of help bridge that gap with the police and the community," Acker added.

The department will host its next community academy in January 2027. Registration is already open and participants can register on the city's website. The program is open to anyone 18 and older. ■

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

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**SPORTSHOUSE**

*continued from page 8*

overflow parking locations and encouraging carpooling or alternative transportation.

Planning officials are also asking SportsHouse to prepare a parking demand study to evaluate impacts on surrounding streets and provide hard data to the county. The facility would undergo an administrative review every two years to assess compliance and determine whether mitigation measures are working, with full renewal required every five years.

Newly appointed Vice Chair Christian Aponte made the motion to deny the recommendation to the county's zoning officer. Council member Kelly Parisi seconded it.

Council members pressed the applicant on outreach and transportation.

Council member Kathleen Daly asked Eagen whether nearby businesses had been notified about potential increases in traffic. Eagen responded that they had notified them to the extent they needed to and said the school is trying to be good neighbors.

Aponte asked Eagen if Synapse reimburses staff for using ride-share services. Eagen said staff

receive a transportation stipend.

"We are trying to maximize as much as usage of foot, bike, train," he said. Council member Blair Whitney said he read some of the written remarks sent in from concerned neighbors.

"I live in North Fair Oaks. It's a pain in the butt when there are people parked every which way, including blinking lights or leaving their cars on the street," Whitney said. "I totally empathize. It's not something you can answer, but the Sheriff's (Office) needs to be responsive to the residents of North Fair Oaks."

"We need to stop turning a blind eye to poor behavior that impacts people negatively," he added. Public comment lasted nearly an hour, and comments were mixed, from support for Synapse to others urging the council not to approve the recommendation. Supporters of Synapse urged the council to back the proposal.

Jennifer, a Synapse parent who said she purchased a home in North Fair Oaks two years ago, described the community as caring and conscientious.

"What I have learned in my time at Synapse is that the community is very caring," Jennifer said. "The amount of coaching and being good citizens and good neighbors, when we're

coming and dropping off our kids, is something they take very seriously."

She added that if there hadn't been that type of culture when she was dropping off her kid, she probably would never have bought a house in North Fair Oaks.

Opponents, many of whom live near SportsHouse, described years of parking conflicts and safety concerns.

Angelica Baez Aranda and her husband, Carlos, shared that they live across from the facility and have repeatedly had their driveway blocked. Aranda described a recent confrontation with a driver she said left her shaken.

"I don't know if these people are carrying guns," Aranda said. "I thought he was gonna get out of the car and hit me." Carlos said he wants the Sheriff's Office to take enforcement complaints more seriously. After public comment, council members offered final remarks.

Aponte said Synapse began as a tiny bungalow in Palo Alto before expanding.

"My comment is maybe it's time to look elsewhere," Aponte said. ■

*Redwood City Pulse Editor Michelle Iracheta contributed to this report.*

**COMMUNITY BRIEFS**

**Reimagine La Entrada field**

The Las Lomas Elementary School District is partnering with the city of Menlo Park to apply for a state grant that would fund the modernization of La Entrada Field in Menlo Park. Throughout March, the two agencies are hosting community input sessions to gather insights on what members of the public would like to see in a reimagined version of the field.

The State of California Prop 4 Parks Grant could bring up to \$8 million in funding to transform the existing field into a community athletic facility and park designed to serve students and community members.

"This is an opportunity to think creatively about how a well-used community space could serve students, families, neighbors, and the broader Menlo Park community for decades to come," said Superintendent Erik Burmeister in a press release. "Before submitting any application, we want to hear directly from the people who use this space or would if improved facilities were available."

The agencies already have ideas for an all-weather running track, open green space, play areas, improved accessibility, a dog park that's open after school hours, an environmentally friendly turf field and convertible tennis and pickleball courts.

The school district and city will be hosting community input sessions on the following dates:

- Thursday, March 12, at 9 a.m. in the La Entrada Middle School multiuse room (MUR)
- Thursday, March 12, during lunch for students only
- Thursday, March 12, at 6 p.m. in the La Entrada MUR
- Saturday, March 14, at 1 p.m. in the La Entrada MUR
- Wednesday, March 18, at 4 p.m. at Phillips Brooks School

La Entrada is located at 2200 Sharon Road in Menlo Park and Phillips Brooks School is at 2245 Avy Ave. in Menlo Park. Community members are also encouraged to complete an online survey on [tinyurl.com/ReimagineLaEntradaField](https://tinyurl.com/ReimagineLaEntradaField).

**Volunteer for Rock 'N' Read Lunch Club**

The Ravenswood Education Foundation is seeking volunteers for its Rock 'N' Read Lunch Club during its annual literacy challenge from March 9 to April 3. The Rock 'N' Read event aims to build strong reading habits for students who are encouraged to log their reading hours outside of the classroom for prizes.

The foundation is looking for volunteers to staff a special lunchtime space where students can work toward logging more minutes for the challenge. Volunteers will help set up and break down the reading area, keep the space calm and welcoming, and assist students.

Volunteer shifts will be from 1 1/2 to 3 hours during the lunch period. Times vary between different campuses. No experience is needed.

For more information visit [linktr.ee/ravenswoodef](https://linktr.ee/ravenswoodef).

**Drainage improvement work on Old La Honda Road**

Drivers can expect lane closures and construction activity between 207 and 320 Old La Honda Road in Woodside while crews work on drainage improvement projects in the area that began on March 3.

While there are no full road closures planned, the town announced that motorists and cyclists should expect minor delays. The project is estimated to take about five to seven weeks to complete.

Residents are invited to contact the town of Woodside at 650-851-6790 for more information on the project.

— Jennifer Yoshikoshi

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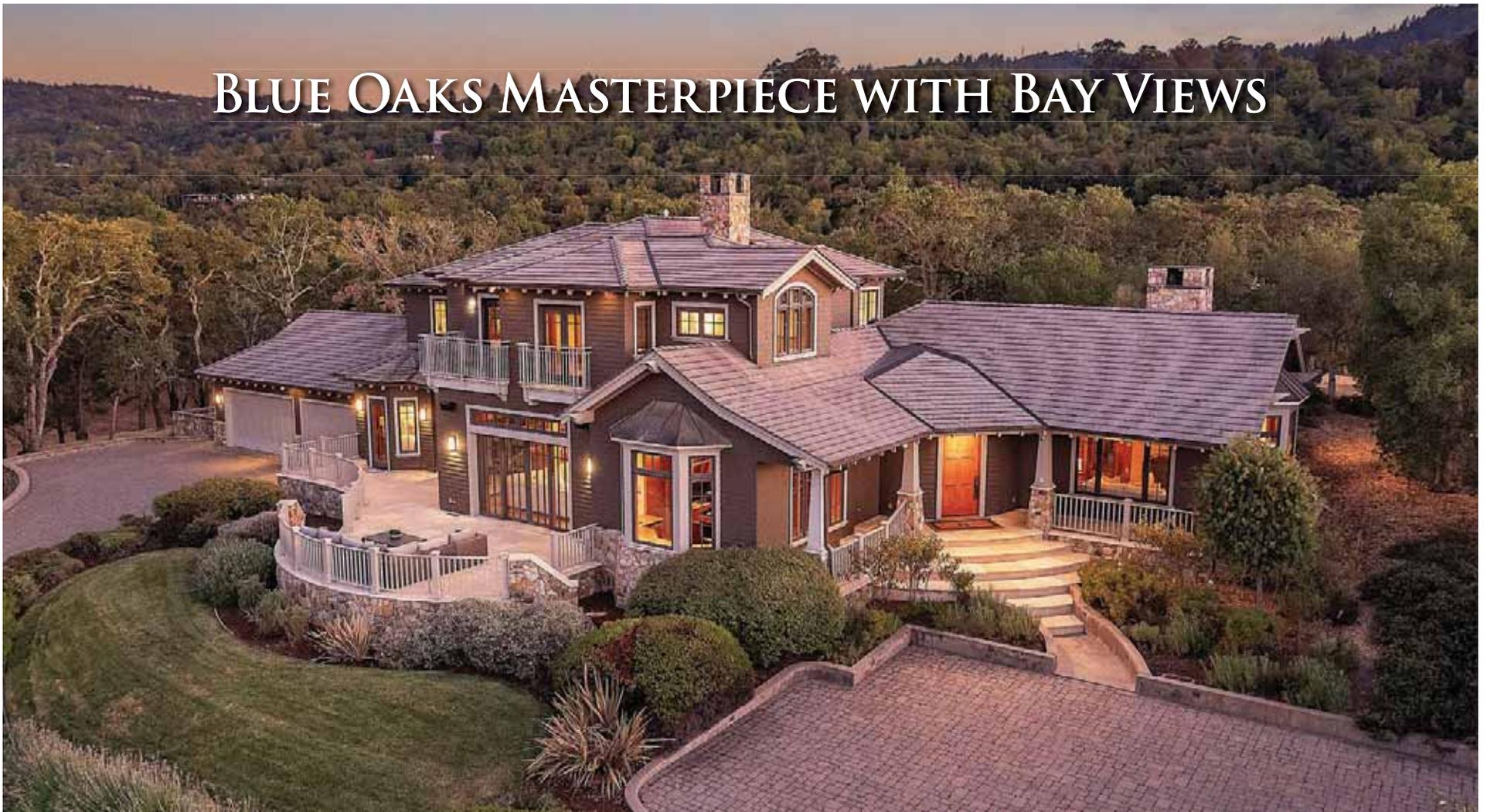
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- Upper level (with slight elevations): bedroom suite, primary bedroom suite with Bay views, bedroom suite, laundry room
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**COUNCILMAN**

