

Mountain View VOICE



On the fringe
Visiting artist's work explores shifting perceptions
ARTS & EVENTS | P.29

OCTOBER 27, 2006 VOLUME 14 NO. 44

INSIDE: WEEKEND | PAGE 21

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NICHOLAS JENSEN

GRIM TIDINGS: *The Grim Reaper welcomes passers-by to check out the ghoulish creatures littering Dan Pitchford's front yard for Halloween. Pitchford's home is at the corner of Oak and Mercy streets in Mountain View.*

Letter alleges retirees scam

MV WHISMAN ROCKED BY ANONYMOUS CHARGES OF PUFFED-UP BENEFITS

By Alexa Tondreau

An anonymous letter alleging fraud in the Mountain View Whisman School District sent ripples through the school's community in a week that ended with former Superintendent Eleanor Yick, implicated in the letter, leaving the country for Ireland until Thanksgiving.

Though it is not clear why she left, Yick did issue a terse statement before her departure, refuting the "irresponsible allegations" as the work of "a disgruntled employee."

Yick's statement continued, "Individual pieces of data have been taken out of context and are

not as alleged."

Neither Yick nor former Assistant Superintendent Modrite Archibeque, also accused of benefits fraud, could be reached for additional comment.

The letter, which was addressed to the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office, prompted Superintendent Maurice Ghysels to call for an investigation into the matter by the California State Teachers' Retirement System (CalSTRS).

"Individual pieces of data have been taken out of context and are not as alleged."

ELEANOR YICK
FORMER SUPERINTENDENT

Ghysels said in an e-mail that he is still "waiting for a response to my verbal and written request" from the retirement system and is not clear on the timeline of the investigation, which will include a lengthy audit of the district's retire-

ment records.

CalSTRS says that audits of this kind consist of looking for anomalies among the final compensation reports of retired members in the district and evaluating the accuracy of compensation amounts.

In this case, the compensation in question is Yick's and Archibeque's final reported salary. The anonymous letter accuses them of rolling the cost of their district health benefits into their gross salary, a process termed "spiking." Because district retirement benefits are based on an employee's final salary, this alleged "spiking" would have authorized Yick and Archibeque to receive more compensation in retirement than they deserved.



Wine time at local tasting, see page 13

► See **MV WHISMAN**, page 10

Council meeting full of twists

ANNEX DEBATE HEATS UP, BUT MEMBERS FREEZE ON SEVERAL MOTIONS

By Daniel DeBolt

After an intense study session on the Cuesta Annex last Tuesday, council members gave no hint as to how they will vote Nov. 14 when the issue returns to council.

During the two hour session, the debate between ball fields, open space and some kind of compromise raged on in the public comment period. When asked to raise their hands, open space advocates made up about 75 percent of the audience, while ball field advocates made roughly 25 percent.

Steve Coyle, a consultant hired by the city, presented the four main plans from the Annex, distilled from 11 designed in two community workshops. The plans ranged from no changes to the open space ("Plan A") to just over half of it being used for ball

fields ("Plan D").

"Most people suggested some type of balance, I believe," Coyle said, referring to the opinion of workshop participants who, he claimed, favored

a compromise between open space and playing fields.

Open space advocates, however, disagreed with this assessment.

► See **COUNCIL**, page 8

Candidates grilled on KMVT

By Daniel DeBolt

Mountain View's community television station, KMVT, held its council candidate forum last Tuesday night, which touched on several issues the candidates had not discussed in depth previously, such as medical marijuana and immigrant laborers.

But the most sharply worded

discussion was over development and quality of life in Mountain View, which the candidates have hashed out many times before.

"Development should not be driven by numbers," said Ronit Bryant, a former parks and recreation commissioner.

The candidates were asked what the ideal maximum population



► See **DEBATE**, page 9



Mary Marley



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Jack Earl



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Judy Mulenburg



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Voices

A R O U N D T O W N

Asked in Downtown Mountain View. Pictures and interviews by Amber Cleave.

What's the scariest thing in Mountain View?



"Being stranded downtown at night by myself."

Jessica Lagman, Mountain View



"The lack of recycling receptacles for businesses."

Carole Traeger, San Jose



"Missing the last bus and having to walk home."

Tony Schwartz, Sunnyvale



"Getting hit by the train."

Megan Trees, Belmont



"I love Mountain View. Nothing is scary here."

Tomas Aguilar, Mountain View

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- Accountability to Mountain View Residents

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Silicon Valley Association of Realtors · California Apartment Association · Tri-County
Mountain View Housing Council · Silicon Valley LGBT Democratic Club · Congresswoman Anna Eshoo
Santa Clara County Supervisor Liz Kniss · Former Mayor Jim Cochran · Former Mayor Art Takahara
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Have a question for [Voices Around Town](http://VoicesAroundTown?)? E-mail it to editor@mv-voice.com

■ QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“Most people suggested some type of balance, I believe.”

— STEVE COYLE

A CONSULTANT HIRED BY THE CITY, ON THE DEBATE OF OPEN SPACE VERSUS BALL PARKS FOR CUESTA ANNEX. MANY PEOPLE DISPUTED COYLE'S REMARK, SAYING THAT A CLEAR MAJORITY FAVORED OPEN SPACE.

■ CRIME WATCH

ASSAULT WITH A DEADLY WEAPON, 900 BLOCK TROPHY DR., 10/17

According to police, Fred Ernest, 23, drove to a friend's house that Tuesday at around 5 p.m. He walked into the garage, grabbed an electric guitar, and swung it twice at the resident's head.

Police said the man was able to block both blows. Then, with the help of friends, they were able to restrict the crazed guitar-slinger until officers arrived. Ernest was arrested and booked.

ROBBERY, SEARS, SAN ANTONIO RD., 10/18

At about 7:55 p.m., a man was exiting the south doors of Sears when he was punched by one of two men loitering outside the store. The other loiterer grabbed

and ripped the shopper's right rear pocket, stole his wallet and fled the parking lot.

