

# The Almanac

NONPROFIT LOCAL NEWS FOR THE MIDPENINSULA

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## Woodside man and dog injured in hit-and-run on dangerous stretch of Woodside Road



Seeger Gray

Rick Congdon holds his dog Millie for a portrait on March 16, near where they were hit by a car in February on Woodside Road in Woodside.

### Family wants driver to be held accountable

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

After the black Tesla speeds away, a figure rises slowly from the ground. The oncoming car's dashcam footage reveals a man cradling a limp, black dog in his arms. Shielded by the stopped car, he calls out to the driver as he gently sets his furry burden down.

The Feb. 4 hit-and-run took place on a narrow stretch of Woodside Road where a trail ends, forcing pedestrians into the roadway to get across a bridge. It highlights the safety risks Woodside residents face in the rural town, where gaps in pedestrian infrastructure can put people into harm's way.

"As we were walking briskly across the bridge, the Tesla came out of nowhere," said Woodside resident Rick Congdon, who was taking an evening stroll with his dog Millie when they were hit by the passenger side of the vehicle, throwing them

both to the ground.

The bridge they were crossing, located near Kings Mountain Road, has been called out by the town's Circulation Committee as an unsafe stretch of Woodside Road.

Congdon suffered a broken pinky finger and bruising and scrapes to his left leg while his dog took the brunt of the hit and almost died from internal bleeding. He said his walk took him along a route typically used by residents, one that he uses regularly. Children use it to ride their bikes to Woodside Elementary School.

Woodside Circulation Committee Chair Ehsan Farkhondeh told The Almanac that the town gets complaints about dangerous driving and speeding in this area of Woodside Road, where the speed limit is 25 mph. As far as Farkhondeh can recall, Congdon is the first pedestrian

See **HIT AND RUN**, page 19

## Potential jail time halved for ex-East Palo Alto employee accused of molesting a minor

Alleged abuse began when victim was 14, not 13, according to prosecutors

By Arden Margulis

A one-year difference in the victim's age means that a former part-time East Palo Alto city employee accused of repeatedly molesting a teen faces reduced potential prison time after two charges were revised.

Investigators previously believed that Redwood City resident Rafael Prado, 28, allegedly began sexually abusing the boy when the boy was 13 years old and Prado was 25. At

a hearing on March 5 in San Mateo County Superior Court, the District Attorney's Office said it now believes that the victim was 14 years old. That distinction changed two of the charges against Prado to lewd acts with a minor between the ages 14 and 15.

Prado is now charged with five counts of lewd acts with a minor between 14 and 15. Previously, he faced three of those counts plus two counts of lewd acts with a minor under 14. He is still facing one count of possessing

child sex abuse material. If convicted on all six counts, the maximum sentence is half of what it would have been before the two charges were modified, dropping from 12 years in prison to down to five years and three months.

During the preliminary hearing, Judge Jeffery Finigan ruled that prosecutor Kara Szkotak had shown enough evidence to move forward on all six counts.

"This is classic predatory behavior," Finigan said about Prado. "And the presumption of

guilt is great based on what I've heard today."

### The allegations against Prado

As first reported by this news organization, Prado, who worked as a part-time, on-call employee for the city of East Palo Alto from July 2022 to April 2025, is accused of repeatedly molesting and supplying drugs to a middle school boy he met at the East Palo Alto

See **PRADO**, page 18



Courtesy San Mateo County Sheriff's Office

If convicted, Rafael Prado is facing a maximum five years and three months in prison, down from 12 years, after prosecutors agreed the victim was at least 14 years old when the alleged abuse began.

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# Local News

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Hannah Bensen

A Shell gas station on Sand Hill Road in Menlo Park on March 12, 2026.

## Why are gas prices so high in California?

There is some mystery, but experts say you should shop around

By Hannah Bensen

California drivers of gas-powered vehicles have likely noticed an unwanted recent development: the price of fuel has increased markedly in recent weeks.

The roughly 85-cent increase since February is largely driven by the spike in oil prices tied to Iran war, according to Severin Borenstein, an energy economist at the University of California, Berkeley. Ships carrying oil have been bottlenecked along the Strait of Hormuz, a key oil supply route that borders Iran, since U.S.

military action in the region, Borenstein said. In retaliation, Iran has blocked shipments of oil suppliers. The conflict has caused the largest oil supply disruption in history, the International Energy Agency wrote in its March oil market report.

While the entire country has seen an increase in gas prices, a gallon of gas still costs about \$1.60 per gallon more in California than the national average.

“We started out higher than the rest of the country, and we’re higher than the rest of the country by about the same

amount as we were before the war,” Borenstein said.

Several factors contribute to the higher gas cost in California, including environmental programs that aim to reduce greenhouse gases but also increase the cost of fuel. Since 1996, California has required a cleaner gasoline blend that reduces smog-forming emissions, but is more expensive to produce. California also has a unique cap-and-invest program that establishes a steadily declining limit — a “cap” — on sources

See **GAS PRICES**, page 21

## Portola Valley teen boosts awareness of endometriosis

The painful condition affects 1 in 10 women, but symptoms are often dismissed

By Michelle Iracheta

It can start with a sharp, stabbing pain in the abdomen — the kind that sends a teenager doubling over or missing school for days.

Friends, teachers and sometimes even doctors may dismiss it as normal period pain.

But for millions of women, those symptoms can signal endometriosis, a chronic disease affecting about one in 10 women worldwide that often goes undiagnosed for years.

A Portola Valley teenager is trying to change that.

Quincy Harding, 17, began talking about endometriosis on TikTok and Instagram, connecting with girls her age and young women. She said one of her goals is to translate complex medical information into language that teenagers can easily understand.

“A lot of the information, when you just Google it, is really difficult to digest because it can be very advanced medical terminology and frankly can be quite intimidating,” she said, adding that her message has reached more than 100,000 people across the Bay Area and beyond.

March is Endometriosis Awareness Month, highlighting a disease that occurs when tissue



Courtesy Quincy Harding

Quincy Harding, 17, will speak at the Annual Meeting of the American & Global College of Endometriosis Specialists on March 20.

similar to the uterine lining grows outside the uterus, causing inflammation, scarring and severe pain.

Dr. Camran Nezhat, a Redwood City-based endometriosis specialist and pioneer in minimally invasive surgery, said the condition can be difficult to diagnose because its symptoms often mimic other illnesses.

“Endometriosis is a chronic and often painful disease,” Nezhat said. “Its symptoms can

See **ENDOMETRIOSIS**, page 20

## Woodside residents call for public investigation into Ledbetter report

DA’s Office reviewing town manager’s allegations

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

On March 10, the Woodside Town Council held its first public meeting since the release of Town Manager Jason Ledbetter’s whistleblower report in February.

The shocking allegations in Ledbetter’s 14-page report singled out three of Woodside’s five council members and detailed incidents ranging from racist and sexist slurs to a pressure campaign to stall unpopular housing projects to improve the reelection chances of Mayor

Brian Dombkowski and Vice Mayor Paul Goeld. A number of town residents say they want to see a truly independent and transparent investigation to get to the truth.

At the council meeting, several people publicly called for Dombkowski, Goeld and Town Attorney Jean Savaree to recuse themselves from a thorough review of Ledbetter’s allegations. Some expressed feelings of confusion, disappointment and declining trust in the town.

The meeting opened up with

a report from the town’s external counsel, Rick Bolanos from San Francisco-based law firm Liebert Cassidy Whitmore. Due to Savaree’s involvement in Ledbetter’s report, Woodside has had to confer with a third-party attorney. The report alleges that the town attorney dismissed his complaints about perceived bias and harassment he reportedly experienced from Council member Jenn Wall.

Bolanos provided an overview of the events leading up to the

See **INVESTIGATION**, page 12



Seeger Gray

A Woodside resident speaks about the whistleblower report from Town Manager Jason Ledbetter during a Town Council meeting at Independence Hall in Woodside on March 10.

# Texas developer plans eight-story housing project in Menlo Park's Bayfront area

By Arden Margulis

A Texas developer has submitted plans for a housing project with nearly 200 apartments in an area of Menlo Park dominated by the corporate offices of Meta and Snowflake.

Dallas-based real estate firm Beam Reach has submitted plans to redevelop 155 Jefferson Drive, a 1.4-acre site in the Bayfront area of the city, into an eight-story multifamily building. The proposal was filed with the city on Jan. 16 and calls for replacing a single-story research and development building with a mix of 199 new apartments.

Beam Reach purchased the property in March 2025 for \$11 million, according to commercial real estate platform Traded.

"We're always targeting locations that we believe need housing," said Beam Reach co-founder Sam Rabb. "In Menlo Park, you're in that corridor

with a lot of new office supply that's come online and a lot of new employees but, like much of the Bay Area, it's short-housed."

The plans include 57 studio units, 110 one-bedroom units, and 32 two-bedroom units. Of the 199 units, 20 will be reserved for very low-income families earning 30% to 50% of the area median income (roughly \$70,000—\$80,000 annually for a family of four), and nine will be set aside for low-income families earning 50% to 80% of the median income, or up to \$109,700 per year.

Menlo Park's inclusionary housing rules require 15% of units in large projects to be priced below market rate. Beam Reach said it plans to meet this requirement, except for a small fraction of a unit, for which it will pay an in-lieu fee.

The project lies near Lume, a mixed-use development by Greystar featuring 441 completed rental units and 42



Courtesy city of Menlo Park

Renderings of Beam Reach's proposal for 155 Jefferson Ave.

for-sale townhomes still awaiting construction. Like Beam Reach's proposal, 15% of Lume's housing is set aside as below-market-rate units.

Beam Reach is proposing building 200 vehicle parking spaces and 330 bicycle spaces in the first three floors of the structure. The plans include around 7,000 square feet of publicly accessible open space and 11,397 square feet of private and shared open space.

Rabb said Beam Reach only recently received the city's initial feedback on the proposal and does not have a specific timeline in mind for when construction could begin. After Menlo Park deems the proposal complete, the project would be subject to environmental review, permitting and architectural review, according to the city. ■

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

## Menlo-Atherton students suspected of bringing gun to school, police say

By Arden Margulis

Two Menlo-Atherton High School students brought a firearm to campus on March 11, the Atherton Police Department said.

At around 1 p.m. a school staff member noticed two students put an item in an athletic locker while seemingly blocking the view of it, according to a press release from the police department.

After the students left, the staffer opened the locker and reported seeing a backpack containing a firearm, police said. The school resource officer (SRO), an Atherton Police officer who works at schools in the town, secured the firearm, police said.

After an investigation, the SRO identified two students, whose names have not been released, as being responsible for the gun. San Mateo County District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe told this news organization that, as of March 12, no charges have been filed in court against any students related to having a gun on campus, and no students were in custody.

The department said the students may face charges including possession of a firearm on a school campus, a minor in possession of a handgun and possession of a firearm without a serial number.

"At this time in the investigation, we can report that there were no known threats made toward the M-A community or toward any individual in the community," Menlo-Atherton Principal Karl Losekoot said in a statement to parents. "While both the school and Atherton PD continue to investigate all details of this incident, we have identified the students connected to this situation and are taking all appropriate and necessary actions as allowed by law."

"At no time was the firearm brandished on campus, and



Michelle Le

Menlo-Atherton High School is located at 555 Middlefield Road in Atherton.

there are no known threats to the campus community related to this incident," the police department said in a statement. "Due to the vigilance of school staff and the quick response of the school resource officer, the firearm was safely secured and the situation was addressed quickly."

The department also said the investigation is ongoing and asked anyone with information to contact police at 650-688-6500.

Losekoot told parents that the school did not go into lockdown since the firearm was immediately confiscated. He added that the school waited to inform the community to allow time for police to investigate.

Losekoot also said that the school did not inform students of the incident but will "take a moment in the coming days to remind students that school safety is important."

It is not the first time firearms have been found at Menlo-Atherton High School, located at 555 Middlefield Road in Atherton. Over the course of three weeks in 2022, two students were found with firearms on the school campus.

In September, a student was arrested for allegedly making "concerning" social media posts that caused Menlo-Atherton and several other local schools to go on a secure campus order, a step below lockdown.

"We remain committed to working closely with school staff and the community to maintain a safe learning environment for all students," the department said in its public statement.

