Number of high school students seeking therapy spikes

TEENS REPORTED STRUGGLING WITH ANXIETY, DEPRESSION AND ACADEMIC DIFFICULTIES

By Kevin Forestieri

The number of students referred for mental health counseling services in the Mountain View-Los Altos High School District jumped significantly for the first quarter of the 2019-20 school year, with the bulk of the increase coming from Los Altos High School.

The trend, revealed in recent annual reports from both Mountain View and Los Altos high schools, underscores the ongoing challenge of providing mental health support to teens in a school environment. The district spends more than $1.3 million each year to maintain an in-house team of therapists — paid for partially by outside organizations — which received more than 650 referrals from the start of the school year through October.

The biggest increase was at Los Altos High School, where 282 students were referred for counseling through October — up from 202 around the same time the prior year. The 40% increase means that an average of 94 students per month are being referred for services. Mountain View High School had 371 referrals, up from 350 last year. Anxiety, depression, academic difficulties and issues with family and peers were consistent problems for students at both schools.

The high school district has spent the past several years publicizing its counseling program as a way to support students showing symptoms and behaviors associated with mental health disorders. The bar for seeking help is set intentionally low, giving anyone the ability to anonymously refer students.

Referrals are essentially a starting point for therapy and other types of mental health support, and in many cases students will either decline services or simply “check in” with staff on how to proceed.

Referendum petition to overturn RV ban succeeds

By Mark Noack

Mountain View elected leaders will be forced to reframe a citywide large-vehicle ban that was accused of being a thinly veiled crackdown on the homeless.

Last month, officials with the Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters announced that a referendum petition had successfully collected enough signatures to overturn the vehicle ban. If a majority of the Mountain View City Council wishes to pursue the ordinance to ban large vehicles, it must go before voters to decide.

The announcement was hailed as a victory by members of the Housing Justice Coalition and the Silicon Valley Democratic Socialists of America. The two groups had coordinated a campaign in November to collect the needed signatures in less than a month.

While many Mountain View residents are deeply troubled by the area’s growing homelessness, they also don’t want a superficial solution that just pushes poverty elsewhere, said former Councilman Lenny Siegel, speaking for the Housing Justice Coalition.

“The community is split on what it means to have people living in vehicles, but most people in Mountain View want a real
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THE YEAR IN THEATER

Most memorable moment of 2019 for local theater fans? No doubt one of them was TheatreWorks Silicon Valley winning the Regional Theatre Tony Award, an enormous feather in the cap of founder Robert Kelley (who was also honored with a local Lifetime of Achievement award) as he went into his final season as artistic director of the company. But TheatreWorks never rests on its laurels, offering another fine year's worth of productions, including a stellar version of the hilarious Hitchcock spoof! “The 39 Steps,” a wonder of comic timing.

“Achduke,” which was work-shopped at TheatreWorks’ New Works festival a few years back, drew mixed audience reactions. I, however, called its regional premiere “moving, bold, strange and empathetic,” in addition to very humorous. Back at the year’s start, theater critic John Orr gave rave reviews to “Frost/Nixon,” calling it an “astounding, not-to-be-missed 110 minutes of theater.”

Broadway by the Bay in March this year offered a near-perfect version of the pop-rock opera “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat,” a dreamy, rainbow-hued riot of music, comedy and dance.

Over at Mountain View’s Pear Theatre, Artistic Director Betsy Kruse Craig announced she was stepping down at the end of the year but plans to remain involved as an actor and director. Orr named actor Fred Pitts’ performance in “Sweat” at the Pear as one of the year’s best. He also enjoyed the quickfire character changes by the cast of the theater’s annual “Peach Slices,” which showcases original shorts by local writers. More recently, Janet Silver Ghent called the Pear’s ambitious one-woman production of “You/Emma” “imaginative,” “well-crafted” and “poignant.”

It was a good year for updates on some lesser Rodgers & Hammerstein classics. Foothill Music Theatre this summer presented a charming version of “Cinderella,” updated for modern tastes by making Cinderella a much more active heroine. Kuow-Hoo Lo’s scenery, too, was sublime, and the result was a family-friendly treat. Palo Alto Players mounted an updated R&H production of its own with David Henry Hwang’s rewrite of “Flower Drum Song.” By keeping most of the songs but jettisoning most of the cringe-worthier aspects of the stereotype-laden original script, this production was a funny, touching and very welcome story of the Chinese American experience. Another favorite this year from Palo Alto Players was the screwball comedy “One Man, Two Guvnors.”

Over to the west, Los Altos Stage Company won big with shows, including the comedies “American Night” and “Admissions,” which tackled prescient issues with wit and aplomb. The former was a surreal trip through one would-be citizen’s dream, while the latter took on the sometimes-hypocritical world of elite education, and both seemed at times to slightly baffle and rattle their audiences; a risk well worth taking.

—Karla Kane
'DRUG DEN' ARRESTS

Mountain View police arrested four people last week on drug charges after serving a search warrant at an Old Mountain View home, finding a large stash of methamphetamine, marijuana and psychedelic mushrooms.

The search of the home on the 500 block of Church Street on Tuesday, Dec. 24, caps off weeks of investigating the home, which officers believe was being used as a hub for drug sales, according to a statement released Monday by the Mountain View Police Department. The four people inside the home were arrested and booked into Santa Clara County jail.

NEW VTA ROUTES, SCHEDULES

The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority launched a new higher-frequency route plan on Saturday, hoping for increased ridership by offering several days of free rides.

VTA offered free rides systemwide on all buses and trains until about 5 a.m. Jan. 1, said Brandi Childress, spokeswoman for VTA.

"We wanted to make it easy for people to try our service and really say thank you for the patience everyone has had as we roll out our newly-designed transit service," Childress said.

"As we were preparing for the new BART system, we knew this would be a good opportunity to look at the system and find areas where we can improve frequency and connect bus routes that would help the regional service," Childress said.

VTA’s new “frequent routes” plan has 20 bus and light rail routes said to pick up every 15 minutes or less during weekdays.

For more information about VTA, please visit www.VTA.com.
Slammed by critics, VTA strives to fix leadership
TRANSIT AGENCY CONSIDERS DOZENS OF IDEAS TO IMPROVE GOVERNANCE

By Mark Noack

Pretty much everyone seems to agree that the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority desperately needs a leadership fix — but where to start?

For one glimpse of the problem, take a look at the results of a recent public survey on the performance of the transit agency’s 12-member board of directors. About 70% of respondents gave the VTA board low marks, particularly for being unresponsive and clumsy in communication. Other withering feedback came from a recent civil grand jury report, which primarily blamed poor board leadership for causing VTA to become one of the most inefficient and dysfunctional transit agencies in the U.S.

VTA directors are now facing an immense challenge to prove they are steering the organization back in the right direction, especially as voters are expected to decide in November on another transit tax. In the meantime, the transit agency’s directors have taken some of the criticisms to heart, and they’ve been trying to figure out how to get better.

On that matter, the VTA directors recently commissioned an independent review to evaluate ways to improve the transit agency’s governance. The independent report, conducted by the consulting firm RSM, indicated that VTA’s complex problems require some complex solutions — the review analyzed nearly 30 ideas to improve VTA governance.

With recycled water deal signed, attention shifts to contentious Baylands site

By Gennady Sheyner

Hailing it as a “historic” agreement, Santa Clara County’s primary water supplier, Valley Water, enthusiastically approved on Dec. 10 a 76-year deal with Palo and Mountain View to construct a water purification plant in the Baylands with the intent of greatly expanding use of recycled water.