Currently, there are no suspects. The two robbers are described as black males in their 20s, wearing baseball caps and sports-related clothing.

ASSAULT WITH A DEADLY WEAPON, CALIFORNIA/ ESCUELA, 10/22

On Sunday at 9:06 p.m., four young boys harassed a man walking on California Street. One of the boys intentionally bumped into the man on the street and began to verbally taunt him. Another boy then threw a glass bottle at the man, barely missing him. All four boys, ages 14, 16, 16 and 17, were located by police, arrested and booked in Juvenile Hall.

■ POLICE LOG

ATTEMPTED SUICIDE
100 block Beacon St., 10/20

AUTO BURGLARY
Trader Joe's, 10/22

BATTERY
Crittenden Ln./N. Shoreline Blvd., 10/19
N. Shoreline Blvd./Villa St., 10/19
200 block S. Shoreline Blvd., 10/19
Fire Station No. 5, 10/21
200 block Castro St., 10/22
1600 block Lloyd Way., 10/22

COMMERCIAL BURGLARY
Wal-Mart, 10/20
1300 block W. El Camino Real, 10/20
1200 block Pear Ave., 10/22

GRAND THEFT
1600 block Yale Dr., 10/16
300 block Villa St., 10/16
Wal-Mart, 10/16
Park Plaza Apts., 10/17
2300 West Evelyn Ave., 10/17
90 block Flynn Ave., 10/21
Sears Department Store, 10/21
80 block High School Way, 10/22

STOLEN VEHICLE
1300 block Shorebird Way, 10/16
North Rengstorff Ave./San Louis Ave., 10/17
1600 block California St., 10/19
700 block West Middlefield, 10/22

VANDALISM
200 block Hope St., 10/17
Safeway, California St., 10/17

■ CORRECTION

An obituary on Harold H. Frye in last week's *Voice* incorrectly stated that he was once manager of Colonial Mortuary. In fact,

Frye was the manager and coach of a Little League team sponsored by Colonial Mortuary. The *Voice* regrets the error.



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- ✓ **The Environment**
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- ✓ **Education**
(Endorsed by Mountain View Whisman School District Members Gloria Higgins, Rosemary Sias Roquero and Fiona Walter)

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Squirrels of yore

By Don Frances

STUDENT OF HISTORY
Birgit Werner recently wrote in with an amazing historical tidbit:

I happened to be reading the book "Milestones: A History of Mountain View, California" by Mary Jo Ignoffo and came across this passage which seems particularly apropos. It's a quote from the diary of Alfred Doten from about 1860 (the gentleman was a farm foreman on land currently occupied by Moffett Field).

"The squirrels are the grand pest of this valley. They are almost as bad as the locusts of Egypt, or the grasshoppers of Utah, in their devastation on the vegetable and grain crop."

He also calls the squirrels "more plentiful than the rats in San Francisco."

It's nice to see that some things, at least, haven't changed in 150 years!

Too true, Birgit — when will San Francisco take care of its rat problem?

MEANWHILE, former health writer and soon-to-be globetrotter Diana Reynolds Roome wrote in to tell of an outstanding local physician getting his due at CSMA:

"R. Hewlett Lee, MD, was celebrated for his lifelong work as a world-class surgeon and compassionate physician at a gala event organized by the Peninsula Stroke Association, which Lee helped found in 1999. The PSA recognized Lee's multiple talents, his humor, and his human touch, as well as his achievement in pioneering lumpectomy, a surgical technique that helps preserve the breast for women

► See **EDITOR'S DESK**, page 14



VERONICA WEBER

Kelly Rohlfs takes out her "weekend cruiser" with dogs Bella and Chloe in tow.

Carless — and doing fine

MOUNTAIN VIEW FAMILY SAYS LIFE IS CHEAPER, LESS HECTIC ON A BIKE

By Daniel DeBolt

A ping-pong table blocks the driveway in front of Sam and Kelly Rohlfs' Mountain View home. That might be an inconvenience for other

families — after all, the car has to go somewhere.

But the Rohlfses aren't like other families: They don't have a car.

The Rohlfses decided last fall to get rid of their last vehicle

after feeling for years like it dominated their lives. When depreciation, maintenance and car payments were factored in, their 1999 BMW cost them

► See **CARLESS**, page 15

County budget outlook worsens

SUPES HEAR PROJECTION OF \$500 MILLION DEFICIT IN COMING YEARS

Bay City News

Last week, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors took another look at the county's projected budget for the next four years. The results were sobering.

From 2008-11, the county anticipates a deficit of \$504.1 million, including \$201.6 million in 2007-08, \$110.7 million in 2008-09, \$88.4 million in 2009-10 and \$103.4 million in 2010-11.

The county's general fund budget over those years is expected to fluctuate between \$1.99 billion in 2007-08 to \$2.2 billion in 2010-11. Yet while revenues are expected to steadily increase over the next five years, so are expenditures, which are estimated to jump from \$2.19 billion in 2007-08 to \$2.58 billion

► See **BUDGET**, page 16

HOME GROWN

Top: Jim McLaughlin of Mountain View stands with co-pumpkin grower Karen Haynes, of El Granada, in front of their two largest specimens. The two pumpkins — the one on the left is 498 pounds, the one on the right, marked "BB" for "Barry Bonds," is 367 pounds — were grown in McLaughlin's backyard this summer, and entered in the recent Pumpkin Festival at Half Moon Bay. They were eventually sold at the festival for \$125 (the smaller one was donated to the American Legion).

Bottom: This series of photos of the "Barry Bonds" pumpkin, grown in McLaughlin's backyard, shows how quickly they can grow. The photos were taken about one week apart beginning in early July. A regular-sized basketball is set alongside the pumpkin to give an idea of scale.