The Atherton Police Department did not immediately respond to requests for additional information. ■

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

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# Local muralist brings joy through wildlife painting at Willow Commons

By Jennifer Yoshikoshi

**B**obcats, chipmunks, geese and deer have joined the residents at Willow Commons in Portola Valley — in murals painted by Palo Alto artist Flo de Bretagne.

Across three pillars in the courtyard of the affordable housing project, de Bretagne created scenes that incorporate the natural landscape and environment of the town. Her whimsical style adds personality to the murals, de Bretagne said.

Willow Commons is Portola Valley's first affordable housing complex to provide supportive housing for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It welcomed residents in June 2025 and aims to encourage social interaction, community and autonomy.

De Bretagne, who has been

painting for 30 years, is the artist responsible for the murals displayed in Peninsula schools that include Encinal Elementary, Lower Laurel, Los Robles-Ronald McNair Academy and Adelante Selby Spanish Immersion. She said her work is designed to inspire positivity and love.

"My work is very colorful and very joyful, and I see it as an opportunity to bring hope to people," de Bretagne said. "I feel that I really paint for other people, not for myself."

At Willow Commons, she invited the residents to be a part of the project by having them choose the themes they wanted. The final decision: Local animals, wildlife and landscapes. Residents even chose which kinds of animals would be featured on the pillars.

Although she typically uses bright colors, de Bretagne said she stepped outside of her

normal style to blend the mural into the natural landscape of Willow Commons. She opted for neutral tones such as beige, brown, sage and olive green, rather than her go-to choices of orange, yellow, blue and red.

While working on the murals, de Bretagne said she has been able to get to know some of the residents and has enjoyed listening to their comments as they walk past her work.

"One of the residents said that the two chipmunks remind her of her and her mom when they chat," she said, pointing out two critters painted at the bottom of one of the murals.

De Bretagne has been working on decorating the pillars since November and said she's been able to learn from the residents how to enjoy the simplest things in life, something that's especially welcome when there is so



Jennifer Yoshikoshi

A mural by Palo Alto artist Flo de Bretagne features deer in a natural landscape at Willow Commons in Portola Valley.

much anxiety outside the bubble of Willow Commons, she said.

"Everyone is very peaceful, joyful and loving. Some of the residents, sometimes they just express so much joy. It's like a life lesson," de Bretagne said.

This is not the first time de Bretagne has incorporated wildlife into her pieces. In a previous art series, she used animals as symbolic figures of power and tenacity to highlight a

message about the "very fine line between power and strength and vulnerability."

"I paint to bring a message to people. It's not just a nice, pretty painting. It's really filled with meaning," said de Bretagne. "I think the animals have a lot to teach us by their perseverance and strength." ■

*Email Staff Writer  
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jyoshikoshi@almanacnews.com.*

## Ex-Woodside High student sues district over alleged coach abuse

By Bay City News Service

**A** former Woodside High School student is suing the Sequoia Union High School District after it allegedly failed to protect her from a volleyball coach who has been charged with sexual assault.

"We are seeking justice for our client and working to ensure no other student suffers under this district's watch," said attorney Lauren Cerri in a statement.

Thomas Feng, a 26-year-old resident of Fremont, was employed by the district as a volleyball coach for several years, going back to at least the 2021-2022 school year.

During his time as a coach at Woodside High, he allegedly had an inappropriate relationship with a student that started when she was 15 years old. Feng allegedly used his position of

authority to groom the student and sexually assault her multiple times on school grounds and at school-sanctioned events, according to the complaint.

The former student filed a police report against Feng in June 2025. Earlier this year, he was arrested and charged with felony sexual assault of a person under the age of 18 years, according to the San Mateo County District Attorney's Office.

The lawsuit, which was filed on March 11 by Cerri, accuses the district of continuing to employ Feng and allowing him around students despite multiple people raising concerns to district employees over his alleged inappropriate behavior.

The district is accused of "failing to report a reasonable suspicion of child abuse by Feng to law enforcement" and "failing to properly respond to complaints

of Feng's misconduct including the two anonymous complaints that Feng was inappropriate with Plaintiff," the lawsuit reads.

Rumors of the relationship between Feng and the student circulated on campus. Feng apparently groomed her by showing favoritism toward her during volleyball practices and games, texting her every day, and guaranteeing her a spot on the volleyball team, according to the lawsuit.

Students and volleyball players apparently saw the two kissing in the school parking lot, spending time alone together in each other's cars, going out to lunch together alone and walking out of a storage closet together.

Sometime in 2023, a parent of another player on the school's volleyball team complained to the athletic director about Feng's inappropriate behavior and said he shouldn't coach a girls' volleyball team. The director apparently brushed off the concern, according to the lawsuit.

In the same year, two anonymous complaints were made to Woodside High School administrators regarding the inappropriate relationship. Both complaints were apparently dismissed as rumors, and no staff members reported the concerns to law enforcement or San Mateo County Child Protective Services, according to the lawsuit.

"By dismissing complaints, the district prioritized its reputation over the safety of students, leaving Feng in a position

to do more harm," Cerri said in a statement.

Feng was also a volleyball coach at Academy Volleyball, a volleyball club for youth with several locations in the Bay Area. The student also played at the club where she allegedly experienced the same abuse from Feng.

Academy Volleyball has been accused of negligence in the hiring and supervision of Feng.

The club had also received complaints over Feng's behavior but allegedly took no action to investigate them or report them to law enforcement, according to the lawsuit.

The school district and Academy Volleyball did not respond to requests for comment. Anyone with information is urged to contact the law firm Cerri, Boskovich & Allard at 408-289-1417. ■



Magali Gauthier

A former Woodside High School is suing the Sequoia Union High School District for allegedly failing to protect her from a volleyball coach who's facing sexual assault charges.

### REAL ESTATE Q&A

by Monica Corman

## Sellers vs. Buyers



**Dear Monica: Have we moved from a Buyer's market to a Seller's market? What are the signs to watch for?**

Amy E.

Dear Amy: We describe the market in the later part of 2025 as a "Buyer's Market". But it does seem like the market is now more a "Seller's Market", judging from the sales in recent weeks. There is pent up demand and there are new listings for buyers to see. Judging from the sales activity the first few months of this year, buyers are acting quickly and decisively for properties they like. They feel there is no reason to wait.

Sellers who list their homes now are benefiting from this. If you have property to sell, this is a good time.

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# SMCCCD faculty union authorizes strike

By Joshua Picazo

The union that represents San Mateo County Community College District teachers, counselors, coaches, nurses and other faculty recently voted to authorize a strike, saying the district failed to meet its demands for a new contract.

The district operates Skyline College in San Bruno, Cañada College in Redwood City and the College of San Mateo.

“Our contract expired June 30, 2025,” said Rika Yonemura-Fabian, president of the San Mateo Community College Federation of Teachers, AFT 1493.

The vote to authorize a strike took place on Thursday, March 12, with a 95% margin, reflecting frustration over working without a new contract. About 80% of union members participated in the vote.

“We are asking for sufficient raises that would match the extremely high cost of living in San Mateo County,” Yonemura-Fabian said.

The union also wants changes to the pay structure so faculty performing comparable work, such as teaching labs

and lectures, are compensated equally. The union said the district has rejected those proposals, along with calls for a fairer pay system for adjunct faculty.

The union also cited academic freedom concerns, saying the district has refused to address the issue despite faculty worries about the current political climate.

“We are extremely disappointed that the district does not acknowledge the importance of these issues for our faculty and fails to see the impact of this neglect that trickles down to students,” Yonemura-Fabian said.

In a statement, the San Mateo County Central Labor Council expressed support for the union’s vote and said it hoped to resolve a new contract before a strike.

“They deserve a fair contract that recognizes the value of their labor,” said Julie Lind, executive secretary-treasurer of the council, which represents 105 affiliated unions.

In a March 9 statement, district officials said they had offered the union more than \$31 million in compensation.

“SMCCCD deeply values our

faculty and the essential role they play in the classroom and in supporting student success,” Chancellor Melissa Moreno said in the statement.

“This proposal reflects our bold effort to date to offer meaningful salary increases based on a new parity framework. If accepted, AFT and the district’s shared goal of parity will finally be achieved.”

The union, however, disputes the \$31 million figure.

“Their accounting methods are meant to overinflate their offers to make it seem like they are offering far more than what they actually are,” Yonemura-Fabian said.

“The actual value of their offer to faculty is in the neighborhood of \$12-\$13 million over three years.”

Student clubs also issued a statement following the vote in support of the strike.

“Skyline students fully support our faculty strike,” a coalition of eighteen Skyline College clubs said in an Instagram post Thursday. “We stand in solidarity with our teachers in their fight for fair and livable wages, academic freedom and better learning conditions for our students.”



Courtesy San Mateo County Community College District

Cañada College in Woodside is part of the San Mateo County Community College District.

The district maintains it is committed to working with the union to reach a contract. “Reaching a fair agreement with AFT is our utmost priority, and the district is committed to working tirelessly through the fact-finding process to avoid a strike,” said David McClain, executive director of community and government relations for the District. “Our faculty deserve that, and our students depend on it.”

The vote does not necessarily mean a strike will occur.

The next step in the process is fact-finding, in which a neutral third party reviews the dispute and issues a recommendation to help the two sides reach an agreement.

“We of course hope we settle a strong and fair contract during fact-finding, but if that does not happen, we are ready to strike,” Yonemura-Fabian said. “The district should take the result of this vote seriously.” ■

*Email Contributing Writer Joshua Picazo at [joshuadpicazo@gmail.com](mailto:joshuadpicazo@gmail.com).*

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# Man who tried to kidnap Sequoia high student avoids prison time

By Arden Margulis

A 27-year-old man accused of attempting to kidnap a student at Sequoia High School while impersonating a law enforcement officer was sentenced to prison but released due to time served, despite objections from the San Mateo County District Attorney's Office.

Prosecutors say Trey Von Duus entered a classroom at Sequoia High School in Redwood City on July 18, 2024, grabbed a 16-year-old student, and said, "I need to take him," while claiming to be a law enforcement officer. A teacher intervened and escorted Duus outside, the District Attorney's Office said.

On March 13, Duus pleaded no contest to felony attempted kidnapping with two enhancements. While prosecutors sought five years in state prison, Judge Jeffery Jackson sentenced Duus to two years and

six months in state prison and dismissed an enhancement for it being Duus' second felony offense, according to the District Attorney's Office.

Since Duus had been in jail awaiting trial since July 2024, he received credit for 604 days in jail and an additional 604 days of credit for good behavior, meaning he did not need to serve any additional jail time as a result of the sentence.

San Mateo County District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe said that his office sought more jail time because the conduct occurred at a school.

"Schools are safety zones. Schools are locations that parents believe should be as secure for their children as their own home. And when something like this occurs, it sends a ripple effect through the community that school isn't safe," Wagstaffe said.

During the incident at Sequoia High School, prosecutors say

Duus caused \$1,000 in damage to a girls' bathroom and warned a staff member that he had a gun. While officers did not find a gun on Duus when he was arrested, he allegedly had a knife that he displayed while on campus.

At the time of the crime, Duus was on felony probation from an incident in Santa Barbara County in which he broke into a fire department official's home, rifled through belongings and put on the resident's clothes, according to prosecutors.

As part of that case, Duus pleaded guilty to burglary and a parole violation. He also agreed to undergo substance abuse treatment in Brisbane. His probation was set to expire this year.

Following Duus' 2024 arrest in San Mateo County, the Superior Court of Santa Barbara issued a warrant. He was arrested on that warrant on March 16, 2026, shortly after his sentencing in



Michelle Iracheta

Trey Von Duus was injured when he was arrested on July 18, 2024, after he attempted to kidnap a student, which caused the school to go into lockdown.

Redwood City. Santa Barbara County Deputy District Attorney Nicholas Harmon declined to comment on the case. Wagstaffe said his office did not coordinate with Santa

Barbara prosecutors.

Duus was arraigned on the warrant in Santa Barbara Superior Court on March 17. ■

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

## Bus-only lane proposed for long-vacant Dumbarton rail corridor

SamTrans plan would link East Palo Alto and Redwood City by busway

By Brianna Sosa

San Mateo County's section of the Dumbarton railroad corridor last saw use in 1982. Now, more than 40 years later, SamTrans is reviving efforts to make this unused infrastructure functional again.