Under the approved terms, Valley Water would pay $16 million for a water purification plant that would be built near the Regional Water Quality Control Plant in the Palo Alto Baylands. The facility, which has an estimated price tag of $20 million, will reduce salinity in treated wastewater and allow more commercial customers to hook up to the city’s “purple pipes.”

The cities and Valley Water are also looking at potentially building a larger and more advanced purification facility in the future, possibly in Palo Alto. That regional plant would effectively convert wastewater to potable water.

But while the water district and the two cities lauded the deal as a perfect example of agencies working together for a common good, the agreement leaves open one critical question: Where exactly would the regional plant be located? The answer to that question may rest with Palo Alto voters.

City officials have proposed using a 10-acre site at Byxbee Park that was initially designated as parkland but that voters “undedicated” in 2011 when they approved Measure E. That measure made the site available for a waste-to-energy facility such as an anaerobic digestion plant. Since the vote, however, the city has agreed to ship out its sewage sludge for treatment in Merced County and Fairfield facilities rather than build a local plant.

The measure requires a public vote for any use of the site beyond what was approved in 2011. It also specifies, however, that the “undedication” is only valid for 10 years. After that time, the council will have the option of dedicating it as parkland.

The contract between the three agencies specifies that if Valley Water board members face a steep learning curve, it doesn’t help that they usually lack any experience in transportation, finance or management.

Many appointees also have a hard time separating their role on the VTA board, which consists entirely of political appointees serving on city councils or the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors. Often, they usually lack any experience in transportation, finance or management.

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Baylands

Valley Water opts not to move ahead with a water plant Palo Alto, the contract allows it to convey effluent to another location in the county for treatment.

Walter Hays, a local environmentalist who was one of the leading proponents of Measure E, said he supports changing the rules for the 10-acre site to allow the construction of a water treatment plant. At the Dec. 10 meeting of Valley Water board of directors, Hays said he and other supporters of the measure would be happy to work on a voter initiative to authorize the purification plant.

Hays said that in the years since Measure E, he and others learned that it was “more practical” to ship out sewage sludge and have it treated through anaerobic digestion elsewhere. “So that site is available now for other environmental purposes and those of us who worked on anaerobic digestion would love to see the advanced treatment plant there,” Hays told the Valley Water board.

A report from Palo Alto’s Utilities Department suggests that not everyone shares this view. The city hosted a meeting in April to discuss the partnership with the Valley Water. While many community members supported the goals of reducing the city’s reliance on imported water and enhancing water conservation, they also expressed concern with the use of the Measure E site for a Valley Water regional purification facility, the report states.

Despite this unresolved issue, Valley Water’s board unanimously supported the deal, which Palo Alto and Mountain View had approved on Nov. 18. The contract also allows the water district to transfer half of Palo Alto’s treated wastewater to an “advanced water purification center,” which could be built either in the city or elsewhere in the county. The plant would convert wastewater to potable water.

Board member Tony Estremera, who made the motion to approve the agreement, lauded staff from the two cities and the water district for confronting and overcoming the various obstacles that stood in the way of the agreement.

“This is the Silicon Valley way; not just to look at problems and whine, but to look at problems and step in, confront them and come up with solutions,” Estremera said. “That’s why we have a 76-year agreement! That doesn’t even exist in the United Nations!”

His colleagues agreed. Board member Gary Kremen, who represents North County, said it’s been an “honor” to work on the deal, while board member Barbara Keegan said she hopes to see other cities forge similar agreements with Valley Water in the years to come.

I look forward someday to be able to say nice things about the city of San Jose and city of Santa Clara, when we enter into similar partnerships with them,” Keegan said. “But they will not have that special place that the communities of Palo Alto and Mountain View have of being the first to the table, so to speak.”

The deal also gives Palo Alto the option of buying water from the water district. Today, the city is one of about two dozen that buy their water from the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, which relies on the Hetch Hetchy system.

Elected leaders from Palo Alto and Mountain View similarly lauded the effort. Palo Alto Mayor Eric Filseth said in a statement that the partnership will “increase the resiliency of our vital water supply.” Mountain View Mayor Lisa Matichak said the deal will improve the quality of recycled water in Mountain View and Palo Alto.

“As a long-time recycled water user, Mountain View looks forward to significantly increasing consumption while concurrently supporting the city’s sustainability efforts and saving potable water for our important non-irrigation needs,” Matichak said in a statement.

Email Gennady Sheyner at gsheyner@paweekly.com

Crime Brief

Among the illicit substances found inside, police reported there was nearly 20 grams of methamphetamine, meth pipes and several grams of psilocybin, commonly known as psychedelic mushrooms. In order to conduct the search, officers had to air out the home, which was filled with a heavy cloud of smoke from recent meth use, according to the statement.

Mountain View residents Mark Niertet, 64, and Kathleen Polito, 64, were both arrested on suspicion of operating the home as a drug den and possession of narcotics and drug paraphernalia. Polito is also suspected of possessing a pound of marijuana, which is more than legally permissible under the state’s Adult Use of Marijuana Act (AUMA).

The other two suspects, a 61-year-old Mountain View woman and a 45-year-old man from Clearlake, were arrested on suspicion of being under the influence of a controlled substance.

—Kevin Forestieri

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6 Mountain View Voice MountainViewOnline.com January 3, 2020
they’re doing. Historically, nearly half the students are referred for therapy by district staff or referred to an outside provider, including the Community Health Awareness Council (CHAC) in Mountain View and Children’s Health Council in Palo Alto.

Who refers the students shifts every year. During the fall quarter at Los Altos High School, for example, the highest number of students referred were mental health professionals — a total of 103, or about 38%. Referrals from therapists (13.2%), school staff (13%) and administrators (12.5%) trailed, followed by peers, counselors and parents. Self-referrals were also the most common at Mountain View High School, followed by school staff, other therapists, and specialty education staff that conduct Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

Mountain View High has grappled with the deaths of two students by suicide since August 2018, putting local mental health professionals on high alert about possible “contagion,” previously described as a suicide cluster in which students are at higher risk.

Though the deaths have been a topic of concern for both school staff and even city officials, the problem has been steadily growing for a while. When school staff began carefully tracking its mental health services about six years ago, the district was receiving about 200 referrals each year, which quickly climbed to more than 800 in 2017 and inundated counselors with difficult caseloads.

Mountain View High School Principal Dave Grissom said the numbers are “alarming” at first, but could be a sign that the school’s culture is evolving in a way that students aren’t ashamed to seek help from mental health care professionals.

“The concern for others is great, and there is an understanding of how mental health issues work. I don’t think was there before,” Grissom said.

Surveys conducted at Mountain View High show that 24% of freshmen students and 33% of juniors reported feeling “chronic” sadness or hopelessness in the last year, and 16% of freshmen and 20% of juniors reported seriously considering suicide. Though not far from the state average, school staff is vowing to bring down those numbers over the next five years. The school’s annual report calls for bringing the number of students feeling chronic sadness and hopelessness down to 15% among freshmen and 20% among juniors.

Other school districts may soon follow in the footsteps of Mountain View-Los Altos. In October, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors agreed to explore ways to expand the availability of school-based mental health services, arguing that placing mental health staff in all of the county’s 32 school districts could be an effective way to create a “baseline” level of support for students. The program would likely focus on prevention and early intervention — screening students for signs of behavioral disorders or depressive symptoms before they get worse.