McLaughlin, who teaches local composting classes, said he used only homemade compost to grow the pumpkins. Classes are finished for this year, but will restart in early 2007.

McLaughlin said the county is looking for volunteers to teach classes on composting as part of its Master Composters Program. To learn more about the program, visit www.reducewaste.org or call the "Rotline" at (408) 918-4640.



PHOTO CREDITS: SKIP MOON - TOP, JIM MCLAUGHLIN - BOTTOM

No contest plea in DUI killing of cyclist

FREMONT MAN COULD GET 28 YEARS FOR DEATH OF MOUNTAIN VIEW RESIDENT JOHN PECKHAM

By Alexa Tondreau

A Fremont man who killed Mountain View resident John Peckham with his car pleaded no contest Tuesday to vehicular manslaughter, and could face up to 28 years in prison.

Chevelle Bailey, 41, entered the legal equivalent of a guilty plea to all of the charges including vehicular manslaughter, driving under the influence while causing injury and a hit-and-run charge. Friends, family and members of Peckham's cycling club filled Superior Court Judge Rise Jones Pichon's courtroom in Palo Alto during the hearing.

Peckham, who was an avid bicyclist, was killed by Bailey on Sept. 8 while on a lunchtime ride in the Palo Alto Hills. He was on

a training ride with his cycling club and rode ahead of the group before being hit.

According to court records, Bailey was under the influence of methamphetamines and alcohol that day, and hit Peckham on Old Page Mill Road at an estimated speed of 60 to 90 miles per hour.

Witnesses reportedly told police that after the crash, Bailey drank a beer at the scene and bragged about his drinking.

Supervising District Attorney Jay Boyarsky indicated after the hearing that the evidence against Bailey was very strong, and that he would seek the maximum sentence, or close to it. Bailey already has a robbery conviction and a DUI on his record.

Hundreds of members of Peckham's club recently held a silent memorial ride for their friend, which ended at the site of his death. ■

E-mail Alexa Tondreau at atondreau@mv-voice.com

Lieber moves up political ladder

FORMER MAYOR COMES HOME FOR SWEARING-IN CEREMONY AS NEW SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

By Daniel DeBolt

Sally Lieber, former mayor of Mountain View and current state legislator, returned home Monday to be sworn in as speaker pro tempore, the second-highest position in the state Assembly.

The official ceremony took place in the Mountain View Center for Performing Arts. A few hundred people showed up to witness the event, including Lieutenant Gov. Cruz Bustamante and other legislators.

Lieber started her first term in office in 2002. She was appointed assistant speaker pro tempore in 2004, the third-highest position in the Assembly, by Speaker Fabian Nunez. Her duties will be similar to that position, but as assistant speaker pro tempore she ran 24 percent of floor sessions, now she will run 75 percent.

"She's smart, energetic, and works hard," Nunez said. "She's been a fighter for our state, and

I know she'll bring that spirit to her new role."

At the event, Bustamante commended Lieber for her political accomplishments. There was also Native American dancing, musical performances and other speakers.

Lieber is the third woman in California history to hold the position of speaker pro tempore, but the first to do so in her first term.

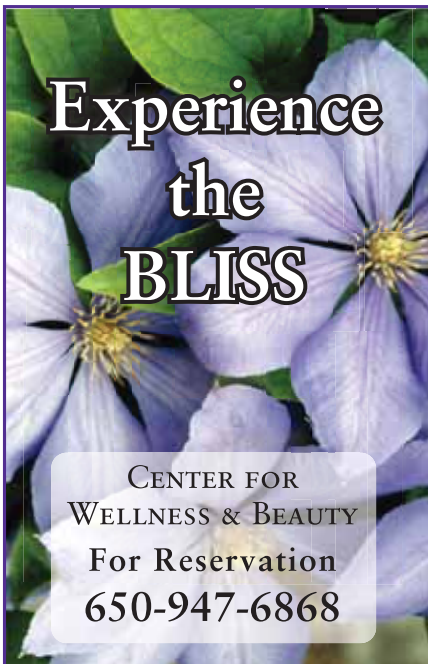
When asked if she would ever become speaker, she said, "maybe in my next life" because she and Nunez both joined the Assembly at the same time. "I'm a big supporter of his," she said.

Only one woman has ever been speaker, and she was recalled shortly after her appointment, Lieber said.

Lieber — who represents Mountain View, Sunnyvale, Cupertino and parts of San Jose and Santa Clara — said she has noticed a lack of women in power in the state Capitol.

"It really strikes you that we need more women going into public service," she said. ■

E-mail Daniel DeBolt at ddebolt@mv-voice.com



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Lady Lancers make strong showing at Shoreline

ST. FRANCIS GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY TEAMS TAKE FIRST IN WCAL II MEET

By Amber Cleave

The St. Francis High School girls cross country teams recently took first place at the 2nd West Catholic Athletic League (WCAL II) meet at Shoreline Amphitheatre.

The Oct. 18 competition was hosted by St. Francis and appears to be a repeat of the WCAL I competition, where both the St. Francis junior varsity and varsity girls teams also earned first place.

In the JV three-mile race, the girls from St. Francis placed second, fourth, fifth, sixth, 10th and 11th. This led them to defeat their closest competitor, St. Ignatius, with a

total team score of 27-41. Dakota Taylor led the way for St. Francis with the second-place time of 20:54.

Meanwhile, the varsity team placed fifth, 10th, 15th, 17th and 18th in their three-mile race. This led them to defeat their closest competitor, Mitty, with a total team score of 65-79. The varsity team was led by their fifth-place runner, Courtney Albini, with an overall finish time of 19:15.

The freshman team placed second overall in their three-mile race. They were beat by St. Ignatius with a score of 40-24. Mitty trailed far behind with a score of 70. Shannon Richardson, St. Francis' freshman star runner, carried that team by remaining in second place for the duration of the run. ■



VERONICA WEBER

LOCKED UP: Los Altos varsity field hockey players Sarah Nolet (right) and Molly McShane (left) go up against Westmont defense in an attempt to score a goal on Monday, Oct. 15. With one overtime, the game still ended in a tie, 0-0.