*continued from page 1*

allege that when Prado was employed by the city in a part-time administrative role, he met a 13-year-old boy, offered him drugs and had sex with him repeatedly over a monthslong period that started when the boy was still in middle school. According to court records, the teen alleges that he became

dependent on drugs and turned to prostitution to support his addiction. As a result, his father kicked him out of the house and surrendered custody of his son to Child Protective Services, court records show.

After Prado was arrested on June 17, 2025, his attorney asked the court to release him from jail while he awaits trial. Romero provided a character reference in support of the release motion.

“My character reference for Mr. Prado was based on observed behavior during my interactions with him at numerous COVID vaccination outreach efforts in East Palo Alto from 2021 to 2022,” Romero previously told The Almanac.

While the letterhead included the city seal and said it was sent from the “Office of Councilmember Carlos Romero,” he told this news organization that he wrote the reference for Prado in his personal capacity and that it did not represent the

city of East Palo Alto.

Dinan rejected Romero’s claim the letter did not represent the city. “That’s a complete lie,” he said. “As a council member, I have consciously chosen not to use the city letterhead when addressing matters that are personal in nature.”

On Feb. 24, Lincoln called for the city attorney to investigate whether Romero’s letter violated city policy. The agenda for the council’s March 3 meeting noted that elected officials are allowed to express personal opinions and provide references as long as they do not represent the City Council or the city.

“By Council Member Romero getting involved in this case, it has put the city in a bad light, and it just makes us look bad because there’s no way in heck that I’m vouching for anybody who’s facing these kinds of charges,” Lincoln said, while also acknowledging that prosecutors must still prove Prado’s guilt.

Dinan said that as long as Romero remains on the council, the controversy will make it harder for the City Council to do its work. “It will continue to be a distraction as long as he’s on council, because everybody who has heard the story, read the story, is appalled by this, and there is no excuse,” he said.

Lincoln also raised the question of whether the city could face legal exposure related to Prado’s alleged actions. “The city attorney needs to evaluate to see if there’s any liability that the city could face. We need to know: What did the city know? Who knew what?” Lincoln said. “Because if the city had knowledge of this stuff and was allowing it to go on without any sort of recourse, then we could be liable for allowing that conduct.”

**City manager’s response**

Lincoln criticized city leadership for failing to inform the council about Prado’s arrest.

“It is troubling that the council was not informed of Mr. Prado’s arrest until a news article was published,” Lincoln said in his statement. “I have made clear to city staff that going forward, I expect prompt notification when any city employee is arrested on serious charges, regardless of their employment status.”

Dinan agreed that the council should have been informed.

In an email to this news organization, City Manager Melvin Gaines wrote that the city was notified of the charges by the state Attorney General’s office in June 2025 and that he was told the alleged conduct appeared unrelated to Prado’s city work.

Gaines said he had no evidence that Prado, who did part-time on-call administrative work for East Palo Alto, had met the victim while working for the city.

In an email to this news organization requesting changes to the description of Prado’s job duties in the published story, Gaines said that he did not want to minimize the alleged crimes. “The seriousness of the allegations cannot be overstated, and nothing in my request diminishes the gravity of the charges or the need for accountability through the judicial process,” he said.

**Longstanding tensions on the council**

Romero and longtime Council Member Ruben Abrica have frequently clashed publicly with newer members Lincoln, Dinan, and Council Member Martha Barragan. In September 2025, Lincoln, Dinan, and Barragan voted to censure Romero and remove him from his appointed position representing the city on the regional boards of Commute

org, Peninsula Clean Energy and ReThink Waste — among others — after he said Lincoln “may be deaf and dumb” during a discussion about affordable housing requirements for a Sand Hill Property Company project.

During Dinan’s unsuccessful 2022 council campaign, Romero accused him of spreading “made-up facts” about affordable housing in the city. Dinan was subsequently elected to the council in 2024.

Dinan denied that his call for Romero’s resignation was related to their previous disagreements.

“This is so beyond policy differences: this is about basic decency, honesty, trustworthiness and community values,” Dinan said. He added that if Romero resigned, Dinan would support appointing someone who shares Romero’s policy positions to the council.

“There is no doubt that Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Dinan represent opposite points of view from mine on many issues, not the least of which regard low-income and marginalized communities,” Romero said in his statement.

**Public Reaction**

During the City Council’s Feb. 24 meeting, several people spoke about Romero’s letter during the public comment period. Two community members urged the council to use the controversy as an opportunity to better support struggling teens in East Palo Alto.

“I am glad to hear that many of you are outraged by what had happened to this youth, but I also want you to consider all other possibilities of what let this youth get to this place,” said Donna Moreno. “Our city doesn’t really provide or have any resources directed towards queer youth to help with mental health services or even a youth shelter.”

Giovanni Brown commented along similar lines.

“I wanted to encourage not just this council and city staff but this community to really get the narrative right, to not be so focused on if somebody used a seal of the city or not, but to really look at what happened to this youth. What are you going to do about these queer youth that are homeless, that are high in our community, that are being prostituted and things like that?”

The City Council discussed Romero’s letter and the accusations against Prado at its March 3 meeting.

Prado’s trial date has not yet been set. His next hearing was scheduled for March 5, which is after The Almanac’s print deadline, in San Mateo County Superior Court in Redwood City. ■

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

**LEHUA GREENMAN**



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**Town of Atherton**  
City Council  
February 18, 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 City Council will hold a public hearing to consider proposed changes to the Atherton Municipal Code, Chapter 15.40 updating holidays where construction related activity is prohibited.

**NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN** that said item is set for hearing by the City Council at its meeting on **March 18, 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 City Council Meeting via Zoom Meeting or by attending in-person in the Council Chambers at 80 Fair Oaks Lane, Atherton, CA 94027.

<p><b>Join Zoom Meeting:</b> <a href="https://zoom.us/j/506897786">https://zoom.us/j/506897786</a></p> <p>Meeting ID: 506 897 786</p> <p><b>One tap mobile</b> +16699006833, 506897786# US (San Jose)</p> <p><b>Dial by your location</b> +1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)</p>	<p><b>Meeting ID:</b> 506 897 786</p> <p><b>Remote Public Comments:</b> 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.</p> <p><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:council@athertonca.gov">council@athertonca.gov</a></p>
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**Description:** The City Council is considering **adopting an Ordinance amending the Atherton Municipal Code, Section 15.40.120** adopting regulations limiting construction and construction-related activities within the Town at certain times. These time limits are detailed in Section 15.40.120 of the Atherton Municipal code and include, but are not limited to Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.

There is a recommendation to the Council to adopt a the ordinance amending the Atherton Municipal Code to resolve any existing discrepancies, conflicts, or ambiguities between the holidays currently observed by the Town and those specified in Title 15 of the Code. It would also clearly identify on which observed holidays construction work is to be permitted. **A copy of the meeting agenda, staff report and draft ordinance can be found online by Friday, March 13, 2026 here:** <https://www.ci.atherton.ca.us/Archive.aspx?AMID=41&Type=Recent>

**NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN** that said Ordinances are set for hearing by the City Council at its meeting on **March 18, 2026 at 6:00 PM** via teleconference accessible through the above-described information and in person at 80 Fair Oaks Lane City Council Chambers, at which time and place all persons interested may participate and show cause, if they have any, why the Resolution should or should not be recommended for approval.