County staff is expected to spend the next several months researching the best way to implement such a program, including a comprehensive analysis on the unmet mental health needs of children in the county. National studies have found that roughly 1 in 5 teens ages 13 to 18 suffer from a mental health disorder, but few have actually met with a mental health care provider. The reasons why are manifold, including a dearth of available child psychiatrists and psychologists, and a failure on the part of commercial insurance companies to provide mental health services at the same level as physical health care.

If the county’s school-based mental health program comes to fruition, it could tap into funding recently made available by the state. California is currently accepting applications for $75 million in grant money available to counties and school districts that team up on “increasing access to mental health services in locations that are easily accessible to students and their families.”

Just under half of that money will be available to “large” counties, which includes Santa Clara. Email Kevin Forestieri at kforestieri@mv-voice.com

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

STATE SENATE CANDIDATES TO DISCUSS CLIMATE CRISIS

A coalition of local environmental nonprofits have organized a forum to be held on Wednesday, Jan. 15, at which local voters can get more information on how District 13 state Senate candidates stand on environmental issues.

The nonpartisan forum is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. at the Menlo-Atherton High School performing arts center at 555 Middlefield Road. Admission is free, though people are encouraged to register.

District 13 covers the Peninsula between South San Francisco and Sunnyvale, including the Coastside. There are seven candidates: Josh Becker, Michael Brownrigg, Sally Lieber, Shelly肌us, Anna O’Hara, Alexander O’Hara and John Webster. All but Webster are expected to attend the forum.

Participating candidates will provide opening statements, then respond to questions from the event’s co-sponsors: 350 Silicon Valley, Acterra, Citizens’ Climate Lobby, and Sustainable San Mateo County. There will also be questions from the audience.

Other supporting organizations are Canopy, Carbon Free Silicon Valley, Climate Reality-Santa Clara County, Cool Block Palo Alto, Cool Planet First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto, Elders Climate Action-NorCal, Fossil Free Mid-Peninsula, Friends of Caltrain, Friends of Edgewood Natural Preserve, Friends of Huddart & Wunderlich Parks, Peninsula Interfaith Climate Action, Sea Hugger, Sustainable Silicon Valley, Sunrise Movement-Palo Alto Hub, Thrive Alliance of Nonprofits in San Mateo County, and Youth Climate Action Network.

Register online for the event at eventbrite.com/e/california-senate-district-13-climate-and-environment-forum—tickets-8357199667.

—Kate Bradsbaw
DAY WORKER  
Continued from page 5

problem with lack of jobs for people who were over 60, 70 years old. So we were thinking of teaching a new skill where (workers) can learn to make their own clothes and sell them. That’s where the idea came from,” said Olivares, who sees patterns for the class from her own online store selling clothing and accessories for pets.

Olivares said there are tentative plans to hold a craft fair at the center, and then sell the pet clothing through local boutiques, animal shelters and other area festivals. The sales would help workers earn money, plus raise awareness about the center and reach possible employers.

“If they are buying the clothes, they are actually helping out people who have been working here and giving back to the community,” she said.

Sewing classes are the latest of many programs offered at the Day Worker Center. Other services include health clinics and classes on a broad range of topics such as English as a Second Language, computers and art.

The center, entering its 24th year, serves 650 workers each year, according to Executive Director Maríx Marroquin. About 65 workers come to the center every weekday; Marroquin said that the seasons, in part, determine how many of them find jobs each day.

“In the spring and summer, we are getting short on workers,” Marroquin said. “Also, most of the jobs that workers perform are outside.”

Winter tends to be slower, though workers help staff events such as the German Holiday Market or the Kiwanis Club’s Christmas tree lot, and those add up to about 1,000 hours of work each, Marroquin said.

The center operates on a budget of $400,000 — funded largely by private donors and the faith community. The Day Worker Center is one of seven local nonprofits benefiting from the Voice’s annual Holiday Fund. Donations to the fund are divided equally among the organizations, and, thanks to the support of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, 100% of the donations go directly to the seven recipient agencies.

Serving an increasingly diverse population is shaping up as one of the more recent major challenges for the center, as it has meant stretching already limited resources further.

“That is a precious gift from God because we are able to serve in the community, but it’s also very challenging, because culturally the thing that’s appealing for you may not be (as appealing) for others. It’s really a privilege to be working here and serving the community, but it’s not easy,” Marroquin said.

Many more homeless people have sought work at the center, according to Marroquin, who noted that homeless workers can face additional hurdles in finding employment, such as inadequate sleep or limited opportunities to bathe.

Often, older workers are no longer able to do the physically demanding jobs for which many employers come to the center. Sewing classes, along with catering work, are among the center’s programs that aim to address that.

“I insist on the importance of supporting people who are getting older,” Marroquin said. “So we’re just trying to encourage the idea of entrepreneurial activities. In the meantime, they are waiting here for work, and then later they repair (the clothing) just to make some money with the time they are waiting here.”

Lopez and Rodriguez, who are now brushing up their sewing skills, have worked a variety of jobs through the center. Lopez has done a variety of cleaning, cooking and babysitting, and Rodriguez has done a lot of handyman work, gardening and cleaning gutters. Both Lopez and Rodriguez had some experience in sewing before taking this class, too, but are applying their skills in a new way. Lopez worked in a bridal shop in Mexico before going to nursing school and Rodriguez helped out a friend who had a small business that involved sewing.

His sewing knowledge has come in handy, he said, to mend clothing. “I fix my pants and shirts. And sometimes my friends say, ‘fix this.’”

“I don’t know, now, maybe it’s a business,” he added with a smile.

Email Heather Zimmerman at hzimmerman@paweekly.com

‘The community is split on what it means to have people living in vehicles, but most people in Mountain View want a real solution.’

Lenny Siegel

The petition results will be considered by the Mountain View City Council at its Jan. 14 meeting, according to City Clerk Lisa Naick. At that time, the council must decide whether to repeal the ordinance or bring it to voters at the next regular election. Since the deadline for the March ballot has already passed, that means the ordinance would have to wait until November.

Email Mark Noack at mnoack@mv-voice.com

LocalNews

RV BAN  
Continued from page 1

solution,” he said. “I’m hoping that we can go beyond the restrictions and come up with something that works for the vehicle residents.”

The referendum takes aim at an ordinance passed on Oct. 22 that banned all vehicles more than 7 feet high, 7 feet wide or 22 feet long from parking along most city streets. The ordinance explicitly includes trucks, including RVs and trailers. The city has not released final details on which streets would be affected.

Ever since the parking ban was first proposed, Housing Justice advocates warned they would work to overturn it. Under city rules, ordinances approved by the City Council do not take effect for 30 days, and then can be overturned through a citizen petition process. To qualify, legitimate voters. As part of the certification process, elections officials verify only a fraction of the total names that were submitted — 500, in this case.

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‘The community is split on what it means to have people living in vehicles, but most people in Mountain View want a real solution.’

Lenny Siegel
Please join Dr. Cornel West to discuss democracy, race, and justice. The evening will also include a question and answer session with Foothill College students.

Friday, January 17
6:30 PM
Smithwick Theatre

Purchase tickets at foothill.edu/speakers

Proceeds will benefit Foothill College service leadership and equity scholarships.
How to Give

Your gift helps children and families in need

Contributions to the Holiday Fund will be matched dollar for dollar to the extent possible and will go directly to seven nonprofit agencies that serve Mountain View residents. Last year, more than 150 Voice readers and the Wakerly, Packard and Hewlett foundations contributed a total of $72,000. We are indebted to the Silicon Valley Community Foundation which handles all donations, and deducts no administrative costs from your gifts, which are tax-deductible as permitted by law. All donations will be shared equally with the seven recipient agencies.