The transit agency's project, Reimagine Dumbarton, plans to convert the 5-mile corridor on the Midpeninsula into a dedicated bus lane that connects from University Avenue in East Palo Alto to the downtown Redwood City Transit Center.

Busways are typically car-free lanes limited to buses, bicycles and emergency vehicles. SamTrans has prioritized the busway because it can be implemented faster and at a lower cost than a regional rail project, which would likely require several billion dollars, according to Millie Tolleson, Reimagine Dumbarton project manager. "We want to be really rooted in the realities of our current funding landscape," Tolleson said. "We really want a project that is implementable in the near term."

SamTrans' goal is to install pedestrian and bike infrastructure along the proposed busway to create a rapid regional transit connection in southeast San Mateo County.

The Mipeninsula has seen an



Magali Gauthier

The Dumbarton rail corridor as seen from East Palo Alto on March 8, 2019.

increase in traffic congestion in recent years. According to SamTrans, daily travel between Redwood City and East Palo Alto has increased by 30% since 2020.

"People are making more and more local trips, and that travel pattern has really stayed in effect since the pandemic," Tolleson said during a Menlo Park Complete Streets Commission meeting in February. "We're excited about the potential, not only for a local transit service, but possibly for regional buses to use the busway ... and providing a service all the way into the East Bay," she said.

Menlo Park Complete Streets

Commissioner Jacqui Cebrian, who lives in the Belle Haven neighborhood, said she is "super excited" about this project because bike and pedestrian connectivity is a "critical need for this little isolated area," she said.

Commissioner Kevin Rennie agreed. "Biking to transit is on the rise, and most people want that," he said. "People would use transit more if they could get that support."

Rennie said the project should focus on integrating pedestrian and bike paths to get people to transit, rather than putting in

See **DUMBARTON**, page 19

### CRIME BRIEFS

#### Atherton home burglary

A home on the 200 block of Oak Grove Avenue was burglarized between March 13 and March 15, according to the Atherton Police Department.

Officers arrived at the home on March 15 and found a broken rear glass door. The department said jewelry was stolen.

The incident is under investigation and no arrests have been made. The Atherton Police Department asks residents in the area to check their security camera footage and send any pertinent information to the department.

#### Redwood City tutor sentenced

A former tutor in Redwood City was given three years in state prison for the sexual abuse of a student, the San Mateo County District Attorney's Office said on March 17.

Aldo Ricardo Sepulveda Perez, 39, was found guilty of engaging in multiple acts of molestation between 2020 and 2021 with a child aged 11 and 12 at the time of the crimes, prosecutors said.

Perez was hired as a tutor and over the course of 15 months he engaged in hugging, touching, showing sex films and the use of sex toys.

"The victim finally told his mother, because the victim was concerned that Perez might be doing it to other people that he tutored," District Attorney Stephen Wagstaffe told this news organization.

Perez was arrested in 2023 following an investigation into reports of someone soliciting children for lewd purposes. He was originally booked into jail on suspicion of lascivious acts with a child, contacting a minor for sexual purposes and arranging to meet a minor for a lewd or lascivious act.

The investigation resulted in the seizure of electronic items from Perez's home on the 200 block of First Avenue in unincorporated Redwood City and his workplace on the 1700 block of East Bayshore Road, according to the Redwood City Police Department.

Judge Jeffery Jackson denied probation and sentenced Perez to state prison for three years with 132 days credit for time served. Perez will be required to serve at least 80% of his sentence. He will also have to register as a sex offender for the rest of his life and have no contact with the victim for 10 years.

Perez was ordered to pay police and prosecutors a combined \$1,070 but the amount of restitution due to the victim has yet to be determined, Wagstaffe said.

— Arden Margulis and Bay City News

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**INVESTIGATION**

*continued from page 5*

release of Ledbetter's report on Feb. 19, including that the council gave Ledbetter a \$15,000 raise following his performance review in January and what a town press release characterized as his "demand for payment of approximately \$400,000 in a lump sum" on Feb. 17.

"He indicated that if the council did not authorize this payment, he would release a whistleblower report, grind all town business to a halt and make every public meeting about the alleged claims in the report," said Bolanos.

He said that the council rejected Ledbetter's demands and although his employment agreement did not provide severance if he resigned, the council offered to work with him to reach an "amicable settlement."

Ledbetter told this news organization in February that he asked the town to provide a separation package that included his salary and benefits for a year, or until he gets a new job, as well as payment for his accrued vacation time. He said he feared Woodside's corrupt and hostile work environment would leave a "stain" on his resume.

The Town Council has referred Ledbetter's complaint to the San Mateo County District Attorney's Office to conduct an independent investigation. Allegations of gender discrimination and harassment however are being reviewed through the town's independent investigation.

"The only thing we look at is if there is something that is a potential criminal violation of the law. So we'll look to see if there were any allegations of Brown Act violations and investigate those," said District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe. "But for us, there's a very narrow window. We only look at criminal violations, the rest of it belongs to Mr. Ledbetter and the town of Woodside."

Wagstaffe said that it's common for allegations to come out of disagreements between public officials and staff but he doesn't recall a case that matches the level of passion exuded by Ledbetter's report.

It's clear that "there is a lot of turmoil going on in Woodside," Wagstaffe said.

He told this news organization that his office will be interviewing Ledbetter and members of the council and hopes that his team will be able to complete their work within a couple of months.

**OBITUARIES**

Local residents who died recently include:

**Michael B. Kenney**, 82, a Palo Alto resident who played pool to pay his way through college, who opened the company United Home Loan, Inc., who invested in avocado farms and briefly owned racehorses, who enjoyed playing tennis and golf and who enjoyed trips with his golf buddies to Thailand, Australia, Switzerland, France and Brazil, died on Nov. 16, 2025.

**Joan Fletcher Lane**, 97, an Atherton resident who attended Smith College, who worked at World Affairs Council before getting a job at Stanford University's International House, who served as a board member at various international organizations at Stanford and UC Berkeley, with a focus on creating college scholarships for young women of color and hosting an exchange program for international students, who later worked as an assistant to the dean of humanities at Stanford and then

as special assistant to the university's board of trustees, and who loved traveling and hiking, died on Feb. 19.

**Mary Helen Luna**, 67, a Mountain View resident who graduated from Mountain View High School and who worked at Bank of America and Shoreline Amphitheatre, died on Feb. 27.

**John Thomas Antoun**, 82, a Palo Alto resident who served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, serving four years as a faculty member in the Rickover Nuclear Power Program in California, who studied mathematics at UC Berkeley, who enjoyed a long career in space science and engineering, spending many years at TRW, Inc., who supported local cultural institutions like Palo Alto Art Center and Gamble Gardens, and who loved to travel the world, died on March 8.

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

Woodside resident Steve Lubin that he was distressed to hear that the investigations are "nonpublic" and called for a true independent review without the influence of council members involved when he spoke at the March 10 council meeting. He said that Ledbetter's accusations are "not inconsistent" with his personal experience.

"Please acknowledge that many people in town do not trust the town government is

conducted in an open manner. There is a perception that issues are determined out of the public eye. Jason's letter reinforces this perception," Lubin said.

Several other residents requested that the town agendize the investigation to open it to the public rather than being done behind closed doors.

"It's my belief that the town should treat the Brown Act as a beacon for good governance and best practices for open meetings, and accordingly the

town should open an investigation into the possible Brown Act violations," said resident Martin Walker.

Savaree clarified to the community that an independent investigation is being conducted through the town's insurance carrier and members of the town staff and Town Council are not involved beyond participating in interviews. ■

*Email Staff Writer  
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[jyoshikoshi@almanacnews.com](mailto:jyoshikoshi@almanacnews.com)*

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**COMMUNITY BRIEFS**

**Menlo Park to receive Green Cities award**

The award will be presented at Sustainable San Mateo County's 27th annual celebration on March 25.

City officials say Menlo Park was the first in Northern California to address greenhouse gas emissions from gas-burning appliances in both new and existing buildings. Updated building codes require new systems to support electric heating and cooling, while the city is also transitioning government facilities away from gas and offering programs to help residents install electric appliances.

"Menlo Park's decisive action demonstrated political courage and strategic leadership that helped create a clear path for other cities to follow," Peninsula Clean Energy CEO Shawn Marshall said in a March 12 press release announcing the award.

For more information or to purchase tickets to the event, visit [sustainableanmateo.org/2026-awardees/](http://sustainableanmateo.org/2026-awardees/)

**'Polarization and Democracy' talk at Ladera Church**

Ladera Community Church, 3300 Alpine Road, is hosting a series on polarization and democracy with Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Stephen Trott starting at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday, March 22.

The event will begin with worship and feature an interview with Trott on court cases involving religion, followed by a Q&A. At 11 a.m., there will be a discussion on broader social issues addressed in the courts.

For more information visit [ladera.org/events](http://ladera.org/events).

— Jennifer Yoshikoshi



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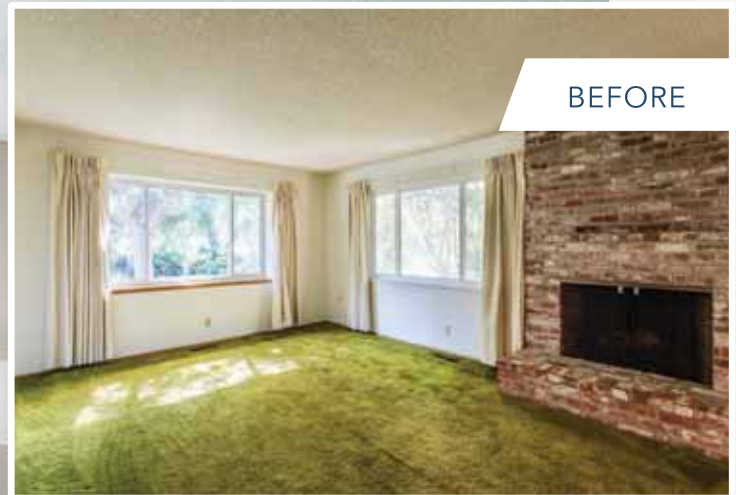
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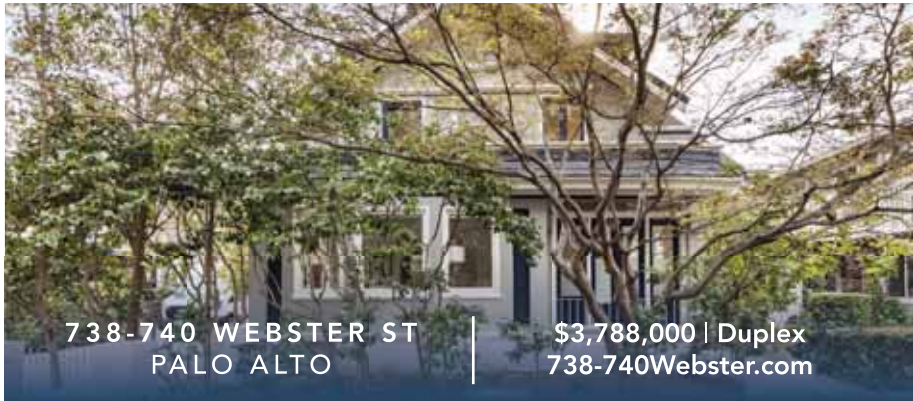
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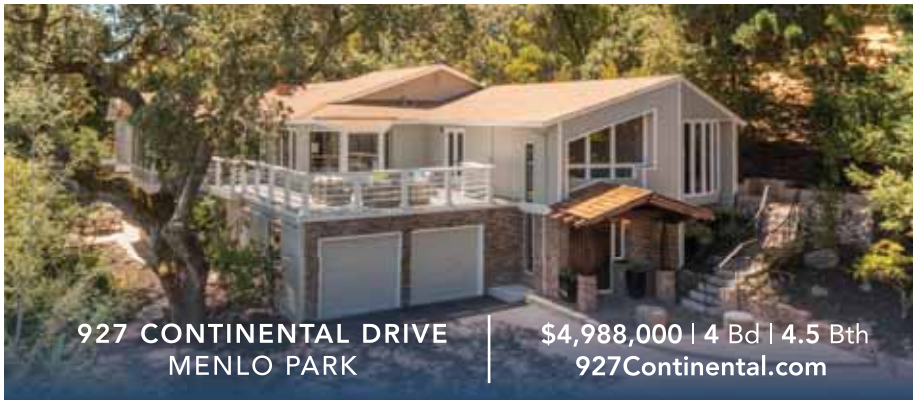
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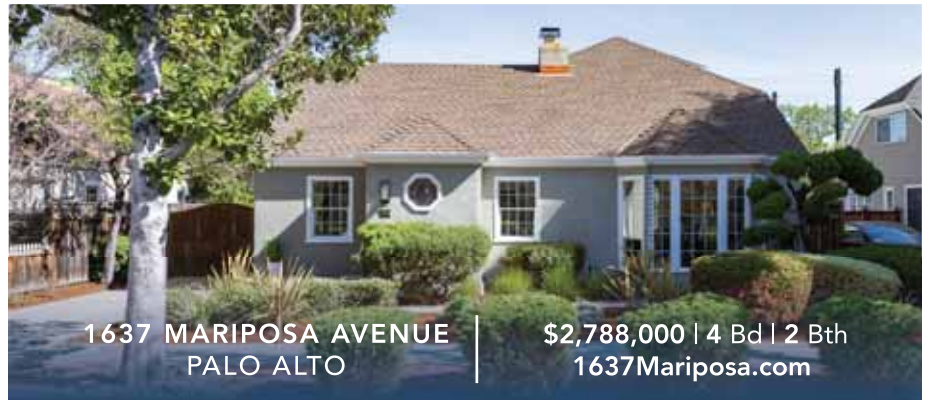
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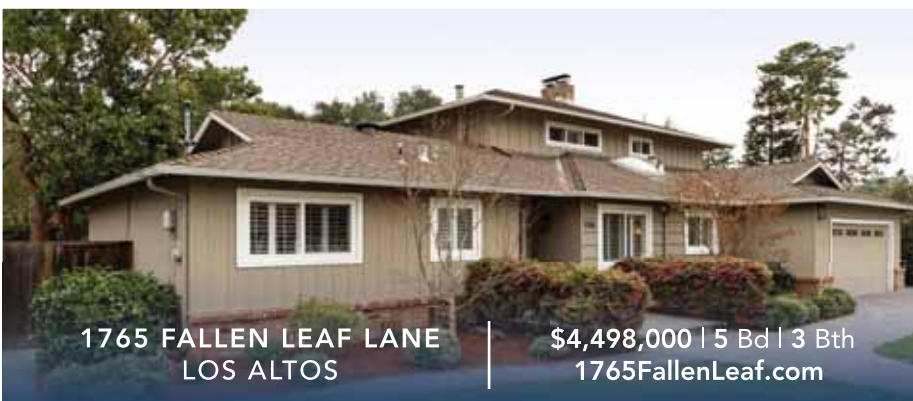
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Spartans Sports Camp, Inc. is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation and all proceeds benefit the Mountain View High School Athletic Department. Spartans Sports Camp has raised over \$550,000 since 2012! Follow Spartans Sports Camp on Facebook and Twitter!