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COUNCIL

► Continued from page 1

Results from the workshops — in which the four plans were ranked using a point system — seemed to show that open space received far more support.

Plan A, which would require little change to the Annex, got 13.4 points. Plan B, which would add a community garden, an orchard and possibly the local Historical Association's proposed museum — and no ball fields — got the highest score with 13.8 points. Plan C, which would add a turf area along Cuesta Drive, got 6.8 points. Plan D, which would put a baseball field and a soccer field on just over half the property, removing the orchards, garden and museum, got the lowest score with 6.3 points.

On Tuesday, Ed Mussman, a parks and recreation commissioner and longtime baseball coach, said that most coaches were on vacation when notices for the workshops went out. At a recent Parks and Rec Commission meeting, commissioners voted 3-2 in favor of ranking the ball field options above the others.

Council member Greg Perry asked questions regarding flood control. How many acre-feet, he

asked, of retention basin would it take to provide adequate flood control at the Annex? Representatives from the Santa Clara Valley Water Control Board said 130 to 190 acre-feet. Perry noted that if only a fifth of the lot was devoted to flood control, it would mean a very deep hole.

Mayor Nick Galiotto made it clear that the direction of the council was to decide on the Annex's recreational uses first, then decide on how flood control might be added later. The SCVWD is scheduled to meet with the council in December, after a decision is made on the Annex.

At the end of the workshop, the council asked staff to provide them with information on the neighborhood location of the residents who filled out questionnaires about the Annex during the workshops. Staff also agreed to find out how many adults participate in sports, how many children, how many are residents of Mountain View and what the inventory is on local ball fields.

No protection for Wunderman house

A different annex was approved Tuesday, when the council voted to annex the

Wunderman house — the city's former brothel on Eunice Avenue — and its property.

Due to its past, the historic house is not up to code by the city's standards. But the council did not second Perry's proposal to change city code to allow the deputy zoning administrator to decide whether a building is historic enough to preclude it from modern code violations.

The house had already been cited for county code violations, and city codes would be no more severe, staff said. Any further code violations would be grandfathered in, they said.

Zoning motion DOA

Council member Perry also failed to move the council with his proposal to change R3 zoning throughout the city, a change which would allow greater housing density — more units per square footage — in future developments.

His proposal was spurred by a decision at last week's city council meeting to replace 15 affordable apartments on Rock Street with 15 large, expensive row homes. But his colleagues demurred.

"I'm not eager to pursue this idea," said council member Lau-

ra Macias. "When I look at what is in the pipeline, I don't see a lot of large homes being built."

Council member Tom Means said he was skeptical the proposal would pan out, because Perry's last meeting of his term was only weeks away. Perry said he wanted to get the proposal moving so it could be studied and brought to the planning commission.

Council member Matt Pear said he would bring the issue up again in the future if it failed. Pear seconded Perry's motion, but no one else voted for it. It failed 4-2.

No re-vote after confusion

Also Tuesday, Macias expressed frustration that the staff and some council members had misunderstood her motion of the previous week to defer a gatekeeper request for a development project at 333 North Rengstorff Ave.

"I don't like being told that when I say 'defer processing,' that means approval," Macias said.

A gatekeeper request is a first step, allowing a proposal to be considered and studied by city staff; it does not necessarily mean it will be ultimately approved.

There was obvious disagree-

ment about what exactly was meant by Macias' motion to "defer processing" of the gatekeeper request. Council member Mike Kasperzak said he would not support a re-vote, because the assumption was that the gatekeeper request was being approved. Work on the project would now be deferred, as the staff had recommended.

"The wording could have been clearer," said city manager Kevin Duggan.

When Macias moved to take a re-vote on the proposal, the motion failed with no one to second it.

"We know when we are approving something," Macias said. "The motion was to defer processing. There was no project approval."

It was still unclear exactly how the vote would have gone if the council had agreed on the meaning of the motion.

When asked what direction the staff would take on the gatekeeper request without a re-vote, Duggan said it would become clear what the new council next year felt about the project, and another gatekeeper request would be unnecessary. ▀

E-mail Daniel DeBolt at ddbolt@mv-voice.com

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DEBATE

► Continued from page 1

would be for Mountain View. The general consensus was about 10 percent growth, or 80,000 people. Jac Siegel, environmental planning commission chair, noted that Mountain View is the second-densest city on the Peninsula behind Campbell.

Candidates also seemed to agree that industrial space should not be so quickly converted to residential use.

“We need a certain economic base here,” Siegel said “That was determined a long time ago. It’s still viable.”

Several callers brought up medical marijuana, an issue which some candidates shied away from. The city council rejected the idea of having a dispensary in the city last year.

Libertarian John Webster was sympathetic to the idea, saying it was a need the city could provide for. John Inks, parks and rec commissioner, said that “Medical marijuana advocates have a long

way to go in getting the rest of the community into buying in.”

County school board trustee Margaret Abe-Koga said any dispensary should be tied to health facilities in the city.

Green Party activist Tian Harter had a simpler message. “I thought they should have voted for it,” he said. “I’d vote for it.”

“For a society to accept it, how do we do that?” asked businessman Kalwant Sandhu. “Education is key.”

Another caller brought up the issue of “illegal aliens.”

“We have an illegal alien problem,” he said. “People are picking them up and paying them a slave wage with no benefits.” He raised concern about the possibility of a proposed Home Depot attracting more to the street looking for work, commenting that “Home Depots are notorious for having illegal aliens.”

Inks said he had a strong concern for day workers’ rights, but at the same time he could understand why businesses didn’t want day workers stand-

ing outside their stores. “It’s a staggering problem connected with border policy,” he said.