**IF YOU CHALLENGE** any actions taken to adopt the proposed changes to the Town’s Municipal Code concerning construction related activities, 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 City Council at, or prior to, the March 18, 2026 meeting by contacting the City Clerk, The Town of Atherton, 80 Fair Oaks Lane, Atherton, CA. 94027.

If you have any questions on the item, please contact Anthony Suber, City Clerk at [asuber@athertonca.gov](mailto:asuber@athertonca.gov) or 650.752.0500. Any attendee who wishes accommodation for a disability should contact the City Clerk at (650) 752-0500 at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.

ATHERTON CITY COUNCIL  
/s/ Anthony Suber  
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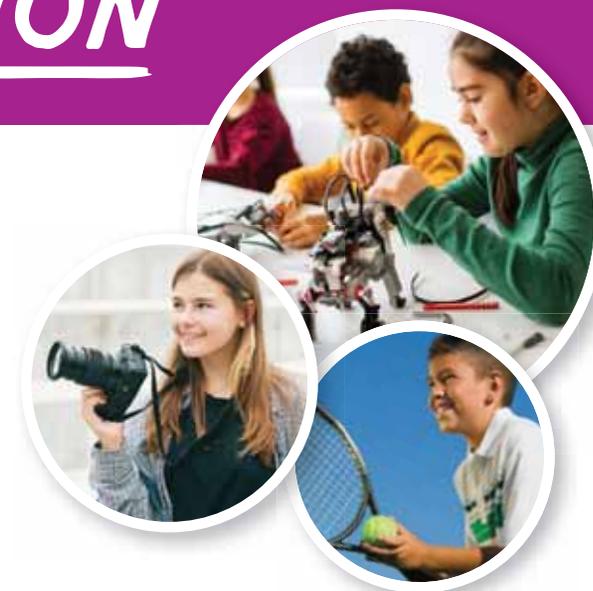
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## TECH

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seen manifestations of populist fervor here, as in other parts of the country,” writes Hancock in the report’s introduction. “It’s being paired with a widespread distrust in tech, something unthinkable a generation ago.”

Rising inequality helps fuel populism, according to Stanford University scholar Francis Fukuyama, a senior fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies who also serves as the editor-in-chief of the online journal *American Purpose*.

“In general, I think that [populism] refers to people who believe that the world is controlled by elites, usually hidden in some way, that make the reality of power seem different from what it ostensibly is,” Fukuyama said in an interview.

While commentators and media frequently root the rise in populism in economic terms related to globalization or the decline of the middle class, Fukuyama noted that there are cultural fears about a nation’s identity or immigration that can contribute to a rise in populism. Both of those factors could drive populism in a place like Silicon Valley.

“To the extent that you’ve got

populism [in Silicon Valley], it’s a much more refined type,” Fukuyama said. “I think there certainly is resentment and class divisions, but they’re just not the sort that I think fit that early definition of populism.”

**The road to instability**

The Silicon Valley Index shows an extraordinary degree of wealth concentrated in the hands of a small group of people. According to the Index, the top 10% hold 75% of the wealth while the bottom half hold less than 1%. Additionally, there are 89 billionaires in Silicon Valley and 145,000 millionaires.

The income and wealth gaps in Silicon Valley are the starkest of anywhere on the planet, Hancock said in a reporter’s call on Feb. 25. Silicon Valley’s Gini coefficient, a common metric used to measure inequality, is 83, according to Hancock. A coefficient of 100 means that a single person owns all the wealth; a coefficient of 0 means that wealth is divided equally. Inequality in Silicon Valley, therefore, is markedly higher than the most unequal countries in the world, including South Africa, with a coefficient of 63, and Colombia, at 54.

“Most developmental economists... would tell you that 83 on the Gini is unstable — the conditions for revolt, the conditions for

the French Revolution,” Hancock said.

The philanthropic sector is seeing a similar trend of consolidation. While the number of area nonprofits registered in Silicon Valley grew by 11%, just four charitable organizations drove 67% of total revenue. Employment, too, is concentrated among a relatively small number of firms. According to additional data compiled by Joint Venture, six firms — Google, Apple, Meta, Amazon, Cisco and Tesla — accounted for nearly a quarter of the area’s total in 2024.

The Index also shows evidence of consolidation in venture capital funding, sometimes called the “innovation engine” of Silicon Valley’s economy, even as investment activity grew. According to the Index, venture capital funding in Silicon Valley and San Francisco grew to \$92 billion in 2025 — the second-highest amount of investment activity ever after 2021. That funding, however, is increasingly being awarded to a small number of firms. Megadeals — an investment of more than \$100 million — accounted for more than half of venture capital investment activity in 2025, with much of that venture funding captured by AI funding.

“This, too, is a new development,” said Hancock in an interview with this publication. “In the past, we’ve been unconcentrated. The venture capital was spread more evenly and so was the wealth.”

By the end of 2025, Silicon Valley and San Francisco had 312 privately-held companies valued at more than \$1 billion — known as “unicorns” — and 27 companies valued at \$10 billion — known as “decacorns.” According to the Index, the number of unicorn companies has almost tripled in the last five years.

While investment growth is “white-hot,” said Hancock, that economic activity is not translating into job growth. Following a rebound in employment after the pandemic, Silicon Valley’s job growth has plateaued since 2022. According to the Index, the area has seen a modest reduction of about 13,100 jobs, or -0.8%, from mid-2024 to mid-2025.

The historic economic activity paired with flat employment is a key paradox of this year’s Silicon Valley Index. The artificial intelligence boom has led to ballooning private and public valuations in leading tech companies. It’s also resulted in layoffs at tech companies as tech companies adopt AI and jettison employees hired during the pandemic that companies say are no longer needed.

In the past few months, Amazon and Meta are among

the firms that have announced layoffs at their facilities in Menlo Park, Palo Alto and East Palo Alto, according to WARN reports from the state Employment Development Department.

Amplifying some of these existing concerns are forecasts that artificial intelligence could eliminate thousands of jobs and cause unemployment to spike. For the first time in history, technological innovation could displace jobs among high income-earners rather than those in the bottom of the income distribution. According to an analysis in the Silicon Valley Index of jobs that are most exposed to automation, 410,000 align with tasks that AI can perform, mainly in the domains of image generating and language modeling.

“Silicon Valley used to create lots of opportunity along every rung of the income ladder, back in the old days,” Hancock said. “That’s no longer the case. .... The big structural change was that we just invented all of these tools, the Internet and other other tools, that made things unnecessary.”

**Signs of discontent**

These parallel but unequal realities are fueling populism, and the whispers of unease about the elites are growing steadily louder. A 2024 poll conducted by Joint Venture showed growing dissatisfaction about the contributions of technology companies. While 40% of residents said that they believe that the success of technology companies benefits everyone, 75% of respondents said that the leading tech companies have too much power and influence. In addition, 69% of respondents say that the leading tech companies have lost their moral compass.

That sentiment was on full display on Feb. 20, when U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders and U.S. Rep. Ro Khanna came to Stanford University to discuss AI and its impact on society. Sanders, a long-time critic of the billionaire class, earned rousing ovations from the crowd as he warned about the threats of AI. Khanna, for his part, criticized tech billionaires for believing that “they have a modern right to lead and rule,” according to prior coverage by this publication.

It’s not just progressive leaders who are questioning the new world order. Through claims of a “rigged system,” attacks on the “fake news media,” and the use of tariffs framed as protection for American workers, President Donald Trump and his allies have adopted an anti-establishment rhetoric that many experts consider populist. Fukuyama, for his part, considers Trump a “hypocritical populist,” noting that the main dimension that

anchors Trump in the populist movement is resentment toward immigrants.

“He rhetorically says that he supports them, but he gets all this money from Silicon Valley oligarchs,” Fukuyama said. “And all of his friends are incredibly rich billionaires, and his tax policy is not redistributed.”