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*Please check directly with camps for updates and offerings. To advertise in print and online, contact your sales representative or email [Sales@EmbarcaderoMedia.org](mailto:Sales@EmbarcaderoMedia.org).*





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## Joan Fletcher Lane

May 7, 1928 – February 19, 2026

Joan Fletcher Lane died peacefully early Thursday February 19, 2026 at Stanford Hospital. She was ninety-seven years old. Even in her final years Joan was funny, kind and unendingly interested in other people. There was rarely a day she did not delight in her family, friends and adored caregivers.

Born in San Francisco, Joan attended Berkeley elementary schools and spent her summers swimming in Lake Tahoe (which she took pride in doing for ninety-three consecutive years) and sailing between the islands of Puget Sound from her beloved Four Winds camp. At Anna Head School for Girls, she graduated at the top of her class, excelled as a tennis player and led the basketball team to winning seasons. Well into her seventies, Joan could shoot 3-pointers.

Ever the adventurer, Joan headed east by train to attend Smith College – a small liberal arts women's college known for its excellence in academics and athletics. In her four years, she played basketball and field hockey, presided over the athletic association and graduated Summa Cum Laude in economics. Joan often reflected that “going east to college” and “attending a women's college” were two of the most formative experiences of her life. Joan treasured Smithies, and she treasured being one.

After graduation, Joan returned to San Francisco where she worked for the World Affairs Council. In 1953 she married Melvin Lane, whom she met while skiing at Sugar Bowl. On the peninsula, she soon began working at Stanford University's International House. In 1956 their daughter Whitney was born, and in 1959, their daughter Julie.

Largely at home with her two young daughters, Joan soon began her remarkable and prescient career as a volunteer – as a board member for international organizations housed at both Stanford and UC Berkeley, catalyzing college scholarships for young women of color, and hosting an exchange program for international students.

In the early 1970s Joan expanded her service to both nonprofit and corporate boards. Often the first woman on a board, she acknowledged with a shrug and knowing smile that she was “a good token woman.” Joan ensured she stewarded those opportunities well. She developed exceptional strengths integrating newcomers and outsiders into board communities, while simultaneously gaining strong skills assessing balance sheets and management transitions.

It was a longstanding family joke that Joan was often opportunely seated next to the prickliest person at a social dinner, and by dessert she not only knew their deepest secrets, but they had joined her fan club. Joan could elicit anyone's life story – a stewardess, an accountant, a door-to-door salesperson, a hiker on the trail.

As Mel's business, Sunset Magazine and Books, expanded, so did his increasingly public role in environmental leadership in the state

of California. Joan loved walking the wetlands of the Bay and endless stretches of California's beaches; protecting open space and oceans for everyone's enjoyment was as important to her as it was to Mel. They were a team; the monogram on their towels was “MJ Co.” They loved glasses of Chardonnay on their deck, summer hiking in the

High Sierras, Stanford football games, train trips in Switzerland, reading novels late into the night and endless “toops” (adventures) with Whitney and Julie.

For Mel's 75th birthday, Joan wrote a poem in which she reflected on all the ways she wanted to be like him when she turned seventy-five – kind, generous, humble, funny, wise. In their fifty-four years of marriage, Joan and Mel never stopped trying to bless each other.

In 1978 Joan began working as Assistant to the Dean of Humanities at Stanford, overseeing Visiting Advisory Boards and liaising with faculty. In 1992 she transitioned to become Special Assistant to the Board of Trustees, where she was affectionately and frequently referred to as “Special As-

sistant for Sticky Problems,” a position she held, and loved, for more than twenty years.

Alongside her professional work, Joan was on the boards of Smith College, McClatchy Newspapers, the Brown Shoe Group, the San Francisco Foundation, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, the James Irvine Foundation and numerous others. Over and over Joan lived the importance of showing up, asking good questions, listening, asking more questions, and saying “Thank you.”

In 1990 Joan commenced her career as a grandmother – dotting in turn on Andrew, Elsa, Owen and Nick (and Finlay the grand-dog Border Collie) with endless enthusiasm. She liked nothing better than treating them to a fantastic dinner- be it salty french fries at McDonalds or Zola's in Palo Alto. She learned to text message far earlier than her peers just so it was easy for her grandchildren to communicate with her. In Joan's final hours in the hospital, alongside her daughters, son-in-law and devoted caregivers, all four grandchildren made immense efforts to be with her, squeezing her hand at her bedside, thanking her for all the ways she had delighted in them, supported them and encouraged them.

Joan was predeceased by her husband Mel Lane; she leaves her daughters Whitney Lane and Julie Lane-Gay, her son-in-law, Craig Gay, her four grandchildren, Andrew (Casey), Elsa (Dominic), Owen and Nicholas and her four great-grandchildren, Sam, Peter, Eleanor Joan and Franco.

A lunchtime organ recital at Stanford Memorial Church by Dr. Robert Huw Morgan will be held in honour of Joan on April 22nd from 12:15 - 12:45pm. All are welcome.

A Celebration of Life will be held later that afternoon (April 22nd) at 4 pm at the Menlo Circus Club. Joan's family would love to see you there.

Donations may be made to The League to Save Lake Tahoe (<https://www.keeptahoeblue.org/>).



### PRADO

continued from page 1

Library sometime between late 2022 and 2023. Investigators say they recovered a video that allegedly shows Prado having intercourse with the teen and found Instagram messages they exchanged that helped confirm that they had sexual relations over a number of months.

Prado, who is sometimes referred to as Rafael Prado Caballero in court documents, was arrested by police on June 17 and has been in custody ever since.

Last June, Prado's attorney, Neil Hallinan, unsuccessfully sought to have Prado released pending trial and submitted several character reference letters to the court, including one from East Palo Alto Council Member Carlos Romero.

Romero told this news organization that his letter was only intended to describe his interactions with Prado, who worked with the councilman as a community outreach volunteer during the COVID-19 pandemic. His reference, on letterhead from his city council office, was not meant to address the merits of the case or speak on behalf of the city of East Palo Alto, Romero said.

After details of Romero's letter were published last month, two other members of the East Palo Alto City Council denounced the reference letter and called on Romero to resign. Romero declined, saying they were politically motivated and argued that the council should instead focus on how to better support youth in the community.

### The hearing

The preliminary hearing on March 5 was one of the first opportunities for prosecutors to lay out their case in front of a judge. Unlike in a jury trial, the judge only ruled on whether there was sufficient probable cause to proceed.

Two detectives testified in support of the District Attorney's Office: East Palo Alto Detective Salvador Perez and Redwood City Detective James Schneider.

According to Perez's account of the victim's interview, the

teenager first met Prado after school at the East Palo Alto Library. Afterward, Prado and the teen connected over social media and shared explicit photos, Perez testified.

During the hearing, defense attorney Hallinan argued Perez's police report was not fully accurate. In one instance, the victim contradicted himself about what Prado was allegedly doing when he said he saw Prado at his middle school, saying he wasn't sure if he was dropping off a package.

After Judge Finigan ruled that the prosecution could proceed on the revised charges, Hallinan asked Finigan to reconsider his motion to release Prado without bail while he awaits trial. Hallinan had sought Prado's release in July, but was denied by Judge Jeff Jackson.

According to Hallinan, Prado has already spent more than 260 days in jail.

Prado had previously served jail time for misdemeanor embezzlement on an unrelated case and for driving under the influence. Prosecutors say Prado has been on probation almost continuously since he turned 18. He also violated his probation terms several times and fled police once, according to prosecutors.

Finigan ruled that Prado must remain in jail until trial, after reviewing the defense's arguments and supporting character references, including Romero's letter. The judge added that if Prado “can't even obey misdemeanor probation,” he did not have confidence in Prado's ability to obey the conditions of pre-trial parole.

If convicted, Prado would need to serve a minimum of half of his sentence because lewd acts with a minor between the age of 14 and 15 is not considered a violent or serious felony. He would have been required to serve at least 80% of any prison sentence if he was convicted of lewd acts with a minor under age 14.

Prado is next due in San Mateo County Superior Court in Redwood City on March 19 for an arraignment based on the updated charges. ■

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

## Lasting Memories

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Go to: [AlmanacNews.com/obituaries](https://www.almanacnews.com/obituaries)

PAID OBITUARY

**HIT-AND-RUN**

*continued from page 1*

to get hit by a vehicle in the last four years, he said.

In response to concerns about the lack of trails and sidewalks across town, the Circulation Committee has been working on a proposal with the Trails Committee to build a path that would connect Sand Hill Road and Woodside Road. This path, dubbed the Woodside West Trail, would add a pedestrian bridge alongside the shoulderless two-lane road bridge where Congdon got hit.

Farkhondeh said there have been discussions about Woodside West Trail for a few years but, like all town projects, it comes down to funding and resources to make it a reality. For now, the only way pedestrians can cross the bridge where Congdon and his dog were struck is by carefully traversing in the traffic lane.

“There are definitely places along the right of way in Woodside where there is not easy access for pedestrians,” Farkhondeh said. “That’s a known issue we have.”

Congdon’s wife Abby Collins, a lifelong resident of Woodside, said that while she was shocked that her husband was hit by a car, she wasn’t surprised that someone eventually got hit.

“I’ve had times where I’ve been driving and called the non-emergency sheriff line because people are driving so fast or recklessly,” Collins said. “I grew up here and we were taught, you don’t speed down Woodside Road.”