Harter said people looking for workers should just go to Mountain View’s Day Worker Center.

“Whether we like it or not, they are here,” said Alicia Crank, human relations commissioner, about undocumented workers. “I am very happy with the Day Worker Center on California and Escuela avenues.”

The next debate is scheduled for this Saturday, 9:30 a.m. at Montaloma School. ■



UP CLOSE WITH
*Margaret
Abe-Koga*

The Mountain View Firefighters are proud to endorse Margaret Abe Koga for City Council.

Margaret, how did you end up in Mountain View?

I grew up on the Peninsula, and so this area has always been home to me. After my husband and I got married, we rented for a while in Palo Alto. Then when we were able to afford to buy our first home we looked in Mountain View because we liked the feel of the community -lots of open space, a great downtown, and the diversity of the population.

What made you decide to take on the challenge of running for city council?

Public service has always been my passion, although I didn’t think of running for office until I had my first child. Then, I felt like I needed to contribute more to improving our community. I ran and was elected to the Santa Clara County Board of Education in 2002. I enjoyed serving in elected office and working on public policy very much. I decided to run for City Council because I wanted to contribute more directly to our city we call home.



Tell us about your family.

My parents are immigrants from Japan, and I’m an only child. They never really picked up English so I was the translator. We were a tight knit clan probably because we had to help each other out. My father was a gardener, my mother did jobs here and there. We were not well off and struggled, but I had a happy

childhood. Many people helped us along the way, especially in encouraging me to pursue my dreams and goals. That’s why I chose to dedicate myself to public and community service in hopes of returning the favor to others.

I met my husband in 1994 through martial arts - kendo, Japanese fencing. My husband, Yotto is a fourth degree black belt and I am a third degree black belt. I went to the National Championships in 2002, and my team came in first place. Yotto and I now have two daughters, Aili who is five years old and who just started kindergarten in the PACT program at Castro School, and Aina who is two and a half years old.

You formerly owned and operated a small business, what was that experience like?

It was a great experience - exciting, fun, stressful, a lot of hard work. To be responsible for an organization and staff was eye-opening. I have a profound appreciation for how hard small business owners work.



You have a degree in government from Harvard. How has that prepared you for a city council seat?

The Harvard experience opened me up to larger horizons, taught me to think globally and outside the box, to question and challenge, and encouraged me to work towards my goals.

There definitely were challenges - being away from home, the weather, and working my way through college, but I’m so glad I went through all of that. It has made me a stronger person.

You spent 6 years working for Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, what were some of your biggest lessons learned while there?

That everyone counts no matter who you are; that it is important to listen to everyone, even if you don’t agree; how you really can make a difference through the political process; how exciting and frustrating the lawmaking process can be at the same time.

What is your feeling on Cuesta Park Annex?

We need to take a comprehensive look at all of our needs and resources available in the area of open and park space. Let’s look at the Pumpkin Patch, Cuesta Annex, the potential playing fields at Shoreline Park, and the potential development in North Whisman and the open space opportunities there all together, and come up with a comprehensive plan to meet the needs of the community as best we can. We should also do a “needs assessment”, which I believe can be incorporated into the recreation plan that is being developed at this time.



What would you like to see happen with the pumpkin farm?

I would love to see the pumpkin farm preserved. I am very interested in pursuing the alternative plan that the Save the Farm group has intelligently devised.

The city has an average operating budget of about \$80 million annually, what qualifications do you have to oversee a budget of this size?

On the Santa Clara County Board of Education, I oversaw an operating budget of over \$200 million and a staff of 1600 hundred. I started on the County Board when we were hit with the worst budget crisis in the history of California, so I had to make tough decisions to scrutinize and pass a fiscally sound budget for our organization.

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MV WHISMAN

► Continued from page 1

The district pays retirement benefits for five years or at age 65, whichever comes first.

The letter claims that Yick's contractual salary in her final year as superintendent was \$167,200 but as reported to CalSTRS was \$177,524. Accounting for the increase is the addition of health benefits to the salary and, the letter alleges, \$3,500 for mileage and phone reimbursements during the year. Specifics of her retirement plan were not available to the public at press time.

Additionally, the letter alleges that Ghysels has been aware of the discrepancies since November 2005 but "deliberately has chosen not to act upon them."

Ghysels said, "I have heard of the concept of spiking, but I do not know all of the technical rules and guidelines that CalSTRS has adopted on the issue." He added, "I cannot speak to whether there is any history of spiking in this or any other district."

Board president Ellen Wheeler spoke in Ghysels defense, stating that "When our board hired Superintendent Ghysels last year, I called him 'exceptional,' and I know that already our entire community has seen how far our district can go under his leadership."

She added, "I believe that Eleanor Yick and Modrite Archibeque are ethical people."

The three-page letter, which was signed by "an Anonymous and Concerned Mountain View Whisman School District Staff Member" and sent to school officials, government representatives and local media, alleges a plan of fraud on Yick's and Archibeque's part that would "bilk CalSTRS of over \$20,000 annually."

If CalSTRS does find proof of fraud, Ghysels said, "It is up to [them] to handle the issue."

Documents provided by CalSTRS show that if Yick and Archibeque are found to have deliberately spiked their reported salary, they will have to "reimburse the plan for benefit overpayments that occur because of the inconsistent reporting and may be subject to prosecution for fraud, theft or embezzlement."

Steve Lowney, who is overseeing the matter at the district attorney's office, said that for now, "We will wait until the CalSTRS audit is complete, and when it is, we will very closely look at their recommendation."

Until that time, Wheeler said, the district will "carry on for the students."

"It is they who deserve our attention and energy," she said. ▽

E-mail Alexa Tondreau at atondreau@mv-voice.com

EDUCATION BRIEFS

MV WHISMAN ASKS PUBLIC TO SELECT DISTRICT JINGLE

Beginning on Halloween Day, Mountain View residents will have the chance to vote online for a music jingle to accompany the Mountain View Whisman School District's new theme, "Education for the World Ahead."