Still, in Silicon Valley, that rhetoric was far more appealing in cities with a large percentage of lower-income voters. According to an analysis by *The Mercury News*, support for Trump grew most dramatically in cities like East Palo Alto, Richmond, and San Pablo when comparing 2020 and 2024 election results. In East Palo Alto, the share of voters who supported Trump went up from 11.2% in 2020 to 19.1% in 2024, according to *The Mercury News*. Across San Mateo County, which includes East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Woodside, Portola Valley and Atherton, 23% of the voters supported Trump in 2024, compared to 20.2% in 2020, election data shows.

Some people believe that Trump harnessed the economic anxieties of voters to gain power.

“Trump did not invent income inequality,” said David Waksberg, a member of the local grassroots organization *Indivisible Palo Alto Plus*, in an email. “He exploited it to gain power and point his finger at false ‘enemies’ and then, once in power, made it worse.”

*Indivisible Palo Alto Plus*, or *IPA+*, was created in 2024 after concerns of democratic backsliding following the re-election of Donald Trump. The organization regularly plans events designed to protest a power structure that Waksberg says is run by autocrats and billionaires that are harming democracy. This has included local No Kings demonstrations, Billionaire Takedown protests, and a Tesla Takeover event that objected to Elon Musk’s role in the Department of Government Efficiency federal workforce reduction which cut around 60,000 federal jobs.

According to Waksberg, autocracy, corruption and income inequality are three mutually reinforcing sides of a triangle.

“The tech oligarchs are amassing wealth and power,” Waksberg said in an email. “*IPA+* seeks to expose these dichotomies as well as fight against the “surveillance state” which is enriching the owners of companies like Palantir and Flock at the expense of our privacy and security.” ■

*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.*

# Employment

**TECHNOLOGY**

Robinhood Markets, Inc. has an opening in Menlo Park, CA for Staff Technical Program Manager (9596926): Drv cnsns & influnc dcsins twrds prjcts gols. Tlcmgt prmttd. Minimum Requirements for Position: Master’s degree or foreign equivalent in Software Management or a related field and 6 years of experience or a related occupation. Education or Experience must include: Systems architecture for mobile development, APIs, runtime characteristics, design limitations, and maintenance requirements. Utilizing database systems and basic data analytics to justify decisions and measure program success. Programming languages for performing code reviews and understanding software limitations. Developing velocity enhancement, managing dependencies, and resolving impediments across distributed teams. Developing comprehensive program documentation, including detailed roadmaps, status reports, risk assessments, and communication strategies. Utilizing Mobile and web SDLC for driving technical decision-making by convening stakeholders, facilitating consensus, and ensuring the timely resolution of critical blocking issues. Implementing robust processes and frameworks to scale software development and elevate overall engineering excellence. Salary Range: \$225000 - \$264500. Background checks req. See bnfnfts at <https://careers.robinhood.com/benefits>. Email resume with job title & job code (9596926) to rhijobs@robinhood.com

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**MEASLES**

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Because a disease investigation often requires a legion of public health nurses, physicians, epidemiologists and laboratory scientists to follow-up with hundreds of contacts, Balter said.

That includes sometimes visiting homes or exposure sites. For example, a recent exposure at a daycare required nurses to wring urine out of used diapers to test babies for measles. County health workers monitored 246 people who had been exposed to those first three measles cases — and the work is ongoing.

On Feb. 19, the county reported its fourth measles case. All of them were related to international travel. Other cases in California also have primarily been related to travel either internationally or to states where there are outbreaks. An unvaccinated child in Napa County contracted measles in January after traveling to South Carolina.

Riverside County health officials reported one measles case where the child had not traveled recently, and Shasta County health officials suspect their first case could be related to travel in Southern California but are waiting for DNA testing for confirmation.

**Health departments have fewer resources, more cases**

Local health departments rely heavily on federal funding to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, but last year, the Trump administration slashed nearly \$1 billion of public health funding from California. This year it attempted to claw back another \$600 million from California and three other Democratic states.

Pending lawsuits froze the cuts, but local health departments are treating the money as a lost cause because they cannot bear the financial risk if a judge eventually rules in favor of the Trump administration.

Consequently, health departments closed clinics, terminated programs and laid off dozens of workers.

“What we can do with less is less unfortunately,” Balter said. L.A. county is facing a \$50 million shortfall due to federal, state and local cuts and recently closed seven public health clinics.

Health departments are also confronting decreased public confidence: The high-profile questioning of vaccine safety and effectiveness by U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has complicated public health’s struggle to

contain the spread of preventable infections.

California Democratic leaders are aggressively fighting Kennedy’s direction. They sued to block the administration’s new vaccine guidelines, which stripped universal recommendation from seven childhood vaccines. They blame Kennedy and the Trump administration for “dismantling” the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and stoking fears over debunked claims that vaccines cause autism.

The state also released its own vaccine guidelines and formed an alliance among four western states to share public health information and recommendations.

“Everything including the outbreaks, the financial cuts, the questions from the federal government that are arising are making our work very difficult,” said Dr. Regina Chinsio-Kwong, Orange County public health officer.

Twelve years ago, Orange County was the site of California’s largest measles outbreak in decades. An exposure at Disneyland from an unknown source infected 131 Californians and spread to six states, Canada and Mexico.

The outbreak, which lasted four months, spurred state lawmakers to pass some of the strictest

childhood vaccine requirements in the country.

But even a single measles case requires “vast amounts of infrastructure” to contain, Chinsio-Kwong said. On average, the department identifies and monitors 100 exposed people per case. Since the start of last year, Orange County has lost \$22 million in federal cuts to public health. The department is trying to protect their communicable disease surveillance work, but it gets harder with every cut.

“We’re trying to prioritize our communicable disease control division,” health officer Chinsio-Kwong said. “There are a lot of different federal cuts, but we’re putting that as front and center: That has to be saved no matter what.”

**Measles spread in unvaccinated groups**

Six hundred miles north, Shasta County is grappling with its first measles cases since 2019 and the state’s largest outbreak of the year.

In late January, a sick child visited a health clinic in Redding with measles symptoms that laboratory testing later confirmed. Health officials interviewed 278 people and identified six locations where others were exposed: a restaurant, a church basketball game, a gym, a park,

Costco and the clinic.

They also identified seven other cases among family members or neighbors who were in close contact with the child.

It can take 21 days from the time of exposure for measles symptoms to develop. On Feb. 19, just before the end of that period, health officials confirmed a ninth case.

That person didn’t recognize the symptoms and visited several places while contagious, including a school, a church service, a basketball game and a clinic, said Daniel Walker, a Shasta County supervising epidemiologist. Now, the contract tracing process has started over. The communicable disease team expects to interview even more people this time.

All cases have been among children who were unvaccinated or did not know their vaccination status.

“It’s a great time to get immunized, because you can’t know when you’re next going to be exposed...especially because we’re in an outbreak situation,” Walker said.

Supported by the California Health Care Foundation (CHCF), which works to ensure that people have access to the care they need, when they need it, at a price they can afford. Visit [chcf.org](http://chcf.org) to learn more. ■

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**LAWSUIT**

*continued from page 1*

surgery. The harsh movements of the arrest caused him extreme pain, according to the suit.

The lawsuit named Atherton police officers David Metzger, Diego Romero, Igor Davidowich, Joshua Gatto and Dimitri Andruha, the Sequoia Union High School District and then-M-A vice principals Nick Muys and Stephen Emmi. Emmi currently serves as the wellness programs coordinator

for the school district.

The suit alleged that police used excessive force during K.C.'s arrest and that the district released confidential student records to Atherton police without a search warrant or his parents' permission. K.C. was later released and was not charged with a crime.

The student's attorney, John Burris, said that the situation involving K.C. could have been handled more "humanely and positively," without the "aggressiveness" that resulted in the lawsuit. He said he hopes

that in the future, the district will be more mindful of how to resolve similar situations using deescalation methods that will not impact its students in detrimental ways.

"When you put someone in the juvenile justice system, in the criminal justice system, you are making a negative impact on their lives, so you shouldn't do that unless it's absolutely necessary, particularly with very young people," said Burris. "This is a young African American male, and it was important that his

rights were protected so that he would not suffer harm as a consequence of this for the rest of his life."

The majority of the settlement fees — \$400,000 — were paid by Sequoia Union while Atherton paid the remaining \$160,000. The school district's attorneys stated that the settlement is not an admission of wrongdoing or liability and are "pragmatic decisions made to limit risk, protect resources for students, and allow the district and its employees to move forward."