Donate online at siliconvalleycf.org/mvv-holiday-fund

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03 – Mountain View Voice Holiday Fund
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P.O. Box 45389
San Francisco, CA 94145

The Mountain View Voice Holiday Fund is a donor advised fund of Silicon Valley Community Foundation, a 501 (c) (3) charitable organization. A contribution to this fund allows your donation to be tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

This year, the following agencies will be supported by the Holiday Fund:

MayView Community Health Center
The MayView Community Health Center in Mountain View offers primary care services to low-income and uninsured patients in northern Santa Clara County. No patient is turned away for inability to pay for services, which include prenatal and pediatric care, cancer screenings and chronic disease management.

Mentor Tutor Connection
Mentor Tutor Connection matches adult volunteers who serve either as mentors with under-served youth in high school or as tutors to students in elementary and middle schools in Mountain View and Los Altos school districts.

Community School of Music and Arts
The Community School of Music and Arts provides hands-on art and music education in the classrooms of the Mountain View Whisman School District.

Day Worker Center
The Day Worker Center of Mountain View provides a secure place for workers and employers to negotiate wages and work conditions. It serves workers with job placements, English lessons, job skills workshops and guidance.

YWCA Support Network for Domestic Violence
This group operates a 24-hour bilingual hotline and a safe shelter for women and their children. It also offers counseling and other services for families dealing with domestic violence.

Community Services Agency
CSA is the community’s safety-net providing critical support services for low-income individuals and families, the homeless and seniors in northern Santa Clara County, including Mountain View, Los Altos and Los Altos Hills.

Community Health Awareness Council
CHAC serves Mountain View, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills and seven school districts. Among the services it offers are school-based counseling and programs to protect students from high-risk behaviors.

How to Give

Your gift helps children and families in need

Contributions to the Holiday Fund will be matched dollar for dollar to the extent possible and will go directly to seven nonprofit agencies that serve Mountain View residents. Last year, more than 150 Voice readers and the Wakerly, Packard and Hewlett foundations contributed a total of $72,000. We are indebted to the Silicon Valley Community Foundation which handles all donations, and deducts no administrative costs from your gifts, which are tax-deductible as permitted by law. All donations will be shared equally with the seven recipient agencies.

Donate online at siliconvalleycf.org/mvv-holiday-fund

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Thank you for supporting the Holiday Fund

As of December 23, 120 donors have contributed $42,843 to the Mountain View Voice Holiday Fund.

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YWCA helps survivors amid spike in reported rapes

By Kevin Forestieri

For volunteers and employees atYWCA of Silicon Valley, trying to meet the needs of all survivors of sexual assault has been a daunting task. And it’s only getting harder.

In three short years, from 2015 to 2018, the number of reported sexual assaults spiked 58% in Santa Clara County. With each report, it falls toYWCA to provide critical, state-mandated assistance to victims, including medical accompaniment and advocacy services. Each step of the way, someone fromYWCA is available to act on behalf of the victim and assist with the myriad challenges that often follow a sexual assault — the court dates, counseling, law enforcement interviews, medical exams and housing needs.

Keeping up those comprehensive services amid the rising demand has been difficult, saidYWCA CEO Tanis Crosby, particularly with the hands-off approach by the state of California. The nonprofit is the only designated rape crisis center for most of Santa Clara County, including North County cities, and the state penal code requires that these services be available to all survivors.

Available funding earmarked in the state budget to actually pay for these services has been paltry at best: Only $45,000 in general fund dollars were allocated for rape crisis centers across all of California for the 2019-20 fiscal year, down from $5 million the prior year. Limited government contracts and a bevy of private donations have keptYWCA afloat in recent years, but the number of available advocates has been stretched thin trying to respond to all calls.

The good news is that 2019 has proven to be a watershed moment for the nonprofit and larger efforts to curb gender-based violence, with sudden and significant support coming from Santa Clara County. Throughout the fiscal year, county supervisors have chastised state officials for abdicating their responsibility to fund services for survivors of rape and sexual assault, and agreed to pitch in a combined $1.7 million in funding toYWCA to bridge the gap left by the state.

“This is a public health issue, and local leaders responded,” Crosby said. “There absolutely has been a pivot point.”

The big boost in funding aside, Crosby said there’s still work to do, and every dollar counts.

Survivors served byYWCA are increasingly desperate and facing tougher hurdles in finding a place to stay amid the regional housing crisis, many of whom have landed in emergency shelters operated by the nonprofit in discreet locations throughout the county. Funds from public agencies are a great help, she said, but are only for specific, direct services. It’s up to individual contributions and philanthropic donations to pay for everything else.

“Donors fill the gap that government doesn’t fund, and government funding is like Swiss cheese,” Crosby said. “Without donor support, we cannot respond to the need of survivors.”

YWCA is one of seven local nonprofits that benefit from donations to theVoice’s Holiday Fund. With the support of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, 100% of donations go directly to these nonprofits.

Data collected by the county shows that sexual assault reports are on the rise by just about every metric, likely in part due to survivors’ increased willingness to speak out. County prosecutors and local shelter programs have turned away 2,151 victims of domestic violence due to lack of capacity.

A big milestone in 2019 was a new joint agreement between 22 agencies, includingYWCA, police departments, hospitals and forensic examiners that sets clear guidelines for how the numerous
In 2019, Mountain View residents chose to make some noise. High school students marched out of class to join the worldwide climate strike, NASA Ames employees protested the 35-day government shutdown and Mountain View residents rallied to oppose President Donald Trump’s policies targeting immigrants and the inhumane conditions at the nation’s southern border. Renters facing displacement, people living in vehicles and homeless advocates demonstrated outside City Hall to draw attention to the housing crisis and people on both sides of the marijuana debate flooded the City Council Chambers. The Mountain View community found quieter ways to stand up for empowerment, from female firefighters who went viral, powerful Bay Area politicians encouraging women to take leadership roles and the lone female Mountain View High School wrestler inspiring other girls to try the sport. Residents mourned the loss of an iconic tree outside City Hall and looked ahead to a salt pond restoration project. Gentrification forced a bicycle-rehabbing nonprofit out of town, Mountain View Parent Nursery School celebrated 50 years of educating the city’s little ones and a new school community coalesced at Jose Antonio Vargas Elementary. Foothill College’s quirky radio station marked another year of challenging listeners with its offbeat selections and, in a moment of peak Silicon Valley, a guy walking down Castro Street used his laptop as an umbrella. It was the kind of year that brought Mountain View, with its challenges and opportunities, its heartbreaks and its promise, into clear view.