Congdon and Collins obtained dashcam footage from the driver who witnessed the accident. The passengers of the car traveling behind the Tesla stopped to aid him and called the Village Square Portola Valley Veterinary Hospital before it closed.

Dr. Jamie Rosen, medical director at the veterinary hospital, said Millie did not have any broken bones, but she “definitely could have died from internal



Seeger Gray

A car drives on the bridge where Rick Congdon and his dog were struck by a car last month.

bleeding” without immediate treatment. Millie had to be taken to an emergency hospital in Redwood City for further care.

Rosen remembered seeing Congdon in the waiting room with a ripped-up pant leg and blood flowing from his knee.

“I haven’t had an experience like that before, so adrenaline kicked in, and I didn’t realize how badly I was hurt,” said Congdon.

Collins said seeing her husband and dog become victims of a speeding car was devastating. She contacted the Sheriff’s Office to make a report. She also obtained automatic license plate reader data from the town of Woodside and security camera footage from Woodside Elementary School that captured the Tesla driving by.

“I went into protective and investigator mode, just because we have lots of friends with kids, our neighbors all have young kids, and for it to be a hit-and-run was really jarring for everybody,” Collins said.

About a mile down Woodside Road from the crash site is Woodside Elementary School, another heavily trafficked area of the highway where the town has seen many close calls between pedestrians and drivers, especially during school drop-off and pickup hours.

“On the opposite side from the school, you’ll see a lot of people walking in the bike lane with strollers and dogs because there’s no sidewalk there,” said Farkhondeh.

Town staff reported that traffic studies show that the average driver travels faster than the posted 25 mph speed limit in front of the school. Parents shared during the Feb. 10 council meeting that they have witnessed cars trying to pass each other by driving in the bike lane, where children and pedestrians are biking and walking.

In response to multiple requests from the community, the Town Council approved a resolution to request Caltrans to establish a 15 mph speed limit on the area of Woodside Road near the elementary school on Feb. 10.

Collins added that while she often sees Sheriff’s Office deputies parked near the school, she has not seen them patrolling in other areas further down Woodside Road in a long time.

**The crash investigation**

Sheriff’s Office deputies located the owner of the Tesla and visited their home the day after the crash. After they asked to see the car, the owner returned with their lawyer on the phone,

according to the police report. The lawyer asked the deputies to leave.

Although the investigation on the hit-and-run lasted for weeks, Collins said the Sheriff’s Office ultimately told her it was unable to identify who was driving the vehicle at the time of the accident. Collins is currently in the process of filing a civil complaint and Congdon’s car insurance company is conducting its own investigation.

“It’s just the frustration of thinking you have everything you would need to see this through and it’s not happening,” said Collins. “An apology would go a long way.”

The Sheriff’s Office told this news organization that it “has allocated significant resources to investigate this case, to include reviewing all available video evidence and conducting witness interviews.” No arrests have been made, according to

Gretchen Spiker, director of communications at the Sheriff’s Office.

The town’s Circulation Committee will be presented with the monthly traffic and accident report from the Sheriff’s Office for February during its meeting on March 19, said Farkhondeh. This will give the committee an opportunity to ask questions about the hit-and-run.

“I can certainly see it becoming agendized if we think that it’s something that can be made better through design mitigations or road layout,” he added.

The Sheriff’s Office encourages anyone with information to contact Detective Lindsey at [plindsey@smcgov.org](mailto:plindsey@smcgov.org) or 650-363-4055. Anonymous tips can be made by calling 800-547-2700. ■

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**Marilyn Wolper**

*March 25, 1929 – January 16, 2026*

Born in San Francisco to Sallie and Ralph Wonderman, Marilyn Wolper grew up in San Mateo. A talented performer, crowned May Queen at age five, she studied singing and dancing, and performed semi-professionally throughout young adulthood. After graduating from San Mateo High School, she worked as a stenographer and attended San Mateo Junior College. In 1949,



she married Boris, the love of her life. The couple moved to San Carlos, where they brought up their daughters, Julie Brenner (Ellis) and Andrea Wolper (Ken Filiano). Marilyn was a school room mother, Girl Scout troop leader, and an avid reader. At Peninsula Temple Beth El she organized a play-reading performance group and co-wrote and -directed youth group shows, and she taught after-school theatre classes at Baywood Elementary. A political volunteer, she was an outspoken advocate for women’s rights and against racial segregation, and cared deeply about poverty and animal cruelty. Boris was a commercial real estate broker, and when Marilyn earned her agent’s license, they formed their own company. They moved to Woodside Hills and pursued their many interests, including embracing their roles as devoted fun grandparents of Sharon Brenner (Justin Nijm) and Elliott Brenner (Lauren Evans). Marilyn and Boris loved traveling, tennis, dining out, attending theatre and concerts, hosting family gatherings, and entertaining an ever-widening circle, cherishing old friendships and welcoming new ones. Marilyn was the consummate hostess who made sure everyone always felt warmly welcomed. Founding supporters of Music@Menlo, the couple supported and attended the chamber music festival for the remainder of their lives. Marilyn continued singing, and had a gift for re-writing lyrics to lovingly roast friends on special occasions. A few years after Boris passed, Marilyn moved to The Peninsula Regent, where she was known for her stylishness, sense of humor, and enjoyment of a very dry Kettle One martini. Her family extends their gratitude to Lydia and Marilyn’s other caregivers, The Key staff, the Peninsula Regent Assisted Living and general staff, and Pathways Hospice. Those wishing to make donations in Marilyn’s memory may consider Second Harvest Food Bank and Music@Menlo.

PAID OBITUARY

**DUMBARTON**

*continued from page 10*

bus stops and “hoping people will come.”

The busway will connect residents with employment centers and regional transportation hubs, according to Tolleson. SamTrans has already coordinated with Meta, and plans for the route to “go very close” to Menlo Park’s largest employer.

For now, the project doesn’t include revitalizing the derelict Dumbarton rail bridge, which opened in 1910 but fell into

disrepair and was heavily damaged in a fire in 1998. SamTrans acquired the rail right-of-way in 1994 but attempts to restore a rail connection to the East Bay have floundered over the years, due to the high price and lack of funding.

SamTrans project managers stressed that Reimagine Dumbarton’s busway project on the Peninsula won’t impede any future railway projects.

Before designing alternatives for the corridor, SamTrans has asked community members about their experiences traveling in the region. SamTrans

held two public meetings in Redwood City and East Palo Alto, conducted 11 pop-up outreach events across San Mateo and solicited input in a survey that closed March 6. Residents were asked about their commuting habits, transportation challenges along the railroad line and travel priorities.

Survey findings and Dumbarton design options will likely be publicized this summer, according to SamTrans spokesperson Randol White. ■

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**ENDOMETRIOSIS**

*continued from page 5*

mimic many other conditions and vary widely from patient to patient.”

Because the disease can affect multiple organs, including the ovaries, bowel and bladder, patients are sometimes misdiagnosed with gastrointestinal, urinary or musculoskeletal conditions.

Nezhat often refers to endometriosis as “the great masquerader.”

As a result, many patients wait years before receiving an accurate diagnosis.

“Symptoms such as painful periods are often normalized or dismissed, particularly in young women and adolescents,” he said. “Patients are often referred between different specialists before the underlying cause is recognized.”

The World Health Organization estimates that endometriosis is one of the most common gynecological conditions, affecting millions of women and girls worldwide.

Advocacy groups estimate that patients often spend seven to 11 years seeking answers before the disease is identified.

Specialists say part of the delay stems from the way symptoms are often dismissed, particularly

among adolescents whose pain is frequently attributed to normal menstrual cycles.

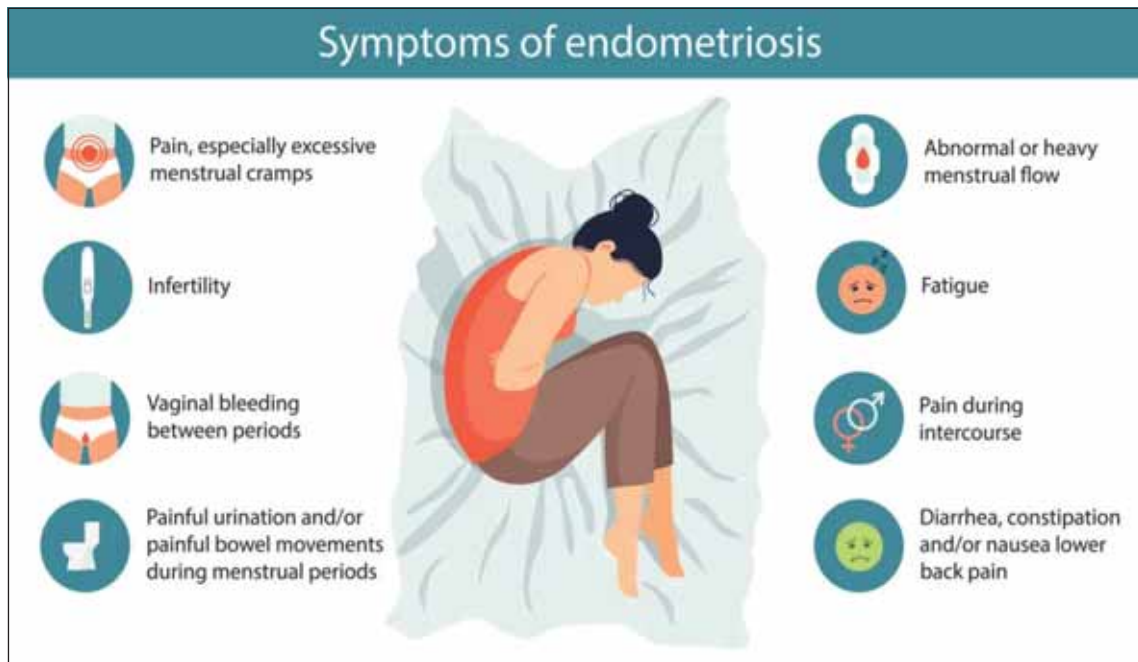
Harding said that lack of awareness, particularly among teenagers, is one of the biggest barriers to diagnosis.

“There’s so much stigma around menstruation and periods, and specifically period pain,” Harding said. “Women are often deemed to have lower pain tolerances, so there can be hesitation to speak up about symptoms.”

Through her social media accounts, called Endo with Quincy, Harding posts short videos explaining symptoms, reproductive health conditions and how young women can advocate for themselves when seeking medical care.

“In order to raise awareness, I need to be meeting teenagers where they’re at,” Harding said. “When a girl my age is scrolling on her ‘For You’ page and sees one of my videos, she might think, ‘Wow, I’m having symptoms like that.’”

Harding’s advocacy grew out of her own experience navigating the disease. After years of debilitating symptoms, she was eventually diagnosed with Stage 4 endometriosis, one of the most severe forms of the condition.



Getty Images

She later connected with Nezhat, whose work in minimally invasive gynecologic surgery helped establish modern laparoscopic techniques for diagnosing and treating the disease.

Today, Harding works with Nezhat’s team and has contributed to clinical research examining diagnostic tools and surgical findings related to endometriosis.

She is listed as a co-author on two studies published in the

Journal of Clinical Medicine that focus on improving early disease identification.

Later this month, Harding will present her research and advocacy work at the American and Global Conference of Endometriosis Surgeons in Las Vegas, where physicians and researchers gather to discuss advances in treatment.

Nezhat said early recognition and treatment are extremely important because endometriosis is often a progressive disease.

If left untreated, it can lead to worsening pain, infertility, organ damage, and significant impacts on quality of life, he said.

Harding said she hopes her work will help increase awareness, especially among young women, and help others avoid years of uncertainty.

Referencing what Nezhat told her when she told him about her symptoms, Quincy said, “Your pain is not in your head.” ■

*Email Editor Michelle Iracheta at miracheta@almanacnews.com.*



**TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY  
NOTICE OF TOWN COUNCIL  
PUBLIC HEARING**

**NOTICE OF PLANNING COMMISSION  
PUBLIC HEARING**

**Applicant: Town of Portola Valley**

**Zoning Text Amendments related to Accessory Dwelling Units and Junior Accessory Dwelling Units, Emergency Shelters, and Developer Indemnification.**

A public meeting has been scheduled by the Town of Portola Valley’s Planning Commission to conduct review and provide a recommendation to the Town Council for proposed zoning text amendments to the Title 18 of the Portola Valley Municipal Code related to Accessory Dwelling Units, and Junior Accessory Dwelling Units, Emergency Shelters, and Developer Indemnification.