The execution of the settlement comes after the school district's board voted in early February to close TIDE Academy, its smallest high school campus, as a cost-cutting measure in the face of structural budget deficits and declining enrollment across the district. Sequoia Union is currently involved in several

other lawsuits that allege discrimination, wrongful termination and more.

"The district is pleased to have resolved this matter in a way that avoids prolonged litigation and significant additional legal costs," said Sequoia Union's legal team in an email. "The district believes the settlement reflects both the district's strong legal position and its commitment to responsible stewardship of public funds."

Burris told this news organization that this lawsuit was unique because it involved a school district, a police department and school administrators. He added that the various parties, its relationships with one another and its competing interests made litigation more complicated. ■

*Email Staff Writer  
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jyoshikoshi@almanacnews.com.*

**OBITUARIES**

Local residents who died recently include:

**Robert McMillen**, 78, of Palo Alto, who served during the Vietnam War, who obtained his CPA license and founded a tax practice that served the local community for three decades, and who volunteered to support people experiencing homelessness, died on Feb. 11.

**Nancy Gilbertson**, 88, who was born in New York state and moved to Redwood City in her later years, who was married for 66 years, who worked locally as a Realtor, and who conducted research at the Hoover Institution, died on Feb. 17 in Palm Beach, Florida.

**Kathryn Rose Beadle**, 88, who received her doctorate from Stanford University, who was an expert in childhood language disorders, who served as director of the Stanford Speech and Language Clinic, who founded the Mid Peninsula Speech and Language clinic,

and who traveled widely, died on Feb. 28 in Markesan, Wisconsin.

**Thomas Clark**, 93, of Palo Alto, who joined the Air Force ROTC in college, who flew with the Air-Sea Rescue Service in Germany, who worked as a senior research engineer at Lockheed Missiles and Space Company where he was responsible for tests on Polaris flight vehicles, who was a principal project engineer for United Technologies Corporation working on the Titan III-C program, who started a company producing a tennis ball tossing machine and later machine parts for companies such as Hewlett-Packard and Applied Materials, and who volunteered at Gamble Garden in his retirement, died on Feb. 20.

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# Viewpoint

IDEAS, THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS ABOUT LOCAL ISSUES

## LETTERS

Our readers write

### Restoring trust in Woodside's town government

Editor,

Jason Ledbetter began his time as Woodside Town Manager by reaching out to a wide range of town residents. He attended many committee meetings and made a concerted effort to get to know the residents. He dedicated long hours to understanding the range of issues facing the town. His arrival felt like an opening up of town government to meaningful citizen participation.

When Jason arrived, my wife, Thalia, requested a meeting for us to get acquainted and Jason readily set one up. The three of us discussed the wide range of issues facing the town, from housing and town center planning to disaster preparedness.

During this meeting, I mentioned that I would love to take

him on a tour of the town and introduce him to its charms and problems. Jason readily accepted, and days later we were strolling through Kite Hill, introducing him to Craig Dremann, walking Flax Hill and the path from Barkley Fields into Woodside Hills. We discussed road maintenance issues and drainage along Jefferson Avenue.

Jason had such curiosity that hours passed and still my list was not complete. No problem. Jason suggested a second session and we were able to tour semi-dormant landslides west of Tripp Road, the town's historic bridges and walk "safe routes to school" and around the town center.

I was not alone in seeing Jason's eagerness to learn about Woodside and meet its citizens. I've heard similar stories from several others.

I can't count the number of committee meetings I attended where Jason was present.

Jason was dedicated to open discussion and genuine citizen involvement. This was refreshing given the decrease in

consideration of citizen participation the town has suffered in recent years.

It is devastating that Jason didn't feel that he could carry out the duties of his job honestly.

It is infuriating that the town press release portrays Jason's negotiation for a fair separation agreement as an attempt to blackmail Woodside. Faced with a condition in which he felt unable to honestly fulfill the duties of his job, he is entitled to an agreement that allows him to provide for the well-being of his family until he finds other employment.

We are fortunate to have residents dedicated to participation in town affairs. We should always work to encourage meaningful citizen participation. We should be sure that our voices are considered.

We are in the midst of Town Center Planning and will soon be engaging in the next round of the Housing Element. These thorny issues cannot be successfully addressed unless citizens trust town government.

It's time to work together toward finding a path to an open and trusting town government.

Steve Lubin  
Woodside

### Let offshore wind move forward

Editor,

President Trump does not like windmills. In December, his Interior Department issued stop-work orders for five offshore wind farms along the Atlantic coast, putting thousands of workers out of a job just days before Christmas.

Thankfully, in a little over a month, federal judges have ordered all the projects to move forward, putting workers back on the job and keeping the projects on track to power more than 2.5 million homes and businesses.

Right now, families across the country are shouldering the strain of unaffordable energy bills. Offshore wind is a clean, reliable, and ready-to-go solution. These five projects are

already creating thousands of local jobs and helping to transition states away from fossil fuels.

This has been an intensely cold winter. Large portions of the country have been blanketed in snow and thousands of homes have lost power. While fossil fuel power plants struggle to stay on during winter storms, offshore wind is a reliable energy source that helps communities save money and keep the lights on. In fact, offshore wind is strongest in the winter and at night - right when we need it most.

I am calling on President Trump to stop his senseless attacks on offshore wind. Let the workers finish the job. Yes!

Janet Schachter  
Portola Valley

Send your letters to [letters@AlmanacNews.com](mailto:letters@AlmanacNews.com). Or snail-mail them to: The Almanac, 2345 Yale St., 1st floor, Palo Alto, CA 94306. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Questions? Email [editor@AlmanacNews.com](mailto:editor@AlmanacNews.com), or call 650-223-6537.

## Public Notices

LL CONSTRUCTION SUPPLY  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-302891

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

1.) LL CONSTRUCTION SUPPLY, located at 189 Constitution Dr., Menlo Park, CA 94025.

Registered owner(s):  
LOVAZZANO LOGISTICS

189 Constitution Dr  
Menlo Park, CA 94025

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 12-1-2025.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on February 05, 2026.

(ALM Feb 20, 27, Mar 6 and 13, 2026)

ERLY'S SHEAR BEAUTY  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-302932

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

1.) ERLY'S SHEAR BEAUTY, located at 611 West Orange Ave, South San Francisco, CA 94080.

Registered owner(s):  
MARAHA LICUANAN

611 West Orange Ave  
South San Francisco, CA 94080

This business is conducted by: an Individual.  
Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 02/10/2026.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on February 10, 2026.

(ALM Feb 20, 27, Mar 6 and 13, 2026)

GREEN GARDEN GONZALEZ  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-302731

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

1.) GREEN GARDEN GONZALEZ, located at 219 Jervis Ave, East Palo Alto, CA 94303.

Registered owner(s):  
ARNOLDO GONZALEZ VASQUEZ

219 Jervis Ave

East Palo Alto, CA 94303

This business is conducted by: an Individual.

Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 01/01/2026.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on January 21, 2026.

(ALM Feb 20, 27, Mar 6 and 13, 2026)

MP JUNK REMOVAL  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-302749

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

1.) MP JUNK REMOVAL, located at 836 Willow St, Redwood City, CA 94063.

Registered owner(s):  
MARCO FABRICIO PALOMINOS

836 Willow St  
Redwood City, CA 94063

This business is conducted by: an Individual.  
Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 01/23/2026.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on January 23, 2026.

(ALM Feb 20, 27, Mar 6 and 13, 2026)

WILD ORCHID FOODS  
WILD ORCHID BOUTIQUE  
WILD ORCHID WELLNESS & RETREATS  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: /M-303017

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

1.) WILD ORCHID FOODS, 2.) WILD ORCHID BOUTIQUE, 3.) WILD ORCHID WELLNESS & RETREATS, located at 104 Gilbert Ave, Menlo Park, CA 94025. Mailing Address: 228 Flynn Ave Mountain View, CA 94043

Registered owner(s):  
KRISTINE PHILLIPS

228 Flynn Ave  
Mountain View, CA 94043

TAYLOR FLEMMING  
228 Flynn Ave  
Mountain View, CA 94043

State of Incorporation/Organization: CA

This business is conducted by: a General Partnership.

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 February 19, 2026.

(ALM Mar 6, 13, 20 and 27, 2026)

SUBTLE COMPUTING  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-303019

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

1.) SUBTLE COMPUTING, located at 311 7th Ave, San Mateo, CA, 94401.

Registered owner(s):  
SKYWALK INC.