—Andrea Gemmet

SEE MORE PHOTOS ON PAGE 14.
Clockwise from top left: Umbelina Martinez calls out for justice during the annual May Day March; the stately cedar at the center of the annual Community Tree Lighting Celebration was cut down in November due to poor health; DJ Cynthia Lombard introduces a song at KFJC, Foothill College’s long-running and eccentric radio station, in April; salt pond restoration efforts planned for Mountain View made a visible difference at Bedwell Bayfront Park (restored land is on the left and land yet to be restored is on the right); the nonprofit Bike Exchange moved to Palo Alto after losing its space in Mountain View; Paris Harrell, the only female member of the Mountain View High School wrestling team, sits with teammates during a meet against Homestead High in January.
Clockwise from top left: A Tesla drives past a row of RVs along Crisanto Avenue in October, when the City Council voted to pass a large-vehicle parking ban that would force homeless RV dwellers off most Mountain View streets; demonstrators splashed with red paint protest Vice President Mike Pence while he tours NASA Ames in November; Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Rep. Anna Eshoo spoke at a women in leadership event at NASA Ames in August; a man uses a MacBook Pro as an umbrella on Castro Street on a rainy day in January; third-grade teacher Sean Dechter greets students on the first day of school at the new Jose Antonio Vargas Elementary; Los Altos High School student Montserrat Mendez holds up her “Climate change is not cool” sign as she and her classmates participate in the worldwide Climate Strike on Sept. 20.
JANUARY SEMINARS
Presented by the DeLeon Team

Tax Strategies for Owning and Selling Silicon Valley Real Estate

📅 Tuesday, January 14, 2019
6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
📍 Oshman Family JCC
Freidenrich Conference Center
3921 Fabian Way, Palo Alto, CA

Michael Repka, Esq.
CEO, Managing Broker, & General Counsel of DeLeon Realty
LL.M (Taxation)
NYU School of Law
DRE #01854880

Making Provisions to Buy a Home Under Market Value in 2020

📅 Saturday, January 18, 2020
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
📍 Mitchell Park Community Center
Adobe Room
3700 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA

Ken DeLeon
Founder of DeLeon Realty
DRE #01342140

How to Determine Optimal Pricing & Strategy When Selling a Home

📅 Thursday, January 23, 2020
6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
📍 Oshman Family JCC
Freidenrich Conference Center
3921 Fabian Way, Palo Alto, CA

Michael Repka, Esq.
CEO, Managing Broker, & General Counsel of DeLeon Realty
DRE #01854880

Appetizers & refreshments will be provided.
RSVP: 650.543.8500 | RSVP@DELEONREALTY.COM

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650.900.7000 | www.DeLeonRealty.com | info@deleonrealty.com
The Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program is a voter-approved, 15-year program to ensure uninterrupted water resources services in Santa Clara County.

**Notice of Public Hearing**

**What:** Public Hearing on proposed modification to the Upper Llagas Creek Flood Protection Project

**When:** Jan. 14, 2020 at 1:00 p.m.

**Where:** Santa Clara Valley Water District (Valley Water) Boardroom, 5700 Almaden Expressway, San José, CA 95118

Modifications to the voter-approved program require a public hearing. The proposed modification is for the locally funded Key Performance Indicator of Project E6, the Upper Llagas Creek Flood Protection Project.

**Project E6: Upper Llagas Creek Flood Protection**

The primary objective of the project is to plan, design and construct improvements along 13.9 miles of Upper Llagas Creek from Buena Vista Avenue in Gilroy to Llagas Road in Morgan Hill, including West Little Llagas Creek in downtown Morgan Hill.

The proposed modification is for the locally funded Key Performance Indicator of the project. The modification increases the length of the project to be built with local funds from approximately 2.9 miles to 4.9 miles in addition to constructing the onsite compensatory mitigation. Besides getting the most out of the available local dollars, this approach keeps the project moving forward, shortens the construction window without inducing flooding downstream and maximizes the potential for external funding opportunities. This modification also reflects improved collaboration with regulatory permitting agencies that require early mitigation for the project impacts.

**Proposed modification to the Key Performance Indicator:**

With local funding only: Construct flood protection improvements along Llagas Creek from Buena Vista Avenue to Highway 101 in San Martin (Reaches 4 and 5 (portion), Monterey Road to Watsonville Road in Morgan Hill (Reach 7a), approximately W. Dunne Avenue to W. Main Avenue (portion of Reach 8), and onsite compensatory mitigation at Lake Silveira.

**For more information**

The board agenda memo regarding this hearing will be available on January 3, 2020 at [www.valleywater.org](http://www.valleywater.org). For more information on the public hearing, contact Meenakshi Ganjoo at mganjoo@valleywater.org or (408) 630-2295.

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YWCA

(YWCA continues from page 11)

organizations involved in assisting sexual assault survivors are supposed to work with one another. The so-called Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) protocol, adopted in September, is meant to break down the siloed approach and ensure that patients are appropriately treated every step of the way, whether at the scene of the crime or in an emergency room. It goes so far as to include flow charts for what specific actions police officers, nurses and YWCA advocates should take depending on each scenario.

Crosby said she believes the SART protocol will likely increase demand by spurrying more people to report sexual assaults, which she said is a good thing — it means fewer people are falling through the cracks.

A majority of the domestic violence cases handled by YWCA don’t have a criminal justice component — meaning they are not reported to the police or victims do not seek to press charges — so the number of survivors seeking help far exceeds how many cases are tracked by local law enforcement agencies. Crosby said it’s great that the district attorney’s office is seeking justice for survivors, but the inclination is to check off each conviction as a victory. For YWCA, the priorities are different.

“What YWCA is concerned about is that the survivor is okay, and how they are doing on their healing journey,” she said.

In the coming years, YWCA will be on the forefront in providing support services for students at Stanford University in a new partnership with the school, and will bring essential advocacy services to all patients who arrive at Stanford Hospital for sexual assault forensic exams. Patients currently have to travel to Valley Medical Center in San Jose for the exams, but a recent deal struck between the hospital and the county means patients can be treated by Stanford’s emergency department starting in 2020.

Crosby said the help from donors also gives YWCA more time to work on “lasting change” that only comes through public policy and advocacy, and the proof was apparent in 2019. It was through tireless work by advocacy groups and even the survivors themselves to make clear that something had to change, which helped galvanize the county to respond with a hefty investment, she said.

Email Kevin Forestieri at kforestieri@mv-voice.com
AIRBNB

In recent years, certain types of short-term rental operations have riled up neighborhoods in Mountain View, spurring complaints of noise, garbage and loss of parking. Some neighbors have criticized hosts who convert residences into the “Airbnb house” dormitories for dozens of tech workers. Other landlords have converted swaths of older apartments into Airbnb rentals to circumvent the city’s rental control rules. There is no sign that any of these large-scale hosts have signed up with the city, according to the city’s data.

VTA

responsibility for improving countywide transportation from the local priorities of their political base. In particular, the San Jose City Council, which controls five seats on the VTA board, has been accused of hogging funding to prop up light rail and BART.

Many VTA members admit they’re overwhelmed with too many responsibilities, making it impossible for them to read every staff report or attend every meeting. Some board members have extremely poor attendance — in some cases, members have skipped every meeting of committees they sit on. Supervisor Dave Cortese has attended barely more than 1 out of 4 board meetings since joining the VTA board in 2008, according to the agency’s published statistics, which includes time when he served as an alternate board member.

The independent review found there are several relatively easy fixes that VTA could implement. In particular, the board’s 17 active committees could be consolidated, streamlined or eliminated to save time. Standing committees, which oversee responsibilities like capital projects or congestion management, should be given more authority to approve expenditures without bringing everything to the full board, the report recommended. Similarly, board members should face some minimum requirement for attendance, and consultants recommended each member should get an annual “scorecard” that grades their performance for things like participation, leadership and relevant knowledge.

Other needed board improvements would likely take more work. The consultant report pointed out VTA members needed to draft an updated master strategic plan, and use that to guide their future decision-making.

Most difficult of all, the independent report urged the VTA board to consider taking its process for appointing directors back to the drawing board. Prospective board members should be first vetted for their qualifications and commitments to ensure they can fulfill their duties before being nominated for the job, the report said.