District Superintendent Maurice Ghysels approached Mountain View's Community School of Music and Arts with the idea, and 20 students aged 9 to 18 accepted his "jingle challenge," enrolling in summer camp to compose the new theme song.

Of those 20 entries, CSMA music instructors selected four finalists, whose entries will go up for public voting. The voting period will last one week, ending Nov. 7.

The music and lyrics were developed entirely on computers, and submitted jingles varied in style, from hip-hop to jazz to classical. Ghysels says he hopes to put the winning jingle on the district's phone message as well as have it performed by children in school productions and choruses.

To listen to the jingles and vote online, visit www.arts4all.org/jingle or www.mvwsd.org between Oct. 31 and Nov. 7.

LANDELS ELEMENTARY HONORED

Landels Elementary School received a California Distin-

guished School award from the County Office of Education in a ceremony last week, an honor bestowed on less than 1 percent of elementary schools in the state.

Schools are selected to receive the award based on a number of criteria encompassing all areas of a school's educational program, including whether it met or exceeded its API score goals for the year. Additionally, schools must have a strong core curriculum in place for all required subjects, academically competent teachers who utilize a variety of teaching techniques, and a safe school culture.

Representatives from the County Offices of Education, California Teachers Association and the Superintendents Educational Services Association, among others, reviewed the scoring rubrics and awarded 204 elementary schools in the state with the award.

Superintendent Maurice Ghysels said in a statement, "I speak for everyone by saying how proud we are of Landels students, teachers, staff, parents and community."

At the same ceremony, Landels also received the Title I Academic Achievement Award, an award given to Title I schools that exceed the federally instated Adequate Yearly Progress score for two or more years.

— Alexa Tondreau

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- Sunday, November 5
- * INFANT CARE**

Often touted as our "most fun" class, learn specifics of newborn care including bathing, temperature-taking, changing diapers, and feeding and soothing techniques. Infant doll models are used to allow for hands-on practice.

- Wednesday, November 15
- * FATHERS OF DAUGHTERS: THE JOYS & CHALLENGES OF ADOLESCENCE**


An evening for fathers of adolescent daughters to learn how to understand and communicate with their daughters as well as discuss issues specific to the father-daughter relationship in adolescence.

- Wednesday, November 15
- * CHILDBIRTH CLASS IN THE CITY**

Come learn about childbirth preparation in a retreat-like setting at the Hotel Monaco in San Francisco. This course includes breakfast and lunch for two at the hotel, as well as participation in breastfeeding and cesarean birth classes.


- Saturday, November 18

Call (650) 723-4600 or visit www.lpch.org to register or obtain more information on the times, locations and fees for these and other courses.




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- **Suzy Q** the Balloon Artist 11 a.m.- 3p.m.
- Kid's **Pumpkin Carving** Contest 12 p.m.-2 p.m.
- Magic Show performance by **Magic Mike** 2 p.m.-3 p.m.
- Healthy **Wheel of Fortune** 11 a.m.-3 p.m.
- Chance to win a pizza and ice cream party for up to 10 kids
- Kids 12 and under are invited to sign up for the **Whole Foods Market, Los Altos Kids Club**





Betty Kaufman and Richard Moyer hold up their glass of 2004 Coppola Diamond Sauvignon Blanc to examine the wine's translucence and color.

VERONICA WEBER

Good work if you can get it

LOCAL EXPERT'S WINE TASTINGS BUILT ON THE TUPPERWARE MODEL

By Alexa Tondreau

Mountain View resident Betty Kaufman's line of work is one that most people would happily fall into.

Consider the essential components of her profession: a good-sized living room, a circle of willing participants, and a lot of really good wine.

As Kaufman explains, "It's like I do Tupperware parties. Just get rid of the plastic, and replace it with wine."

Kaufman works full-time for Wine Shop at Home, a Bay Area-based company with a thousand representatives around the country who work to connect customers to 100 wineries in a convenient and comfortable way.

"The whole point of this is to bring wine into people's homes. It's an opportunity to taste wines that you wouldn't taste unless you actually went to the wineries in Sonoma, Napa and Mendocino," she says.

Last week Kaufman invited the *Voice* to attend a wine tasting party in her own home with a dozen friends — and the current selection of reds and whites that Wine Shop at Home is offering.

The party started with a lesson. Kaufman says there are four essential steps to wine tasting, which can be boiled down into a simple mantra: see, swirl, smell and sip.

Beginning with a glass of Coppola Diamond Sauvignon Blanc, guests tilted the wine to its side and up to the light, in order to better observe its color. A uniform color signifies a young wine and darker edges show age, she explained. Also, holding wine up against a white surface, such as a tablecloth or wall, helps to distinguish its various tones.

Next, the ancient art of the wine swirl. Kaufman recom-

mends setting the wine glass down on a stable surface and gently moving it around in a circle. The swirling will aerate the wine and "bring aromas to the front," Kaufman says.

Then smell. For this, Kaufman dispensed with subtlety, recommending to guests that they stick their noses into the glass and inhale long and deep.

And finally, guests were instructed to sip the wine, holding the liquid in their mouth for three seconds before swallowing.

"Put it on different parts of your tongue," Kaufman said, "because it will taste different on the front of your tongue than on the back."

These steps were repeated throughout the night, with six different wines. Kaufman coached guests in seeking out the various complex flavors in the wines, a process fundamental to any wine connoisseur. Food helps to enhance flavor, especially cheese, fruit and chocolate, as does drinking the wine slowly and in small sips.

Guests discovered surprising flavors. In the Rosenblum Lone Oak Chardonnay, which comes from Alameda County, imbibor Araceli Brun said she tasted "Apple pie. It's like a comfort wine." A sharp cheddar cheese complemented the wine, and brought out its spicy flavors.