855 El Camino Real - Ste 13A-230  
Palo Alto, CA, 94301

State of Incorporation/Organization: DE

This business is conducted by: a Corporation.  
Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 01/04/2026.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on February 19, 2026.

(ALM Feb 27, Mar 6, 13 and 20, 2026)

FENCE MOD  
POLLIONI

FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-302948

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

1.) FENCE MOD, 2.) POLLIONI, located at 292 Raymundo Drive, Woodside, CA 94062.

Registered owner(s):  
POLLIONI GROUP LLC

292 Raymundo Drive  
Woodside, CA 94062

State of Incorporation/Organization: CA

This business is conducted by: a Limited Liability Company.

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

This statement was filed with the County

Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on February 11, 2026.

(ALM Feb 20, 27, Mar 6 and 13, 2026)

HOKKAIDO BAKERY  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-303001

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

1.) HOKKAIDO BAKERY., located at 433 Airport Blvd. Suite 103, Burlingame, CA 94010.

Registered owner(s):  
BE BLUE VENTURES, INC.

433 Airport Blvd. Suite 103  
Burlingame, CA 94010

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 February 18, 2026.

(ALM Feb 27, Mar 6, 13 and 20, 2026)

GYMIO  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-302835

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

1.) GYMIO, located at 1580 Southgate Avenue 416, Daly City, CA 94015.

Registered owner(s):  
BEYOND LLC

1580 Southgate Avenue 416  
Daly City, CA 94015

State of Incorporation/Organization: California

This business is conducted by: a Limited Liability Company.

Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 07/01/2025.

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on February 02, 2026.

(ALM Feb 20, 27, Mar 6 and 13, 2026)

CERTILINK SIGNING AGENCY  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-302614

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

1.) CERTILINK SIGNING AGENCY, located at 171 Lassen Dr, San Bruno, CA 94066.

Registered owner(s):  
TRICIA LLANA MANGABAT

171 Lassen Dr  
San Bruno, CA 94066

This business is conducted by: an Individual.

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

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on January 08, 2026.

(ALM Feb 13, 20, 27 and Mar 6, 2026)

X DRIVE  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-302591

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

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

Registered owner(s):  
NADER HADIZADEH RAEISSI

1383 Laurel Street #B  
San Carlos, CA 94070

This business is conducted by: an Individual.

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

This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on January 07, 2026.

(ALM Feb 13, 20, 27 and Mar 6, 2026)

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

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

The deadline is Sunday at 11:59 pm.

Visit [AlmanacNews.com/legal\\_notices/](https://AlmanacNews.com/legal_notices/)

For assistance email [LegalNotices@AlmanacNews.com](mailto:LegalNotices@AlmanacNews.com).

## Learn the art and science of nature journaling in Palo Alto

From local flora to ‘really weird bugs,’  
The Foster Museum’s class draws on the healing power of observation

By Angela Swartz

Sunny Toy walked out on the wooden observation deck at Baylands Nature Preserve in Palo Alto during a low tide. In the mud she spotted a glass bottle, chunks of wood and faint footprints, and she leaned over her notebook to sketch and color what she saw, noting the temperature and topography.

Toy visited the preserve as part of a field trip with Kate Rutter’s nature journaling class, hosted by The Foster Museum in Palo Alto. Toy, a Mountain View resident, credits the class, which teaches students to write and draw pictures to record an observation in nature, for helping her notice things she might have otherwise overlooked.

“She helps us slow down to observe and record, and she does it in a joyful way,” Toy said of Rutter.

Rutter, an Emeryville resident and former product designer, said the practice has real mental and social health benefits, such as calmness and restfulness. A 2025 study by Penn State University backs up this notion. Although it’s not a new practice, nature journaling gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic as

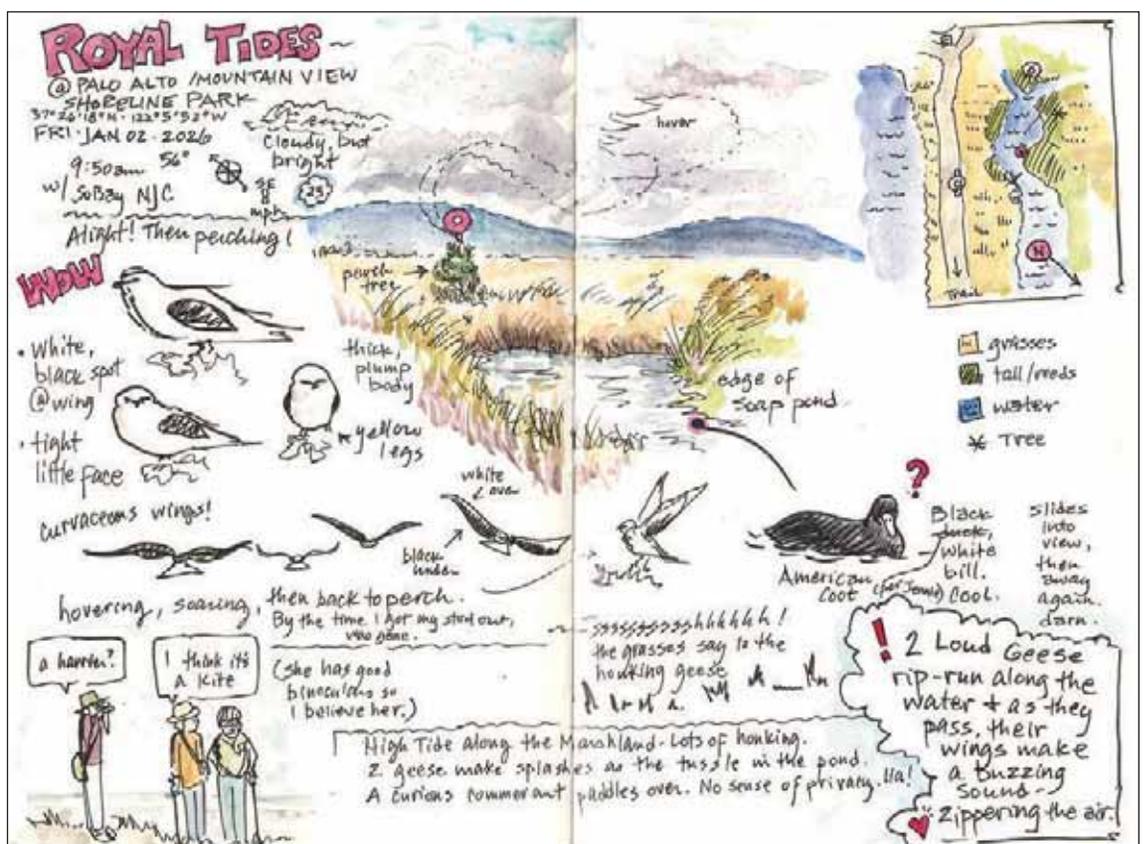
people looked for more outdoor activities, according to the study.

“Humans need nature; nature needs humans,” said Rutter, a certified California naturalist who started nature journaling about a decade ago. “We’re not joking when we say ‘touch grass’ — hopefully native grass.”

Her class curriculum is based on books like “The California Naturalist Handbook,” “Keeping a Natural Journal” and “The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling.” Rutter also integrates her own book of 26 hand-illustrated native plants called “Bay Area Botanical.”

“It just absolutely transformed my life,” said Rutter of nature journaling. “It’s not only an art practice, it’s a science practice, nature practice, poetry practice. ... Learning to draw from observation, understanding how light works, understanding how to make something simplified, more diagrammatic, is a real skill, and that opens you up to seeing differently.”

Now, as a teacher, Rutter helps people connect with the outside world — be it a houseplant, fruit, vegetable, “things sometimes people call weeds,” “really weird bugs” or a “cool root.”



Courtesy Kate Rutter

On a recent visit to the Baylands, Kate Rutter captured the sights, sounds and signs of life during the royal tides (AKA king tides), a seasonal event in which unusually high tides draw many birds to the area.

“There is something enchanting in everything that grows,” she said.

Rutter began teaching classes at The Foster in 2023 after meeting the museum founder, watercolorist Tony Foster, at a conference hosted by the nonprofit Wild Wonder. Foster’s wilderness landscapes, displayed in the museum, offer fitting inspiration for nature journaling, Rutter and her students said.

“I fell in love with just the fact that there is this jewel of a museum which is free and accessible in this fairly commercial area of Palo Alto ... totally dedicated to the celebration and protection of the world’s most wild spaces,” Rutter said.