This project has been determined to be exempt from the provision of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines § 15282(h), as well as Public Resources Code § 21080.17, which provides a statutory exemption for ordinances regarding accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and junior accessory dwelling units (JADUs) in a single-family or multifamily residential zone to implement Government Code § 66310 et seq. Further the zoning text amendments are exempt from the provision of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as it has been seen with certainty under Section 15061(b)(3) that a series of zoning code amendments will not have a significant effect on the environment.

The Planning Commission will review and discuss the project during a hybrid in-person and Zoom videoconferencing public meeting on **Wednesday, April 15, 2026, at 7:00 PM**. You are invited to attend and provide written or verbal comments. Members of the public may attend virtually by utilizing the Zoom meeting info posted below, or in person at the Town’s Historic School House, 765 Portola Road in Portola Valley. Written comments may also be submitted to Planning staff.

**VIRTUAL PARTICIPATION VIA ZOOM**

**To access the meeting by computer:**  
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83006083336?pwd=FBWVoO62kJMz8xolNwRma6XU81QpEJ.1>  
**Webinar ID:** 830 0608 3336  
**Passcode:** 443334  
**To access the meeting by phone:** 1-669-444-9171 (Mute/Unmute – Press \*6 / Raise Hand – Press \*9)

**Public Comments:**

Members of the public are encouraged to submit written comments in advance of the meeting. Please send an email with heading “Zoning Code Amendments” to Sarah Cawrse, Planning & Building Director at [scawrse@portolavalley.net](mailto:scawrse@portolavalley.net) and cc the Town Clerk at [ptownclerk@portolavalley.net](mailto:ptownclerk@portolavalley.net) by 12:00 PM on the day of the meeting. All questions and comments received by this deadline will be included in the public record. Meeting participants may also ask questions/provide comments either in person or virtually during the meeting.

The agenda and staff report will be posted on the Town’s website by 5:00PM the Friday prior to the meeting at <https://www.portolavalley.net/town-government/planning-commission/minutes-and-agendas>.

Dated: March 18, 2026

Sarah Cawrse, Planning & Building Director

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**GAS PRICES**

*continued from page 5*

of greenhouse gas emissions in California and puts a price on these emissions. The market-based program has been a key part of California's strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but it results in a higher per-gallon gas price of about 23 cents, according to an analysis conducted by the state.

In addition to these programs, California has imposed a 61-cent per gallon state gasoline tax that helps fund infrastructure improvement projects and a sales tax of 2.25%, which can add another 10 to 15 cents.

The sum of the cost of the environmental programs, taxes and fees is around \$1.10 to \$1.20. That's still around 40 to 50 cents short of the price differential between California and the rest of the United States. In other words, the price differential cannot be fully explained by these elements alone.

This unexplained price difference was first studied by Borenstein in 2017. He termed it the "mystery gasoline surcharge." The Department of Petroleum Market Oversight, an independent watchdog agency within the California Energy Commission, confirmed the existence of the mystery surcharge in a 2024 report, noting that the mystery surcharge averaged \$0.41 per gallon between 2015 and 2024 and cost Californians \$59 billion.

Borenstein and other experts have theories about what drives it. The surcharge appears to have emerged after a 2015 oil refinery explosion in Torrance, Borenstein said. The sudden increase in the mystery gas surcharge in the years following the explosion helps explain where it originates: not in the production of the oil, but somewhere downstream.

"Most of that differential does not show up in the wholesale spot price for gasoline," Borenstein said. "It shows up downstream in distribution, marketing and retailing."

Borenstein's first theory about what drives the surcharge is related to the high concentration of refinery ownership in California. According to the petroleum oversight department report, four companies — Chevron, Marathon, PBF and Valero — control 90% of in-state crude oil refining capacity.

"The gasoline refining market in California is best characterized as an oligopoly, with few firms controlling the vast majority of supply," the petroleum oversight department wrote.

Refiners don't directly set gas prices. But, Borenstein said, there are indirect levers that these companies can use to control the price, such as how they set the wholesale price that they charge to gas stations and contractual arrangements that determine how much stations can mark up the price of gas.

Borenstein's second theory is that California drivers are simply willing to pay the extra price. Borenstein has noticed that gas stations in California can have significant price dispersion in the span of a block: in some cases, one station may charge 60 to 80 cents less than the brand-name gas station down the street. That's unusual compared to the rest of the country, where proximal gas stations generally have equal or much closer prices, Borenstein said.

"There does seem to be some greater willingness in California to just pay whatever their regular station is charging, regardless of how much they could save by driving an extra block or two," Borenstein said. "And that is part of the problem."

Some factors may influence these consumer behaviors such as specialized gasoline products like Chevron's Tchron gas that the company says can extend a car engine's life. California also has less gas station density than other states, meaning the price differences in stations may not be as visible to drivers. ■

*Hannah Bensen can be reached at [hbensen@almanacnews.com](mailto:hbensen@almanacnews.com).*

# Public Notices

PARK PLACE DENTAL OF SAN MATEO  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-302979  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:

1.) PARK PLACE DENTAL OF SAN MATEO, located at 1100 Park Place, #30, San Mateo, CA 94403. Mailing Address: 2383 California Street, Suite 5  
San Francisco, CA 94115  
Registered owner(s):  
BAY AREA DENTAL INC.  
2383 California Street, Suite 5  
San Francisco, CA 94115  
State of Incorporation/Organization:  
California  
This business is conducted by: a Corporation.  
Registrant has begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above on 11/17/2025.  
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on February 17, 2026.  
(ALM Mar 13, 20, 27 and Apr 3, 2026)

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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)

THE ARETE METHOD  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-302987  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:

1.) THE ARATE METHOD, located at 3304 EDISON WAY, MENLO PARK, CA 94025.  
Registered owner(s):  
VARUNI KASHMIRA NANAYAKKARA  
3304 EDISON WAY  
MENLO PARK, CA.94025  
This business is conducted by: an Individual.  
Registrant has not yet begun to transact business under the fictitious business name(s) listed above.  
This statement was filed with the County Clerk-Recorder of San Mateo County on February 17, 2026.  
(ALM Mar 13, 20, 27 and Apr 3, 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)

PENINSULA DIAGNOSTIC AND AMBULATORY CENTER  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-303232  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:

1.) PENINSULA DIAGNOSTIC AND AMBULATORY CENTER, located at 91 WESTBOROUGH BLVD #1010, SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94080.  
Registered owner(s):  
PENINSULA DIALYSIS ACCESS CENTER, LLC

91 WESTBOROUGH BLVD #1010  
SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94080  
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 March 11, 2026.  
(ALM Mar 20, 27, Apr 3 and 10, 2026)

JDG REGISTRATION SERVICES  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-303170  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:

1.) JDG REGISTRATION SERVICES, located at 648 EL CAMINO REAL STE E, REDWOOD CITY, CA 94063.  
Registered owner(s):  
JDG REGISTRATION SERVICE, LLC  
648 EL CAMINO REAL STE E  
REDWOOD CITY, CA 94063  
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 March 04, 2026.  
(ALM Mar 20, 27, Apr 3 and 10, 2026)

SORAYAMI  
FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAME STATEMENT  
FILE NO.: M-303234  
The following person (persons) is (are) doing business as:

1.) SORAYAMI, located at 620 Fox Court East, Redwood City, CA, 94061.  
Registered owner(s):  
SORAYA AMIRIAN  
620 Fox Court East  
Redwood City, CA, 94061  
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 March 11, 2026.  
(ALM Mar 20, 27, Apr 3 and 10, 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)

ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE FOR CHANGE OF NAME SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA FOR THE COUNTY OF SAN MATEO  
Case No.: 26CIV01360  
TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS:

Petitioner: C Terrigal Burn filed a petition with this court for a decree changing names as follows:  
C TERRIGAL BURN to CHRISTOPHER TERRIGAL BURN  
CHRISTOPHER TERRIGAL BURN to CHRISTOPHER TERRIGAL BURN  
THE COURT ORDERS that all persons interested in this matter appear before this court at the hearing indicated below to show cause, if any, why the petition for change of name should not be granted. Any person objecting to the name changes described above must file a written objection that includes the reasons for the objection at least two court days before the matter is scheduled to be heard and must appear at the hearing to show cause why the petition should not be granted. If no written objection is timely filed, the court may grant the petition without a hearing.  
NOTICE OF HEARING: 4/28/26, 9:00AM, Redwood City of the Superior Court of California, County of San Mateo located at 400County Center, Redwood City, CA 94063.

A copy of this ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE shall be published at least once each week for four successive weeks prior to the date set for hearing on the petition in the following newspaper of general circulation, printed in this county:  
ALMANAC  
Date: 2/27/26  
S Mariah  
JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT  
(ALM Mar 20, 27, Apr 3 and 10, 2026)

NOTICE OF PETITION TO ADMINISTER ESTATE OF:  
SUSAN RUN SHENG NI  
Case No.: 26-PRO-00299

To all heirs, beneficiaries, creditors, contingent creditors, and persons who may otherwise be interested in the will or estate, or both, of SUSAN RUN SHENG NI.  
A Petition for Probate has been filed by: Perla Ni in the Superior Court of California, County of SAN MATEO.  
The Petition for Probate requests that: Perla Ni be appointed as personal representative to administer the estate of the decedent.

THE PETITION requests the decedent's will and codicils, if any, be admitted to probate. The will and any codicils are available for examination in the file kept by the court. THE PETITION requests authority to administer the estate under the Independent Administration of Estates Act. (This authority will allow the personal representative to take many actions without obtaining court approval. Before taking certain very important actions, however, the personal representative will be required to give notice to interested persons unless they have waived notice or consented to the proposed action.) The independent administration authority will be granted unless an interested person files an objection to the petition and shows good cause why the court should not grant the authority. A HEARING on the petition will be held on April 13 2026 at 9:00 a m in Dept 13 of the Superior Court of California, County of San Mateo, located at 400 County Center, Redwood City, CA 94063.

If you object to the granting of the petition, you should appear at the hearing and state your objections or file written objections with the court before the hearing. Your appearance may be in person or by your attorney.  
If you are a creditor or a contingent creditor of the decedent, you must file your claim with the court and mail a copy to the personal representative appointed by the court within the later of either (1) four months from the date of first issuance of letters to a general personal representative, as defined in section 58 (b) of the California Probate Code, or (2) 60 days from the date of mailing or personal delivery to you of a notice under section 9052 of the California Probate Code. Other California statutes and legal authority may affect your rights as a creditor. You may want to consult with an attorney knowledgeable in California law. You may examine the file kept by the court. If you are a person interested in the estate, you may file with the court a Request for Special Notice (form DE-154) of the filing of an inventory and appraisal of estate assets or of any petition or account as provided in Probate Code section 1250. A Request for Special Notice form is available from the court clerk.

Attorney for Petitioner:  
Arthur Swid Weil, Esq  
Law Office Arthur S Weil  
671 Oak Grove Ave Ste K  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
650-322-4244  
(ALM Mar 20, 27 and Apr 3, 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/](http://AlmanacNews.com/legal_notices/)**  
For assistance email [LegalNotices@AlmanacNews.com](mailto:LegalNotices@AlmanacNews.com).

# Employment

The Almanac offers employment advertising.

The deadline is Sunday at 11:59 pm.

Visit [AlmanacNews.com/employment\\_ads/](http://AlmanacNews.com/employment_ads/).

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

## Menlo Park has lost its way

By Bob Dickinson

### GUEST OPINION

Menlo Park has lost its way. The two most obvious signs are the city's struggle to meet its state-mandated Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) and the epidemic of unsolved home break-ins in recent years.

Take downtown development as an example. It was prominently featured in the city's housing element, yet leaders didn't fully anticipate, and work proactively to defuse, the fierce opposition that downtown merchants would mount when the proposal moved closer

to reality. The result has been a lawsuit and an upcoming ballot measure.

While in the near term we should move forward with housing on the downtown parking lots, including adequate new parking, to meet our goals and prevent "builders remedy" projects, the city needs to recognize that building affordable housing on public land isn't a viable long-term strategy. The city must find a way to incentivize private property owners to participate. There will be

more housing required in future housing element cycles and not enough public land to satisfy those needs.