The Pied Violet Merlot inspired most of the group, who found hints of pomegranate, cherry and clove lurking beneath the surface.

The wine tasting is tailored for all levels of know-how. Kaufman says that for beginners, an essential first step is determining personal preference. If you like fruity wines, which tend to be younger, she says, then buy something with a more recent date, like 2004 or 2005. If you like something rich, with the more bitter taste of minerals, then you'll want an older wine.

And when you've finally found something you love, she says, buy a case.

"The rule is, drink one bottle every year on the day that you originally bought it. When you reach the day that it tastes fabulous, drink all the wine in that year."

She warns against getting caught up in wine hype, wherein a certain year and brand become so famous that there is a list of thousands who are waiting to get their hands on the bottle, the price of which rises exponentially into the hundreds of dollars.

"There are plenty of great wines under \$20," she says, and as evidence of this, all the wines that she provided were in the lower price range.

Kaufman's own love of wine led her into this line of work after nearly 20 years in the high-tech industry.

"High-tech drove me to drink," she says with a laugh. "I realized it was time to apply my marketing and business knowledge to something I like more than high-tech."

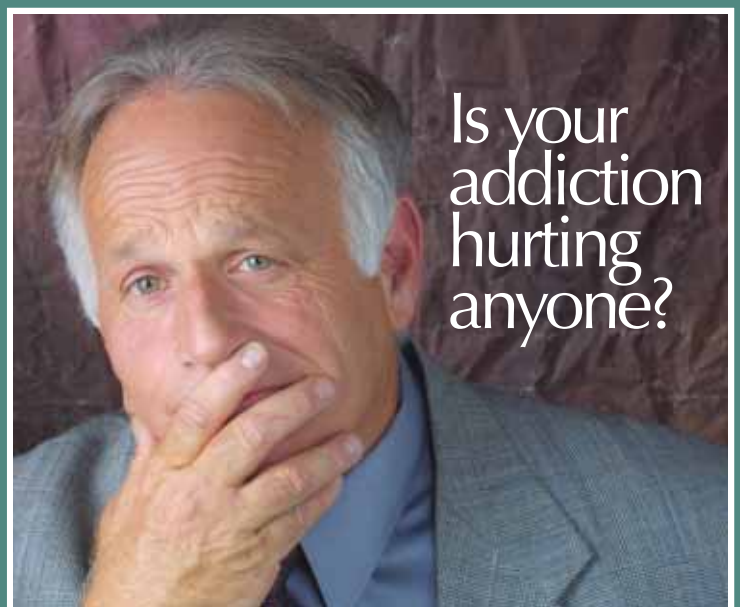
As a representative of Wine Shop at Home, Kaufman helps clients set up wine tasting parties in their own homes, for 10 to 20 people, at \$60. Wine ordered from the party will arrive on a customer's doorstep in a matter of days.

Bill Berner, who attended last week's wine tasting, says he plans to hold one of his own very soon.

"It will be a good chance to talk to some of my neighbors who I haven't seen in awhile and enjoy a few glasses of wine without anyone having to drive home," he said.

Interested parties can visit www.wineshopathome.com for more information. ▀

E-mail Alexa Tondreau at atondreau@mv-voice.com



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VERONICA WEBER

DARK CORNERS: Palo Alto firefighter Mark Von Appen exits an empty apartment which has been filled with fake smoke and heaters to simulate the conditions of a real fire during training for Santa Clara County firefighters at the NASA Ames Research Center last Friday.

■ OBITUARIES

WINIFRED 'WINNIE' MCCULLOUGH

Winifred "Winnie" McCullough, a Mountain View resident originally from Northern Ireland, passed away on Oct. 16 with family by her side. She was 73.

Born in Northern Ireland, McCullough immigrated to the U.S. with her husband, Patrick McCullough, in 1969. She is survived by her husband of 37 years, her daughters Marie and Colleen, and many siblings, nieces and nephews.

Those who knew McCullough admired her for her strength, courage and gentle demeanor. A memorial service was held Oct. 21 at St. Joseph's Church. Arrangements were made by the Cusimano Family Colonial Mortuary in Mountain View.

ALMA 'PAT' DREW

Alma "Pat" Drew, a longtime resident of Mountain View, passed away peacefully on Oct. 7. She was 89.

Drew had an extensive family — including 13 siblings — and was a homemaker for

many years. She was known for being cheerful, hospitable, and a strong advocate and believer of Evangelism. She worked for many years as a salesperson at The Emporium, and loved to volunteer, including as a ranger at Shoreline Park.

She is survived by her two children, Patricia Barnum and Cherie Moreno, as well several grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Two of her siblings still live in the Bay Area.

No public memorial services are being held upon Drew's request. Gifts, remembrances and good wishes can be sent to the Peninsula Bible Church, where Drew was a member of the congregation. The church address is 3505 Middlefield Rd., Palo Alto, 94036.

CHARLETTE OLIVE WARNER PARSONS

Mountain View resident Charlette Olive Warner Parsons passed away peacefully on the morning of Oct. 12 following a series of strokes. She was 87.

Parsons was born in Oakland on Sept. 6, 1919, to Raymond

and Mabelle Warner. She is survived by her husband, Robert parsons; their three sons, Gary, Charles and Robert; and by five grandchildren, Scott, Cristin, Melissa, Mitchell and Tori.

A memorial mass will be held for Parsons at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church on Monday, Oct. 30 at 2 p.m. The church is located at 2094 Grant Rd. in Mountain View. In lieu of flowers, donations can be sent to St. Timothy's Mission Fund in Charlette's name.

RAYMOND ISAAC HENARD

Raymond Isaac Henard passed away on Oct. 23, less than a month before his 82nd birthday.

Born in Illinois in 1924, Henard moved to California after WWII and worked at Stanford University for over 40 years. In his retirement, he enjoyed gardening and socializing. He is survived by three sons, Jeff, Rick and Tim; his daughter, Jennifer; and eight grandchildren.