She noted the No. 1 reason a person may not start nature journaling is because they are concerned they are not skilled at

drawing. Sue Cashel, a Palo Alto resident, was in this camp.

“I wasn’t intimidated at all after about a minute (into class),” said Cashel, who took the course about a year ago. “You didn’t have to know how to draw or this particular form of capturing these observations to paw on ahead and make it your own.”

Inspired after taking the course, Brandi Filbert, a science and art teacher at Alta Vista High School in Mountain View, used a grant to bring Rutter to teach students in the school’s Serenity Garden for 10 weeks.

Filbert earned a nature journaling certificate recently.

“Now I have the resources and learning to confidently continue working with my current students by reviewing topics and skills that Kate covered and just spending more time on each, since the

time we spent with her went by so quickly,” said Filbert in an email.

Sign-up is open for a four-class spring series on March 8 and March 15. There are two classes on each day, but you can sign up for just one class. Classes are two and a half hours long. Sign up begins March 15 for the summer series, which takes place on May 17 and June 14. ■

Angela Swartz is a Contributing Writer.



Courtesy Kate Rutter

Students work on their nature journals during a field trip to the Baylands.

Nature Journaling: Explore, Express, Connect!, The Foster Museum, 940 Commercial St., Palo Alto. \$45 per class at the Foster, \$20 for a field trip to the Baylands, or \$140 for each seasonal series. Class materials are included in cost. [thefoster.org/natural-journaling](http://thefoster.org/natural-journaling).

## Unique album release show takes special ‘measures’

Peninsula musicians team with local theater company for a concert that brings together music and art

By Heather Zimmerman

‘Measure Silence,’ a new album by Peninsula musicians Alex and Maya Valdivia, explores themes of emotional distance and restraint, but the concert marking its release aims to offer the opposite, with a unique way for listeners to connect, and not only through music. It’s an event that’s also an artistic collaboration with the community.

The March 13 show at Little Green a Plant Bar in Redwood City is part of a joint project with Peninsula-based Fuse Theatre in which community members created works of art — masks — inspired by the album’s songs.

San Mateo-based musician Alex Valdivia and his daughter, Maya, wrote and recorded “Measure the Silence” together. They will perform all 14 of its tracks at the show, each with a corresponding mask on display.

“The idea behind the album is (about) all these things that we carry with us and we don’t share, and how we can reframe them and think about them differently, so that we can actually share that burden,” Alex Valdivia said. “You know, the metaphor is right there for the taking, right? Because when you don’t say the things that you should be saying, what you end up doing is like putting on a mask. So we took that very literally.”

Valdivia has been working with Fuse Theatre for about a decade, he said, writing music for some of the company’s shows and occasionally performing as well. He’s also part of Fuse Theatre’s Sparks group, an artists’ collective that plans plays, events and other performances.

“It’s very singer-songwriter, acoustic indie folk — some combination between folk and chamber, but the foundation is acoustic guitars and piano,” Valdivia said of his style. “I’ve been doing this project with my daughter Maya, who plays the piano. So it’s guitar, piano and harmonies — that’s kind of our thing. And every once in a while, we kind of branch out and bring the whole band, which is what’s happening (at the album release concert).”

The concert will feature a seven-piece band, but Valdivia more typically performs solo or as a duo with 13-year-old Maya, which itself is a relatively new development. “Measure the Silence” marks the pair’s first official project.



Courtesy Alex Valdivia

Maya and Alex Valdivia perform in front of the Center for Creativity in downtown Redwood City. The arts center, which opened last year, is a frequent collaborator with Fuse Theatre.

Valdivia, who was born and raised in Cuba, said he was raised playing music and that it has always been a part of his life. His daughter is also growing up in a musical environment.

“Maya has been coming on stage with me for a while now. She also started learning piano when she was really, really small, and taking singing lessons. But this is the first time that we’re actually doing something that we arranged together. We’ve been doing this for a year, working on this project,” he said.

The masks that will be featured at the concert were created in two community workshops held by Fuse Theatre in February.

“We’re using the masks as props, and kind of a statement on the themes of the album,” said Stacey Ardelean, Fuse Theatre’s artistic director.

The mask workshops also included some collaborative poem writing, she said, which will also be shared during the show.

“I created some of the masks for the album, and we used those as sort of a jumping-off point to talk about scenes around silence in our everyday life, and how those masks can feel heavy or locked-in or blocking our vision and that sort of thing. We used those masks to talk about the idea of a metaphor of a mask; what we hold on the outside and what we hold on the inside,” Ardelean said.

Workshop participants initially were given only the lyrics for the songs featured on “Measure the Silence,” and asked to begin creating their masks based on the words alone. They didn’t hear the accompanying music until a little later in the process. Both Valdivia and Ardelean noted the surprising shift in the art that came about once the participants heard the melodies.

“We read the lyrics as a poem, and I read it, so it was interesting for Alex and Maya to listen to it, and the words are just really heavy as a poem, but then they played it as a song, and the song just lifts it and gives it hope. It was just very interesting to us how different the music could make the lyrics,” Ardelean said.

After participants heard the music, Valdivia said, “Most of the time, they’d go back and tweak their original designs or even restart from a fresh perspective, which is kind of the whole point of the album.”

The March 13 concert won’t be the final outing for the masks. The art, and the community collaboration developed in the initial mask workshops, will serve as a foundation for further workshops aimed at creating a performance to be held later in the spring.

“We do collaborative poems, we do improv, we do movement, so we’re going to be taking all that music and the masks and all the work we’ve already done in those workshops, and we’ll invite people back, and we’ll invite people from the opening to come to those workshops in March and April, and then in May, we’ll be doing a performance, perhaps with community members if they want to perform, or it might be just our company members,” Ardelean said. ■

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

March 13, 8-10 p.m., at Little Green a Plant Bar, 1101 Main St., Redwood City; free (reservations requested); [tinyurl.com/ValdiviaSilenceAlbum](http://tinyurl.com/ValdiviaSilenceAlbum).

## Worth a Look



Courtesy Luciano J Bilotti

BoDeans mark their 40th anniversary March 7 at The Guild Theatre.

### BoDeans

Alternative rockers BoDeans (“Good Things,” “Closer to Free”) emerged from Wisconsin in 1986 and have toured with big names including U2, Bob Dylan and Tom Petty over the years. You might remember “Closer to Free” best from the ‘90s TV show “Party of Five.” Founder, frontman, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and producer Kurt Neumann has described the BoDeans as having a “classic guitar-driven midwestern rock-pop sound.” Marking the group’s 40th anniversary this year, BoDeans are making a tour stop at the Guild.

March 7, 8 p.m., The Guild Theatre, 949 El Camino Real, Menlo Park; \$61; [guildtheatre.com](http://guildtheatre.com).

### ‘Songs for a New World’

Jason Robert Brown’s “Songs for a New World” is a theatrical song cycle about life’s pivotal moments and points of transformative choices. The musical introduces a variety of characters including a Spanish explorer and a woman considering her troubled relationship, and is Hillbarn Theatre’s latest production, with a cast of four: Jessica Coker as Woman 2, Sophie Oda as Woman 1, Sidney Matthew Román as Man 1 and Coleton Schmitto as Man 2. The show is directed by Cindy Goldfield.

March 5-22, Hillbarn Theatre, 1285 E. Hillsdale Blvd., Foster City; see online for show dates and times, and ticket prices; [hillbarntheatre.org](http://hillbarntheatre.org).

### Bay Choral Guild’s ‘Collaborations’

Solo instruments such as flute, oboe, marimba and cello adjoin choral works by J. S. Bach (“Lobet den Herrn”) and contemporary composers including Reena Esmail and Joan Szymko at Bay Choral Guild’s upcoming “Collaborations” concerts in Campbell and Palo Alto, with preview talks a half hour before each performance.

March 7, 7:30 p.m., Campbell United Methodist Church, 1675 Winchester Blvd. and March 8, 4:30 p.m., First Congregational Church of Palo Alto, 1985 Louis Road, Palo Alto; \$31.87 general admission, \$26.65 seniors, free for students (and children accompanied by a paying adult); [baychoralguild.org/2026-03-collaborations.html](http://baychoralguild.org/2026-03-collaborations.html).