The recommendations will be taken up by the full VTA board of directors at a future meeting.
By Keating Rhoads

I
n the Dec. 6 edition, the Mountain View Voice reported on landlord rent control fee delinquencies. As noted in the article, the fee obligations — $101 per rental unit per year — are codified in the Community Stabilization and Fair Rent Act (CSFRA), also known as Measure V. The delinquencies are large, totaling over $100,000. Forty-thousand dollars of the delinquency is due to non-payment by Carmel Partners, owners of The Village apartments on San Antonio Road. A sample of rents currently/recently on the market shows annual rents of $44,000 for a one-bedroom and almost $62,000 for a two-bedroom. Based on the same sample, I estimate annual rental income at The Village, after a 5% vacancy rate assumption, to exceed $15 million. In his article, the reporter noted the announcement of the sale of the apartment complex at a value twice the 2015 assessed value and that the delinquencies are not “likely” a matter of inadequate cash flow. The above data leads me to the same conclusion. To Carmel Partners and/or their acquirer, it is past time to pay up — including late fees. This is a legal obligation to the city of Mountain View and its residents.

The Rental Housing Committee (RHC), which administers the city’s rent control program, has been well-managed in its almost three-year existence. As provided in the CSFRA, the city provided start-up funds to carry the RHC until the landlord fees began to be collected. Since then, 100% of those start-up funds were repaid, and the committee has funded its own operating needs. Said another way, the RHC has not cost the city one penny.

The only management concerns are those uncollected fees. This has all the appearances of normal collection activity. City staff has offered to help the RHC in its collection efforts. The CSFRA explicitly provides for penalties for landlord noncompliance and allows the RHC the assistance of the city attorney if needed. Committee members who are hesitant should bear in mind their fiduciary duty to Mountain View residents. It is not the RHC that is making an issue of the fees, it is the delinquent landlords. Let’s get these amounts from Carmel and others, collected.

Last, it’s worth noting that the City Council-backed Measure D to amend the CSFRA is coming up on the March ballot. Under the first three years of the CSFRA, rents increased an average of 3.5%. Expect two to three times that amount under the council plan, since renters will be asked to share capital costs of occupancy. Note as well that tucked inside that ballot measure is a little item having to do with RHC membership. The council has decided to eliminate the requirement in the current law that committee members be Mountain View residents. Considering the challenges of getting out-of-town landlordsto pay their fees, we should not vote for Measure D, which would allow landlords like Carmel Partners, who refuse to comply with our law, to run the RHC.

Keating Rhoads is a Mountain View resident.

WISH I WAS THAT CLEVER

I’m impressed with the deal that Federal Realty has gotten from the city of Mountain View and the Los Altos School District (“LASD finalizes $135M land deal for new Mountain View school,” Dec. 27). Federal Realty is getting, according to my antiquarian mathematics, a rate of return of 156% per year. I wish I could do this well on my investments that typically return 4% to 8% a year. And this is for property not bought in the depths of the Great Depression, or even property bought in the depths of the Great Recession of 2007/2008, but in the reasonably prosperous era of 2015. But I assume we have to defer to the great economists and business folks on the Mountain View City Council, who presumably know why Federal Realty was paid so handsomely, rather than having its property seized by eminent domain.

David Lewis

Oak Street

CHANGE THE NAME OF OUR CITY

The City Council just green-lighted a seven-story office building on the 1-acre parcel at the corner of San Antonio Road and California Street, where the Milk Pail Market is (“Council greensights seven-story San Antonio office project,” Dec. 6). Also, a new giant office building is going in at the intersection of Rengstorff Avenue and El Camino Real, in addition to all of the other tall projects in the works along the El Camino corridor. So I propose we change the name of our city to No View, which would be an accurate description.

Ellyn Berner

Fordham Way

What’s on your mind?

From City Hall politics and the schools to transportation and other pressing issues, the Voice 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@MV-Voice.com. Or snail-mail them to: Mountain View Voice, P.O. Box 405, Mountain View, CA 94042.
Story by Elena Kadvany
Photos by Magali Gauthier

Only in Silicon Valley does a longtime tech startup founder find a second career in a chocolate-making robot.

Nate Saal studied molecular biophysics and biochemistry at Yale University after graduating from Palo Alto High School in 1990. After returning to Palo Alto, he quickly shifted from science to the internet, founding what he says was the first web-based software updating service in 1996. He went on to start more technology companies and later worked for CNET and Cisco.

But these days, he’s immersed in chocolate — specifically, chocolate made by a countertop device that he created called CocoTerra. The sleek white device, which looks like a large, futuristic coffee maker, uses algorithms, hardware and a smartphone app to transform cocoa nibs, milk powder, cocoa powder and sugar into chocolate in about two hours.

Saal has high hopes for the machine, which has yet to be released. In the age of automation, where robots are making pizza and ramen and delivering our food, he sees CocoTerra as doing something different: using technology to deepen rather than disrupt people’s connection to how their food is made.

“We’re not trying to slap technology for technology’s sake on top of that to abstract it away, to take creativity away,” he said. “We’re trying to actually create a whole new category of people who can now make chocolate.”

While Saal’s professional career has focused on technology, he has always filled his weekends with homegrown food science, like tending to his vegetable garden, keeping bees and growing grapes and olives to make wine and olive oil from scratch. He’s fascinated by the “deep science” of these activities.

Making chocolate, however, was not in his repertoire. It wasn’t until he took his brother-in-law, who works in the coffee business, to a chocolate tasting several years ago, and a conversation about the similarities between the two industries got him thinking. His brother hypothesized that home coffee machines have allowed more people to understand and appreciate coffee in a way that chocolate hasn’t experienced. People did make chocolate at home, but it was a lengthy process that required having several expensive appliances, he found.

“There’s a bread machine, an ice cream maker and a juicer and a pasta maker and a tea brewer and a coffee maker — every major food category has a home appliance. What I discovered very quickly was there is no such thing (for chocolate),” Saal said.

He educated himself by going to chocolate-making classes, including a boot camp at Madre Chocolate in Hawaii. Back in Palo Alto, he and a team got to work designing several iterations of a device that could combine all steps in the chocolate-making process — grinding, refining, conching for a smooth texture, tempering and molding — in one machine.

Above: Nate Saal adds cocoa nibs to CocoTerra, the device he created to make chocolate from scratch at home. Top: A variety of chocolates, from white to dark, made in a CocoTerra machine.

See COCOA, page 20
It typically grinds the single-origin cocoa nibs for about half an hour, using stainless steel balls, then refines the cocoa butter, sugar and milk powder before tempering. Tempering, Saal enthusiastically explained, is a chemical process that involves cooling the ingredients to a specific temperature that will create a specific structure of seed crystal in the cocoa butter molecules. The crystals solidify, creating shiny, hard chocolate. A patented centrifuge inside the machine cools and spins the chocolate to remove bubbles.

The final result is a ring-shaped, half-pound mold of chocolate, rather than the traditional rectangular bar.

On the back end, technology allows a level of customization that CocoTerra’s creators hope will make the device as appealing for experts as for novices. A cloud-based recipe system, accessible online or via an app, guides you from start to finish in a recipe. People can either default to CocoTerra’s recipes, such as 62% dark chocolate or milk chocolate with almonds, or customize them, from level of sweetness and creaminess, to added flavors and ingredients, to the tempering temperature.

CocoTerra will sell the base ingredients directly to customers, focusing on fair trade, ethically grown nibs, or people can use their own. People advanced enough to roast and shell their own cacao beans could still do that, put them into the machine and then create their own recipes.

Producing quality chocolate in two hours is “jaw-dropping” to many in the chocolate industry, Saal said.

“I thought they were totally crazy when I first talked to them on the phone,” John Scharffenberger told CNBC. Scharffenberger, who co-founded Scharffen Berger in San Francisco in 1997 before small batch, artisan chocolate was a thing, is an investor and calls CocoTerra “a natural extension of the craft chocolate movement.”