As for public safety, the police department's approach to break-ins has been to tell homeowners to strengthen their defenses and clearly hasn't worked. The perpetrators ignore, or disable, lights, cameras and alarms, secure in the knowledge that by the time the police arrive they will be long gone.

What's really needed to deter, and apprehend, them is a visible police presence and a faster response time. Some of our neighbors in Sharon Heights have given up on the police and are considering contracting with the Woodside Patrol, which, unfortunately, is more likely to be a placebo than a solution. The only thing the Woodside Patrol can do is call the police and the professional burglars know that.

Less visible is the failure of

the city to protect our parks from development. The city has taken the position that state law is sufficient to do that, while former mayor and now San Mateo County Supervisor Ray Mueller pointed out several years ago that this isn't the case and our own city attorneys have provided differing opinions on the subject.

The council at that time voted to have staff prepare an ordinance addressing the loopholes in state law, which staff failed to do, pleading insufficient resources. Another indication of the low priority placed on our parks, which help make Menlo Park an attractive place to live, is the pond at Sharon Park. Only a few short years ago it was home to fish and ducks and had a functioning recirculation system with an attractive fountain. As a result of ongoing neglect, the fish and most of the ducks are gone, the recirculation system and fountain

are in disrepair and the pond is stagnant and full of algae and debris.

While the council and staff likely have good intentions, strong leadership and effective management of resources are also needed to successfully deal with these issues. I've never seen an organization that thought it had all the resources it needed — the successful ones are those that focus on getting accomplished what needs to be done with the resources they do have. And a clear vision of what Menlo Park strives to be would help guide policy and operational decisions in the right direction, rather than the one that's most expedient in the short run. ■

*Bob Dickinson and his wife, Sylvia, have lived in Menlo Park since 1983. A former tech CEO, Bob has consulted on climate impacts and adaptation since 2011.*



## GET ENGAGED: APPLY FOR A COMMITTEE OPENING!

The following committees will have a vacancy starting July 2026:

- Planning Commission
- Audit and Finance Committee
- Transportation, Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Committee
- Environmental Programs Committee
- Park and Recreation Committee



APPLY HERE  
TODAY!

<https://atherton.news/committeeapplication>  
[mgallagher@athertonca.gov](mailto:mgallagher@athertonca.gov)

### LETTERS

Our readers write

#### Endorsement for Brian Donnellan for judge

Editor,

The San Mateo Police Officers Association proudly endorses Brian Donnellan for San Mateo County Superior Court judge. Through years of professional collaboration, our members have seen firsthand that Brian is methodical, fair and tireless in his pursuit of justice for crime victims.

Brian's local roots and understanding of community expectations set him apart. This is why he has earned a broad consensus of support from all San Mateo County judges, the District Attorney, and law enforcement groups countywide.

Critically, Brian balances his pursuit of justice with appropriate empathy for those he has prosecuted. His work in the Veterans Treatment Court, combined with his own background as an immigrant and Iraq War veteran, proves he has the judicial temperament necessary to handle the complexities of the bench with fairness for everyone.

The San Mateo POA urges

you to join us in supporting Brian Donnellan for Superior Court judge.

*Kayla Quinlan  
President, SMPOA*

#### Concerns about San Mateo County taxes

Editor,

Recently I've been spending a lot of time figuring out my 2025 state and federal taxes, but it wasn't until someone asked me to sign a petition to increase the San Mateo County sales tax by 0.5% to support childcare and education that I really started to think about all the money I'm paying in taxes.

The sales tax in San Mateo

County is about 9.65%. In the 2025-26 fiscal year, San Mateo County will employ 5,889 full-time employees. In 2015, San Mateo County employed 5,100 full-time employees.

And yet today the population of San Mateo County is 2% lower than in 2015. In other words, our resident population has decreased, but the number of government employees has increased.

Affordability is a real issue. At 9.65%, tax revenue is not the problem. We have a spending problem. If someone has a petition to put a measure on the November ballot to decrease San Mateo County taxes, I'll be the first to sign it.

*Thomas Carroux  
Menlo Park*

### What's on your mind?

From City Hall politics and the schools to transportation and other pressing issues, the Almanac aims to keep readers informed about their community. But we also want to hear from you.

Tell us what's on your mind by sending 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.

# WE'RE PROUD TO BRING OUR READERS SOME OF THE BEST JOURNALISM IN THE STATE

The annual **California Journalism Awards** competition, which celebrates excellence in reporting, design, photography and multimedia, recognized our team with **15 awards** in the following categories:

- Breaking News
- Coverage of Youth and Education
- Coverage of Student Government and Campus Administration
- Environment Reporting
- Feature Story
- Housing and Land-Use Reporting
- In-Depth Reporting
- Photo Story/Essay
- Photo Journalism
- Print Inside Page Layout & Design
- Public Service Journalism
- Sports Action Photo

**Please help support the local journalism and the award-winning team that is driven by the desire to bring you fresh, original reporting.**

**We couldn't do it without you.**

The Almanac

SUPPORT LOCAL  
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# Artscene

PEOPLE AND PERFORMANCES IN ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

## How Tinder 'tis to love



Courtesy Angie Higgins/Silicon Valley Shakespeare

Silicon Valley Shakespeare's "48-hour Play Festival" gives teams of writers, directors and actors two days to put together short plays based on Shakespeare and certain thematic elements. Pictured here are participants in 2025's festival.

### 'ShakesDATE' mashes up classic characters and modern romance in plays written and performed in 48 hours

By Karla Kane

In William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," Friar Laurence cautions the lovestruck Romeo to go "wisely and slow; they stumble that run fast." But in the case of Silicon Valley Shakespeare's 48-hour Play Festival, making haste is what it's all about.

Over the course of the festival weekend, teams of directors, writers and actors have just two days to come up with brand-new short plays inspired by the Bard and incorporating certain thematic elements.

This year's festival, which culminates with a show on March 29, is titled "ShakesDATE," with a theme that would probably be of interest to Romeo: "What happens when famous Shakespearean characters are foisted into the modern world of dating?" Expect concepts such as dating apps, ghosting and voice notes to appear alongside Shakespeare's timeless interest in love, lust, jealousy, missed connections and romance.

Festival teams are assigned and assembled on Friday night. The writers draw a Shakespeare play

and a thematic element to base their script on, and all teams get a required line of dialogue, a prop and a surprise element to incorporate, according to the festival's website. The writers then have until noon on Saturday to deliver a finished script for a 10-minute play, and the director and actors have the rest of the day and evening to "figure everything out and put everything together," as participant Melinda Marks put it.

On Sunday, there's a rehearsal and a tech run-through, followed by the performance Sunday evening.

Marks has been a part of many of the 48-Hour Play Festivals as a writer, including the inaugural one in 2014, and served as a director once as well. This year, they are looking forward to participating as a writer again.

"I like to go into it just embracing the chaos," Marks said. "You always get a new group of people and an interesting dynamic."

Writers and directors like Marks are typically invited by the theater company, while actors apply to become part of a lottery system. Twenty-four actors, plus two alternates, are selected (half of the slots

are reserved for Foothill College students, as the festival is currently partnered with Foothill College Theatre Arts and performs on campus, at Lohman Theatre).

Marks' first entry as a writer, back in 2014, was a play about the deceased characters of "Hamlet" trying to sort out their family differences together in purgatory. Lauren Doyle was an actor in that play (as well as the writer of a different piece that year) and has also returned to the festival as a writer several more times, as they will again for "ShakesDATE."

The festival "is probably my favorite annual theater event in the Bay Area," Doyle said. "Being given two days to write, rehearse and then perform, that's a pretty big challenge; this is what I look forward to every year."

Past years' themes have included "Shakespeare in Place" (on Zoom, during the pandemic); "Shakes-BINGE," for which Doyle wrote a mashup of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," and last year's "Shakes-FLUENCER," for which Marks' script included a cooking video for a pie made of human meat, a la "Titus Andronicus." With

such little time for preparation, it's an exercise in quick thinking, creativity and teamwork, and a chance to have a lot of fun.

"I always hope that whatever I write is funny enough to me that I feel proud to send it in, and, ultimately I just want whatever I write to serve the success of the director and the actors," Marks said.

Being a Shakespeare aficionado is not required for participation, although having some familiarity helps. Marks is working on a doctorate in early modern history so they have a fairly deep knowledge of many of Shakespeare's works, but it's not essential.

"The goal ultimately is not to show your knowledge of Shakespeare but to use it as an inspiration point," Marks said.

And to enjoy watching the show, "the artists, the actors, the director and everyone does a great job of making it fully accessible to the audience," Doyle said. "You don't have to be a Shakespeare buff at all; it's just a bonus."

Accessibility and inclusivity is a hallmark of Silicon Valley Shakespeare in general, Doyle said, and anyone can sign up for the chance to be picked from the

actor pool lottery each year. Marks and Doyle said the festival is a great way to get involved with live, local theater.

"You don't have to be a veteran performer by any means. Silicon Valley Shakespeare is very warm and welcoming," Doyle said.

Why is Shakespeare's work such a good match for a quick play-making frenzy?

His oeuvre "is very flexible. Shakespeare is great for gender-bending; you can apply Shakespeare to any situation. You can kind of mess with Shakespeare a little bit," Doyle said. His work, they added, maintains relevance, whether presented traditionally or in contemporary adaptations. "He touched on so many themes that come back time and time again." ■

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

"48-Hour Play Festival: ShakesDATE," March 29, 7 p.m., Lohman Theatre, Foothill College, 12345 El Monte Road, Los Altos Hills; \$15; [svshakespeare.org/festival](http://svshakespeare.org/festival).

# Arts program for adults with disabilities is 'vitaly important'

Exhibition of students' work celebrates the joy of making art and finding inspiration

By Angela Swartz

About 60 pieces of artwork by students from the Artistic Intelligence program are on display at the Community School of Music and Arts in Mountain View until March 29. The program, which is over a decade old, offers adults with disabilities weekly music, art and dance lessons.

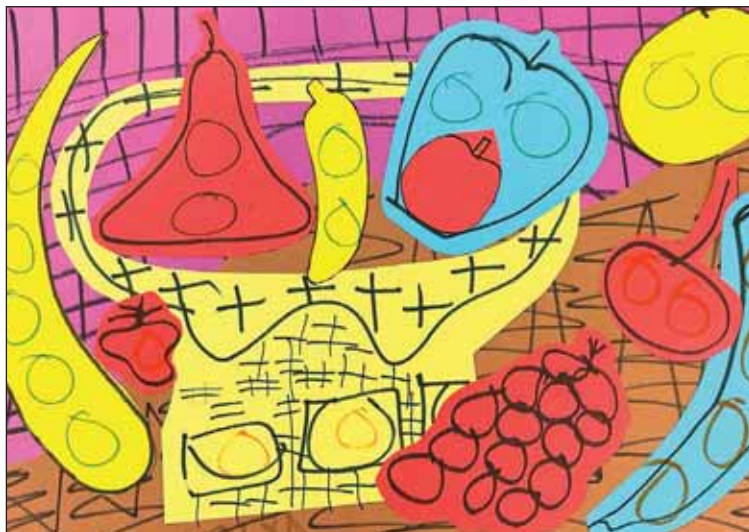
The art show, housed in CSMA's Sobrato Gallery, includes framed paintings, drawings, collages and mixed-media sculptures. This year's focus is on the joy of the art-making process, discovering what inspires artists and claiming space as artists in society. Artistic Intelligence is a collaboration between CSMA, Morgan Autism Center and the Mountain View Los Altos Adult School.

"It's very powerful work created by students who share a lot of their emotions and their feelings through brushstrokes, and they share how they perceive the world," said Pedro Lopez, CSMA senior arts program director who curates gallery shows.

One of Lopez's favorite works is an image of a pitbull behind bars with the words "Save pit bulls." One student created an image with the theme of keeping families together amid the increase in ICE raids, according to Lopez.

"We don't try to sell any propaganda (to the students)," Lopez explained. "But during that lesson, I know it was about messages (students wanted to send) to the world, and so that's what they decided to create."

Lopez himself said that the ideas of change and transformation drive him to make art.



Courtesy Community School of Music and Arts

Art by Kolya A. is featured in the "Artistic Intelligence" art show at Community School of Music and Arts. The show is part of a collaboration between the school, the Morgan Autism Center and the Mountain View Los Altos Adult School.