### Astrid Kuljanic and the Ben Rosenblum Trio

Vocalist Astrid Kuljanic and the Ben Rosenblum Trio offer a night of “Transatlantic Jazz” at Community School of Music and Arts. The concert will showcase a variety of global sounds, thanks to Kuljanic’s Croatian heritage and expertise in jazz and Brazilian music, performed in a range of styles and languages. Kuljanic, singing traditional, popular and original songs, is accordionist Ben Rosenblum, Mat Muntz on bagpipes and bass, and Ben Zweig on drums and percussion.

March 6, 7:30 p.m., Tateuchi Hall, Community School of Music and Arts, 230 San Antonio Circle, Mountain View; free; [arts4all.org](http://arts4all.org).

# Food & Drink



LOULOU'S LECHE FLAN



CLOUD & CRUMB



ORANGE ELAICHI

## SMALL BUSINESSES,

3 woman-owned small businesses bring globally inspired treats to the Peninsula



**Above:** Kat Liu poses for a picture while selling her madeleines and cookies at an event. Courtesy Cloud & Crumb. **Top from left to right:** A single-serving ube leche flan from LouLou's Leche Flan (\$7). Courtesy LouLou's Leche Flan. A variety of cookies from Cloud & Crumb (\$3-\$5). Courtesy Cloud & Crumb. Egg-free mango lassi bundt cakes from Orange Elaichi. Courtesy Orange Elaichi.

By Adrienne Mitchel

**T**hese under-the-radar bakeries are far from vanilla. This Women's History Month, we're spotlighting three woman-owned small businesses baking up big and bold global flavors.

All three of these women had no formal culinary training or prior experience as business owners, and all are forgoing traditional career paths to pursue their passions, incorporating flavors from their home countries or heritage.

From cookies infused with Hong Kong tea to egg-free bundt cakes that taste like mango lassi, here are three bakeries you might not have heard of to satisfy your sweet tooth.

### Mixing French mini cakes with flavors from Hong Kong

San Mateo resident Kat Liu has a weird cat. "(Kumo) is not supposed to eat pastry, but he always steals my pastry," Liu said. "Even if it is a croissant, he will eat it from the top, like a psychopath."

She named her home-based bakery, Cloud & Crumb, after him, as Kumo means "cloud" in Japanese, and he leaves crumbs everywhere. Liu launched her madeleine and cookie business last year after completing her Ph.D. in cancer genomics from Stanford University. She decided to pursue her lifelong passion full time after the death of her aunt, who was a mother figure to her.

"I know that in order to make her proud, what she wants for me is happiness," Liu said. "So I decided to take a leap of faith and start my home bakery, because that's something that I want to do ... and I know my aunt would be very proud of me for doing that."

Liu grew up in Hong Kong until she was 13

years old, and she's incorporating the flavors of her childhood into her baked goods. She offers madeleines stuffed with fillings in flavors such as black sesame, Hong Kong lemon tea, salted egg yolk and osmanthus mochi (\$3.50).

She also crafts cookies with homemade miso toffee and fresh apple chunks or ones infused with hojicha and stuffed with mochi (\$3). For ube lovers, Liu uses real ube to make cookies with a gooey salted egg yolk and soft ube center, ube butter mochi and ube canele (\$3-\$5).

"Cookies and madeleines (are) very versatile, they are portable and they're meant to be shared," Liu said. "They're the kind of treats that you would gather with people for afternoon tea, which is a culture where I'm from, in Hong Kong, to really chat over and to share the joy."

Liu is a self-taught baker, recalling the first time she baked was in a toaster oven following a Valentine's Day cookie recipe from a



**From left:** Julianne Zuniga, left, created LouLou's Leche Flan in January 2025, naming the business after her mother. Courtesy LouLou's Leche Flan. Sunnyvale resident Janki Chauhan, who formerly worked in tech, is the creator of Orange Elaichi. Courtesy Orange Elaichi.

# BIG FLAVORS

children's magazine.

"My grandma loved it — I think it's only because her grandkid made it for her, but that really stuck with me," she said.

Liu said she's passionate about flavor development and introduces new flavors regularly. She hopes to eventually move to a commercial kitchen to grow her business.

"I want people to know that small dreams are worth pursuing," she said. "It's not a bad thing to follow your heart, to do what you like, just because you're not following the path that society agrees with."

To order from Cloud & Crumb, fill out the online order form and pick up in San Mateo. Free delivery is available within 5 miles of the pickup point, with additional charges for delivery up to 20 miles away. Cloud & Crumb will also be popping up April 18 at Little Green A Plant Bar in Redwood City from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

**Cloud & Crumb,**  
www.cloudandcrumb.com,  
Instagram: @cloud.and.crumb.

## Fusing traditional South Asian ingredients with modern bakes

Sunnyvale resident Janki Chauhan describes herself as a "100% introvert" who expresses herself best through baking.

What started as gifting friends and family small boxed items for Diwali and other holidays grew into Orange Elaichi, a small business specializing in eggless baked goods with nostalgic South Asian flavors.

She started the business as Cup, Spoon and Spatula in 2024 before rebranding last summer to Orange Elaichi, with the orange as a nod to California and elaichi (meaning cardamom in Hindi) representing India.

"The goal here was to bring the traditional flavor(s) which I grew up with into these modern bakes, which are more accessible,"

Chauhan said.

Chauhan's rose pistachio bundt cake is one of her most popular offerings (\$8). Instead of using rose flavoring, she uses gulkand, a rose petal jam traditionally used in paan, a South Asian post-meal refresher. Other treats include the mango lassi bundt cake and orange pistachio truffles, a twist on brigadeiros (\$12 for six truffles).

All products at Orange Elaichi are egg-free, and many of her baked goods are fully vegan and gluten-free, including her chai spice oatmeal cookies and cranberry-orange muffins.

She notes that while vegan baked goods often come with a bad rap, she finds that plant-based baking can be an asset. Instead of just substituting ingredients, she thinks holistically about each ingredient.

"If I'm using a plant-based product, I'm taking advantage of what flavor they bring in," Chauhan said. "Most of my milk I use is oat milk, and I know that you get that nice, early, slightly sweet flavor out of oat milk, so I'm using that

flavor as an advantage."

Chauhan grew up in Gujarat, India, coming to the United States for her master's program in 2008. Her first time baking with an oven was during grad school, as she did not have access to an oven while living in India. An avid home baker, Chauhan worked in tech until about five years ago.

"I wanted to make sure that I'm doing something I really want to do, rather than something I'm just doing day to day," she said. "Cooking and baking has always been

my love language. That's how I express myself."

Chauhan's bakes can be found at Cupertino's De Anza College Farmers Market on Sundays, or ordered online and picked up from her home in Sunnyvale on Fridays and Saturdays. She will soon introduce Orange Elaichi at the College of San Mateo Farmers Market on Saturdays as well.

**Orange Elaichi,** www.orangeelaichi.com,  
Instagram: @orangeelaichi.

## Crafting Filipino leche flan with a purple punch for the palate

Julianne Zuniga grew up making Filipino leche flan with her mother, "LouLou." That recipe is now the backbone of her business, LouLou's Leche Flan.

The Hillsborough resident and former development director didn't have any prior experience in culinary or owning a business, but at the urging of those who had tried her leche flan before, she started selling flan early last year. Available at farmers markets all along the Peninsula, Zuniga offers just two flavors (original and ube) with the occasional appearance of mango or chocolate varieties (\$7 for individual size, \$36 for family size).

"I love interacting with customers," Zuniga said. "I love seeing their reactions to my leche flan, and I love introducing it if people have never had it."

Flan, a dessert made from baked custard coated in caramel, is a staple in many countries' cuisines, including Mexico, Cuba and Vietnam. Zuniga said that she finds Filipino-style flan to be more dense and less eggy than Mexican flan.

"When people don't like flan, I feel like

it's a texture thing," she said. "And so when they try mine ... they end up trying it and liking it."

She said her leche flan stands out because the ube flavor is pronounced, noting that she's tried many ube desserts that barely taste like ube.

Zuniga currently bakes everything herself, and she plans to hire employees and hopes to eventually open a brick-and-mortar shop.

Find LouLou's Leche Flan at Stanford Farmer Market on Tuesdays and Fridays, Brisbane Farmers Market on Thursdays and Foster City Farmers Market on Saturdays. Zuniga donates a portion of all proceeds to Project Pearls, a nonprofit combating poverty in the Philippines. ■

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**LouLou's Leche Flan,**  
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