The company won’t disclose a price for the machine, which they claim is the world’s first tabletop chocolate maker. CocoTerra has raised more than $2 million in investments and is now focused on a larger round to fund the release of the device.

“This is about the evolution of technology to make chocolate. But it’s also making it accessible,” Saal said. “We’re bringing that to people by using smart mechanical engineering and software to make it accessible so that you can actually now focus on things like the flavor and recipe and the look and the design and the craft of it.”

Email Elena Kadvany at ekadvany@paweekly.com

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THE YEAR IN FILM

THE BEST, WORST AND MOST MEMORABLE MOVIES OF 2019

By Peter Canavese

This year, the line between the big and small screen, between cinema and television, blurred more than ever. Big-spending Netflix — emboldened by last year’s Oscar-acknowledged “Roma” — led the charge again with “The Irishman,” “Marriage Story,” “The Two Popes,” “I Lost My Body,” “The King,” and “Atlantics,” among others, while Hulu continued to program new feature films and Disney+ and Apple+ entered the streaming-service fray. This year, one could watch Willem Dafoe tangle with Robert Pattison in “The Lighthouse” at the local multiplex, or stay home and watch Dafoe fall in love with his sled dog in Disney+’s “Togo,” a big-screen-quality, family adventure film instantly watchable on anything from a phone to a giant-size 4K TV.

What does it mean for cinema when movies as dumb and/or chintzy as “Stuber” and “The Curse of La Llorona” compete for butts in seats with TV series as smart and/or cinematic as HBO’s “Watchmen” and Disney+’s “The Mandalorian?” Choice, of course. Perhaps too much of it. Truly, there is something for everyone in today’s screen landscape. Want blockbuster movie? “Avengers: Endgame” set the new standard by skillfully wrapping up the initial phases of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (before “Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker” not so satisfactorily concluded the initial “Star Wars” saga). Want intimate human-scale drama? I’ve got the Mr. Rogers flick “A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood” and indie film “The Souvenir” right here. Animated family movies? Have a “Toy Story 4” or a “Missing Link.” Foreign film lover? We’ve got you covered with everything from “Parasite” to “Pain and Glory.” “Rocketman” came along to shame those who thought “Bohemian Rhapsody” was the best of musical biopics, and “Cats” crawled into theaters to face the music with Broadway lovers. Even a good old-fashioned ensemble murder mystery came along in “Knives Out,” to tide us over until Kenneth Branagh’s Poirot returns.

In other words, not much has really changed (although TV’s “Breaking Bad” suddenly became a movie — both streamed and in select theaters). But as the sheer volume of films and television increases, audiences must work harder to dig up the hidden gems (not to be confused with “Uncut Gems,” the wild new Adam Sandler dramedy). That’s where the line between the big and small screen, between cinema and television, blurred more than ever.

In a year of cinematic stunts, like the long-take constructions of “1917” and “Long Day’s Journey into Night” (which added 3D into the bargain) and the de-aging of everyone from Robert De Niro (“The Irishman”) to Samuel L. Jackson (“Captain Marvel”), the fundamental things apply as time goes by: a dimly lit room, an illuminated screen and a story that appeals to our emotions. And away we go...

THE TOP 10 FILMS OF 2019

10. ‘The Mountain’

As downbeat as they come, Rick Alverson’s rigorous “The Mountain” functions as an eccentric commentary on the horror of historical ignorance and the pain of existence in a world that’s gone insane. With just a dollop of deadpan black comedy, Alverson plays out a corrupted mentor-mentee relationship between the emotionally prone, newly orphaned Andy (Tye Sheridan) and a semi-charming lobotomist (Jeff Goldblum) as they travel the backroads spreading traumatic brain injury to the mentally ill and the socially ostracized. The year’s most unsettling American self-portrait.

9. ‘End of the Century’

Writer-director Lucia Castro’s deceptively simple story of chance encounters, possibility and regret provides comment on gay romantic culture (and its sometime collateral damage) and how love and sex play out on individual but intersecting timelines. In 84 minutes, Castro dramatizes the lovers’ two meetings (at either end of a 20-year gap), a flashback and a daydream to clarify the tension between the power of desire and the indifference of reality. Naturalistic performances (by Juan Barberini and Ramon Pujol) and direction make this zoo-kan on time linger in the mind and heart.

8. ‘The Souvenir’

Joanna Hogg’s agonizingly honest and mature semi-autobiographical drama explores the agonizing self-delusions and experience of youth. As Hogg’s stand-in, Honor Swinton Byrne comes to hard-won realizations in her vocational and personal lives, each informing the other as the film student succumbs to the overtures of an older lover (Tom Burke) who’s harboring a dark secret (Byrne’s mother Tilda Swinton plays along as Byrne’s uneasy screen mother). Hogg’s understated approach and self-examined privilege accumulate for a distinctive take on the young-adult coming-of-age narrative.

7. ‘The Last Black Man in San Francisco’

Joe Talbot’s impressive debut serves up a highly personal and locally resonant story that begins as a screeched on Jonathan Majors deliver breakout performances, while Talbot fearlessly creates a heightened reality that’s also grounded in some uncomfortable truths about American life — particularly its insistence on buying and selling stolen property to establish and maintain the land of the free, home of the brave.

6. ‘Long Day’s Journey Into Night’

In a year of strong Chinese imports (see also “An Elephant Sitting Still” and “Ash is Purest White”), Bi Gan gave us the greatest stunner with his visionary and transportive neo-noir (natively titled “Last Evenings on Earth”). A classic “cherchez la femme” narrative gradually reveals itself to be a meditation on untrustworthy memory, as well as unconscious and cellullide dreams. As such, an amateur detective’s plodding path to find his lost love leads to an astonishing “one-take” 3D dream sequence forming the film’s final 50 minutes. A lyrical, gorgeous, but devastating reminder of precious time in the vein of director Wong Kar-wai.

5. ‘The Irishman’

Flawed, but still essential, Martin Scorsese’s culminating statement on American life through a mobster lens appears at first to be a neat capper to a thematic trilogy formed with “Goodfellas” and “Casino,” stories that likewise run on the insider knowledge of mob protagonists, sourced from nonfiction books. But the pivotal truths in question in “The Irishman” may not be true at all, which little concerns Scorsese, star-producer Robert De Niro and ultimately audiences. For here is a Shakespearean history laced with the tragic limits of loyalty. Gifted with great performances, elegantly crafted, innovative and pure, uncut Scorsese.

See TOP FILMS, page 22
TOP FILMS

4. "Portrait of a Lady on Fire"

Céline Sciamma’s doomed but rapturous romance patiently observes the spark, the fire and the sad extinguishment of love. As William Butler Yeats noted, “love comes in at the eye,” dramatized here as a painter (Noémie Merlant) who falls in love with her subject (Adèle Haenel). Beautifully realized, “Portrait of a Lady on Fire” works as a feminist historical drama (foregrounding customarily forgotten late-18th century female painters), but soars as a love story of swoony beauty.

3. ‘A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood’

Marielle Heller’s finely sensitive Mr. Rogers dramedy gets the magical appeal of Fred Rogers — children’s show host, ordained minister, husband, father and friend to all. As played by Tony Hawk, Rogers could have made the convincing center of a hagiography. Macat Fitzerman-Blue and Noah Harpaler’s ingenious adaptation of Tom Junod’s “Esquire” profile “Can You Say... Hero?” sees Rogers as the most extraordinary kind of human: capable, like all of us, of succumbing to anger and selfishness, but choosing again and again to look beyond himself and truly see and hear each person he encounters. In doing so, Mr. Rogers helps to heal the temporarily broken (embodied by Matthew Rhys’ world-weary journalist).