"Transformation happens in these students' lives through creating art," he said. "Someone who is very particular about certain areas of their life and how they approach it can really gain independence through art and the different media that is accessible to them. So for them to be able to transition from ... just wanting to use charcoal, to all of a sudden that they're using paint. That is really teaching them to adapt to our world and to change their approach."

Marita Musante, a former art instructor for Artistic Intelligence who now is a creative learning coach for teachers in the program, said she appreciated seeing unfinished works of art in the exhibition.

"It honors the process of 'this is where they are right now,'" she said. "We will put doodles that Picasso and other artists did while they were kids (in museums). ... Looking at someone's work in progress is something we do historically and it's great to see it valued for these students as well."

Musante appreciates the long-term transformation the students experience in the program. For example, she was delighted to see one woman in the program who used to draw



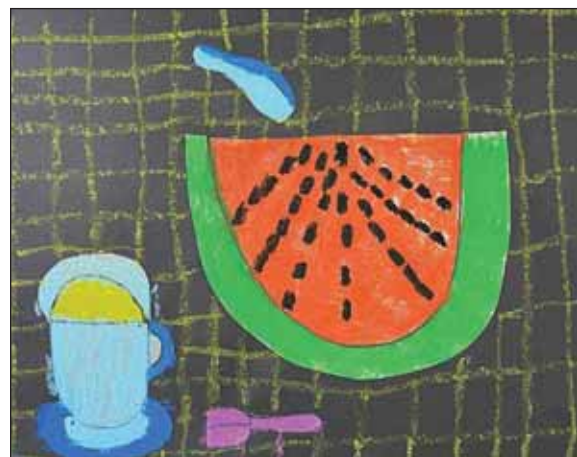
Courtesy Community School of Music and Arts  
Artist Miyke M. created this piece during a lesson on making art with messages.

one single shape over and over again move on to drawing a variety of shapes, lines and colors this year.

"It's night and day," Musante said. "For someone who has very limited oral communication that's just vitally important. ... Abilities are distinct and different from disabilities. It's (the exhibition) an opportunity to see their abilities in all their glory." ■

Angela Swartz is a Contributing Writer.

Through March 29, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Sobrato Gallery, 230 San Antonio Circle, Mountain View. Free. [arts4all.org/mohr-gallery](http://arts4all.org/mohr-gallery).



Courtesy Community School of Music and Arts

Students in the Artistic Intelligence program can learn to use a variety of media and techniques, as this mixed-media art by Julian D. shows.

## Worth a Look



Courtesy Philip Greenberg

WindSync performs March 22 at Kohl Mansion.

### WindSync

WindSync, the wind quintet featuring Garrett Hudson on flute, Noah Kay on oboe, Graeme Steele Johnson on clarinet, Kara LaMoure on bassoon and Anni Hochhalter on horn, embraces both classic and contemporary works. As part of the Music at Kohl Mansion series, the group will perform pieces by Nadia Boulanger, Elliott Carter, Philip Glass, Jean Françaix and Mozart, with a pre-concert talk by Stanford cellist and educator Christopher Costanza and post-concert wine and dessert.

March 22, 7 p.m. (pre-concert talk at 6 p.m.), Kohl Mansion, 2750 Adeline Drive, Burlingame; \$30-\$62; [musicatkohl.org/windsync-2026-3](http://musicatkohl.org/windsync-2026-3).

### 'The Meaning of Home'

The work of eight San Mateo artists is on display in "The Meaning of Home," the latest art exhibition at the Chan Zuckerberg Community Space, presented by the Redwood City Parks and Arts Foundation. An opening reception, with refreshments and an artist showcase, will be held March 20. The exhibition's theme "explores historical and contemporary experiences of place and belonging" and includes paintings, photography, digital compositions and 3D installations, according to an online calendar listing for the event. Participating artists include Mariana Acosta Burns, Gunnar Cheetham, Beth Grossman, Swee Choo Oh, Gabriela Romero, Faina Shpiler, Carolyn Tillie and Lesly Vazquez.

March 20, 6 p.m., Chan Zuckerberg Community Space, 801 Jefferson Ave., Redwood City; free; [tinyurl.com/CZIMeaningofHome](http://tinyurl.com/CZIMeaningofHome).

### After Hours: Glow in the Dark Disco

East Palo Alto's EPACenter is ringing in spring in style with a free glow-in-the-dark disco party. Attendees are invited to wear their best 1970s-style attire (suggested ideas include platform shoes, bell bottoms, bold patterns and anything with a lot of sparkle and shimmer) and boogie down on the dance floor as a DJ spins groovy tunes.

March 21, 6-10 p.m., EPACenter, 1950 Bay Road, East Palo Alto; free; [tinyurl.com/EPACenterDisco](http://tinyurl.com/EPACenterDisco).

### Ralph Alessi Quartet

Jazz trumpeter, composer and educator Ralph Alessi, along with Adam Benjamin on piano, Richard Giddens on bass and Mark Ferber on drums, will perform in Palo Alto at a concert presented by Earthwise Productions. According to Alessi's website, his sound is a mix of classical precision and avant-garde jazz, "blending technical mastery with an adventurous spirit."

March 23, 8 p.m., Palo Alto Art Center Auditorium, 1313 Newell Road, Palo Alto; \$20; [tinyurl.com/AlessiEarthwise](http://tinyurl.com/AlessiEarthwise).

### Tayari Jones

Tayari Jones, author of "An American Marriage," comes to Kepler's to discuss her newest novel, "Kin." The new book is about two best friends and neighbors whose lives take different paths. According to Kepler's event description, it explores "mothers and daughters, friendship and sisterhood, and the complexities of being a woman in the American South." Jones will be in conversation with fellow writer Natalie Baszile.

March 25, 7 p.m., Kepler's, 1010 El Camino Real, Menlo Park; \$11.49-\$47.19; [tinyurl.com/TayariJonesKeplers](http://tinyurl.com/TayariJonesKeplers).

# Food & Drink

## NEW DAY DISHES



*Nowruz food traditions celebrate fresh greens, community and new beginnings*



Above: Borani Bademjan, a dish of fried eggplant simmered in a savory tomato-garlic sauce and served over garlicky yogurt, at Arya Steakhouse in Palo Alto. Top: A table of Persian dishes arranged for a photo at Arya Steakhouse in Palo Alto. Photos by Seeger Gray.

By Karla Kane

Nowruz, the spring holiday also known as Persian New Year, translates to “new day,” and falls on the Northern Hemisphere’s vernal equinox, around March 20.

Dating back thousands of years, the ancient festival is celebrated by many across Iran, Central Asia and all over the world, including on the Peninsula. It’s a time that honors hope and fresh beginnings, even as upheaval and conflict in Iran likely weigh on the minds of community members this year.

Nowruz is rich in food traditions. The culinary culture connected with Nowruz is both deeply symbolic and sensory, according to Menlo Park’s Nina Sarazin, the founder of Nourish & Flourish, an educational culinary and wellness program.

Central to the celebration is the Haft Seen (also spelled Haft Sin) table display, set up before the equinox and featuring, among other symbolic items, seven elements that each begin with the Persian letter “S.” These include apples, garlic, sprouted greens, vinegar, wheat pudding, silverberry and sumac.

Each item has symbolic significance for ushering in the new year, said Fera Hashemi, co-owner of Arya Steakhouse,

Arya Steakhouse, 140 University Ave., Palo Alto; open daily from 11:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Instagram: @aryasteakhouse.

a modern Persian restaurant in downtown Palo Alto. Sabzeh, the sprouts, represent rebirth, while serkeh (vinegar) symbolizes time, patience and aging.

“Everything we put out on the table, it’s supposed to symbolize the upcoming year,” she said. “Sumac is a bright burgundy, symbolizing the color of the sunrise, the victory of good over evil; happiness and warmth, basically.”

Look for Nowruz specialties at Persian restaurants locally, such as Arya and Chelokababi in Sunnyvale, both of which set up Haft Seen displays for the holiday each year.

Hashemi recommends starting a Nowruz meal at Arya with the appetizer plate panir sabzi, symbolizing spring and featuring fresh greens such as basil, parsley, leeks and tarragon, served with feta, walnuts, radishes, cucumbers and tomatoes. The dish is accompanied by taftoon bread.

The traditional entree for the eve of Nowruz is sabzi polo mahi — herbed rice and greens, with the greens representing rebirth and the spirit of the season, served with fish, representing life and movement forward, according to Sarazin.

At Arya, the rice is made with leeks, parsley, cilantro, garlic and green onions and paired with marinated fish that’s seasoned with the restaurant’s house Persian spices. Hashemi said it’ll be offered through March 30 this year.

Chelokababi Restaurant, 1236 S. Wolfe Road, Sunnyvale; open Tuesday 4-9 p.m., Wednesday and Thursday from 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., Friday from 11:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., Saturday noon to 9:30 p.m. and Sunday noon to 9 p.m.



Employees at Rose International Market in Mountain View stock the freezer with chopped herbs which are used to make sabzi polo, a Persian rice dish, before the store's opening in 2019. Photo by Veronica Weber.



"There is nothing that tastes quite as great because of the greens and ingredients that go into the sabzi polo mahi," Hashemi said. "We only make it once a year. Even our staff gets excited to taste it." The dish, she said, represents "the welcoming of spring."

Chelokababi will also be serving sabzi polo mahi as a Nowruz special March 20-21, according to Maryam Lane, the restaurant's managing partner.

Another beloved dish representing spring flavors is kuku sabzi, a traditional vegetable frittata made with a mix of fresh herbs and barberries (zereshk), which Hashemi also recommends as part of the Nowruz meal.

Sarazin, whose mother was from Iran, enjoys cooking kuku sabzi often.

"I make it almost once a week; it's so yummy," she said.

Those looking for Haft Seen goods and ingredients for making Nowruz meals can check local shops, including Rose International Market in Mountain View and Real Produce International Market in Palo Alto. You can even find frozen, pre-chopped herbs for kuku sabzi, Sarazin said, making the labor-intensive dish a bit easier for newbies.

Cookies and sweets are also often eaten at Nowruz, incorporating flavors such as rose, saffron and cardamom.

Hashemi recommends ending a Nowruz meal at Arya with a dessert of bastani makhloot (Persian pistachio ice cream with saffron and rosewater), served alongside faloodeh (rice noodles in rosewater, topped with sour cherries and fresh lemon).

Thirteen days after Nowruz (or the closest weekend to then), Sizdeh be dar, or Nature Day, is commonly celebrated in Iran and in the Iranian diaspora community, Sarazin said. At a picnic that day, the sprouted greens that were grown for and displayed on the Haft Seen are tossed into moving water.

This tradition serves as "another ritual of out with the old, in with the new," Sarazin said, as well as the final chance to celebrate

Rose International Market, 801 W. El Camino Real, Suite B, Mountain View; open daily from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Nowruz with family, friends and good food.

She grew up celebrating with her mother's side of the family, with fond memories of visiting relatives and eating treats with them. Now, she strives to carry on the cultural heritage with her son. Some Persian American families, she said, adapt customs by blending traditional recipes with regional ingredients or adding modern twists to their celebrations.

Chelokababi managing partner Lane's favorite part of the holiday is "definitely the many family gatherings, celebrating, forgiving, and starting new beginnings," she told this publication in an email.

While Nowruz celebrations often include lively dance and music, Hashemi said she expects the tone of some of this year's local holiday celebrations to be lower-key, in acknowledgement of the recent and ongoing turmoil and violence in Iran and beyond, and it will vary from family to family.

No matter how communities choose to mark the holiday, Nowruz's themes of fresh beginnings and hope may be more poignant than ever.

"I think the most special thing about Nowruz is just being together. Especially this year, it's particularly important," Hashemi said. ■

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Real Produce International Market, 501 Oxford Ave., Palo Alto; open daily from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.. Instagram: @realproduce. Nourish & Flourish, Menlo Park.

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From the top right down: The interior of Chelokababi in Sunnyvale. Chelokababi will offer its sabzi polo mahi, a traditional Nowruz dish, from March 20-21. Zeytoon Parvardeh, an appetizer of green olives, ground walnuts, pomegranate molasses, garlic and herbs, at Chelokababi in Sunnyvale. Photos by Seeger Gray.

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