2. ‘Parasite’

The year’s sharpest comedy, Bong Joon-ho’s “Parasite,” examined the economic chutes and ladders that drive and plague a capitalist society. Bong mines both the comic and poigniant possibilities of his carefully unfolded fable on economic inequality, as family exploits family exploits family. Keen production design, insinuating camerawork, and well-calibrated performances (including that of Bong regular Song Kang-ho) helped this South Korean stunner to cross over as multiplex fare likely to score not only a Foreign Film Oscar but a Best Picture nomination.

1. ‘The Lighthouse’

Robert Eggers’ blinding vision, set in a psychossexual landscape of a mind on the brink, has everything we go to the movies for: meticulously effective sight and sound, confident storytelling, humor and horror, dream and nightmare. One of the all-time two-hour adventure, flat attempts at humor, and generic-brand songs! This tedious, talent-deficient “Lego Movie” rip-off.

Of course, there’s plenty more to remember beyond 2019’s highest highs and lowest lows. Read on for our take on the best good guys, the worst baddies, the top documentaries and the most magical animated movies.

Email Peter Canavese at pcanavese@bcp.org

RUNNERS-UP


THE BOTTOM FIVE

5. ‘El Chicano’

This brownsploration actioner billed as the “first Latino superhero movie” teases itself as a Mexican American “Batman” but has the moral sense of “The Punisher.” “El Chicano” wastes a fine actor (leading man Raul Castillo) as it mechanically goes through its painfully dull, occasionally gruesome paces.

4. ‘The Art of Racing in the Rain’

One of three — count ‘em, three — 2019 films in the increasingly popular genre of soggy dog movies where we hear the pooh’s thoughts in voice-over. Dog lovers, start your engines and turn off your brains for this Nicholas Sparks dog tale that will grab at your heartstrings.

3. ‘Rambo: Last Blood’

Co-writer/star Sylvester Stallone goes back to the bloody wellness with this sadistic sequel in his popular vigilante-killer franchise. Mechanical and morally wrong, and long removed from the day when John Rambo was more of a character than an icon, this one’s strictly for those who enjoy watching self-righteous murders in bulk.

2. ‘Cars’

A special kind of bad, this adaptation of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s famous/infamous spandex-and-whiskers stage musical becomes an unintentionally
**CONCERTS**
Free Organ Recital Weekly noon-time organ recitals on the two Flentrop organs at All Saints Episcopal Church. Each recital will include at least one work by J.S. Bach. Tuesdays through May 26, 12:15-12:45 p.m. Free. All Saints Episcopal Church, 555 Waverley St., Palo Alto. aslmusic.org

**Master Singina Chamber Orchestra** The Master Singina Chamber Orchestra performs pieces by Respighi, Holst and Mozart. Jan. 11, 7:30 p.m. $15-$25; discount for seniors and students. Palo Alto High School Performing Arts Center, 50 Embacadero Road, Palo Alto. mastersinfonia.org

**MUSIC**
Open Mic Performers sing in front of a supportive audience and meet fellow musicians and artists during Open Mic Mondays at Red Rock Coffee. Ongoing; Mondays at 7 p.m. Red Rock Coffee, 201 Castro St., Mountain View. redrockcoffee.org

**TALKS & LECTURES**
Kindest Workshop Mentor and coach Priya Kasturi teaches how to bring a kindness workshop to your community together and practice kindness. Ongoing; Sundays at 9:30 a.m. $50. Menlo-Atherton Performing Arts Collective, 328 Lomita Drive, Stanford. journeyofthesimorgh.bpt.me

**MUSEUMS & EXHIBITS**
Baylugs Lego Holiday Show Bay Area Lego User Group and the Bay Area Lego Train Club co-host the annual holiday show, featuring train layouts, Bay Area landmarks, castles, miniature cities, sculptures, portraits and more all made out of Legos. Through Jan. 5, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Free. Gamble Garden, 1431 Waverley St., Palo Alto. gamblenewgarden.org

**HOME & GARDEN**
Baylugs Lego Holiday Show Bay Area Lego User Group and the Bay Area Lego Train Club co-host the annual holiday show, featuring train layouts, Bay Area landmarks, castles, miniature cities, sculptures, portraits and more all made out of Legos. Through Jan. 5, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Free. Gamble Garden, 1431 Waverley St., Palo Alto. gamblenewgarden.org

**OUTDOOR RECREATION**
Baylugs Lego Holiday Show Bay Area Lego User Group and the Bay Area Lego Train Club co-host the annual holiday show, featuring train layouts, Bay Area landmarks, castles, miniature cities, sculptures, portraits and more all made out of Legos. Through Jan. 5, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Free. Gamble Garden, 1431 Waverley St., Palo Alto. gamblenewgarden.org

**DANCE**
Journey of the Simorgh A dance and music concert by the Simorgh Dance Collective, adapted from Farid ud-Din Attar’s Persian epic, “The Conference of the Birds.” Jan. 11, 7 p.m. $35-$50. Menlo-Atherton Performing Arts Center, 355 Middlefield Road, Atherton. journeyofthesimorgh.bpt.me

**Health & Wellness**
Silicon Valley Basketball Silicon Valley Basketball opens its weekly, year-round, pickup basketball games, welcoming all skills, ages, genders, etc. Ongoing. Sundays at 9:30 a.m. $15 monthly fee. Graham Middle School, 1175 Castro St., Mountain View. facebook.com

**HOME & GARDEN**
Western Horticultural Society Meeting Guest speaker Aaron Ryan talks about the secret to successful succulent propagation at this month’s meeting. Jan. 8, 7:30-9 p.m. $10; free for members. Shoup Park Garden House, 400 University Ave., Los Altos, westaltoshortpark.org

**COMMUNITY GROUPS**
Wright Wednesdays A casual writing space for writers of all levels. Jan. 8, 7-9 p.m. Free. Los Altos Library, 135 S. San Antonio Road, Los Altos. scs-edventure.info

**AUTHOR EVENTS**
Abigail Hing Wen’s ‘Loveboat, Taipei’ Author Abigail Hing Wen debuts her highly anticipated romantic comedy book “Loveboat, Taipei.” Jan. 6, 7-9 p.m. Free. Kepler’s Books, 1010 El Camino Real, Menlo Park. keplers.org


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**Worry about Home Inspection Pitfalls Before You Put Your House Up for Sale**
Mountain View - According to industry experts, there are over 33 physical problems that will come under scrutiny during a home inspection when your home is for sale. A new report has been prepared which identifies the eleven most common of these problems, and what you should know about them before you list your home for sale.

Whether you own an old home or a brand new one, there are a number of things that can fall short of requirements during a home inspection. If not identified and dealt with, any of these 11 items could cost you dearly in terms of repair. That’s why it’s critical that you read this report before you list your home. If you wait until the building inspector flags these issues for you, you will almost certainly experience costly delays in the close of your home sale or, worse, turn prospective buyers away altogether. In most cases, you can make a reasonable pre-inspection yourself if you know what you’re looking for, and knowing what you’re looking for can help you prevent little problems from growing into costly and unmanageable ones.

To help homeowners deal with this issue before their homes are listed, a free report entitled “11 Things You Need to Know to Pass Your Home Inspection” has been compiled which explains the issues involved.

To hear a brief recorded message about how to order your FREE copy of this report call toll-free 1-833-929-1261 and enter 2003. You can call any time, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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Your home is where our heart is