A memorial will be held for Henard on Friday, Oct. 27 at 10 a.m. at Cusimano Family Mortuary, located at 96 El Camino Real in Mountain View.

EDITOR'S DESK

► Continued from page 5

with breast cancer." The celebration, Diana said, took place Oct. 21 and featured

several musical acts, including pianist Iris Doolittle, who "played a number of piano solos written or adapted for the left hand, which she uses exclusively and expressively since a stroke paralyzed her right arm at age 28."

Find out more about the Peninsula Stroke Association by visiting www.psastroke.org or calling (650) 565-8485. ■

Don Frances can be reached at dfrances@mv-voice.com.

CARLESS

► Continued from page 5

\$1,400 a month, Kelly Rohlfs said.

"I think we're just totally normal people without a car," she said.

For Sam Rohlfs, a last straw was when the sunroof stopped working and the repair bill was going to be astronomical. The couple was commuting through traffic on El Camino Real to Stanford every day, arriving at work frustrated and tense, they said. They found it was quicker to take their bikes on the train than sit in traffic. Or, if they chose, they could take a bus the whole way.

Kelly said she and Sam asked themselves, "How many options have to exist before we get rid of our car?" Apparently seeing enough options, they took the plunge.

And if it didn't work out, Sam figured, "You can always go back and buy a car."

The Rohlfses say they've gotten used to the barrage of questions from people after hearing they don't have a car — questions such as "How do you get groceries?" or "What if it rains?" or "What if there is an emergency?"

"We call 911 like everyone else," Kelly said.

As for groceries, the couple has bicycle trailers. According to a Web site they pointed to, www.bikesatwork.com, a person riding an average multi-speed bike can tow up to 300 pounds with the right gear ratio.

Nor is wet weather a deterrent. Sam said if they were ever going to quit the bike routine, it would have been during the rainy season last year. But the couple invested in rain gear and say they love riding in the rain. "It's beautiful," Kelly said.

If they need a car for whatever reason, the Rohlfses just rent one to suit their needs at the rental place two blocks away. And if there's a problem with the car?

"You just drive it back and come home and play ping-pong," Kelly said. "It's not my worry."

Sam claims he's lost 40 pounds since his bike became his sole transportation. The garbage can is also a little lighter, the couple claims, because they think twice before buying anything they have to drag home on their bike

trailers.

Now, instead of a car, the garage is filled with bikes and trailers.

"Twenty percent of my land is dedicated to my car," Kelly said, referring to the long driveway to the back of her house.

"It's hard to find anything attractive or useful to do with my driveway," Sam said, referring to the centrally located ping-pong table.

The couple has at least four bikes to choose from. Sam said he wanted to make sure they spent money for some decent bikes and equipment. He thought the "car envy" he had would be gone with his car — but now he said he finds himself with "bike envy" whenever he sees a nice bike.

Kelly has a cup holder on her handlebars. "Even I go to Starbucks on the way to work," she said.

Their son, 14-year-old Max, still wants a car when he turns 16. He said his peers are "astounded" that his parents don't have a car. But he's on the progressive side too: His automobile of choice when he turns 16 is a "Smart Car," a tiny gas powered machine from Europe that gets over 60 miles per gallon.

He and his parents obviously had a disagreement on their hands as they went back and forth.

"Bikes are dangerous," Max said.

"People are much more likely to die in a car," his mom responded.

When the Rohlfses drive a car now, they say, they aren't used to the speed.

"The biggest surprise for me was how easy it was," Sam said about giving up his car for bikes and public transit. "I thought we were going to have to ramp it up, take it up a notch." But now it doesn't feel like a chore to run errands, he says. "It's more like a day out."

When people have to sit in traffic, they honk, they yell, "they are doing something they don't like to do," Sam said about the average driver.

"We'd like all the cars to go away," he joked.

"In our ideal world," Kelly added.

"I just want to encourage people to give it a try," Sam said. "Things just don't get hectic on the bike." ■

"If they were ever going to quit the bike routine, it would have been during the rainy season last year."

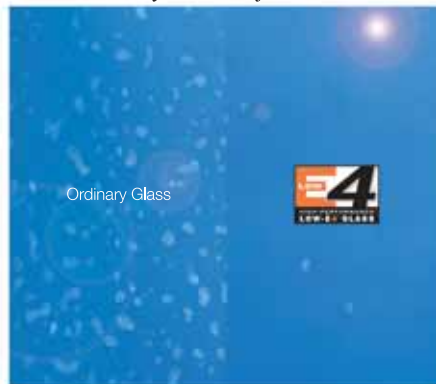
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BUDGET

► *Continued from page 5*

in 2010-11, according to county budget director Leslie Crowell.

"It reinforces our need to be disciplined as we move into fiscal year 2008," county executive Pete Kutas said at the Oct. 17 meeting.

Last month, Kutas rolled out a budget plan that would plug the 2007-08 deficit with \$158.8 million in cuts and \$43.4 million in one-time funds. The plan asks county departments to absorb the bulk of the cuts — \$155.6 million — with health and hospital services taking the hardest blow in the form of \$109.8 million in reductions.

The county supervisors approved that plan in concept but left room for future adjustments.

Since 2002-03, the county has faced \$802.6 million in budget shortages with the accompanying elimination of more than 1,000 vacant and filled positions. The continued deficit, which reportedly stems from accumulated shortages built up — from temporary fixes to ongoing problems in years past and unreliable federal and state financial support — means that at least another 500 county workers could lose their jobs by January 2008.

Crowell said the county receives its revenues from three main sources: 34 percent from the state, 19 percent from the federal government, and 30 percent from local property taxes. The remaining 17 percent comes from various county-generated revenues. The projected revenue

flow for 2007-08 will cover 91 percent of the county's cost, leaving 9 percent — \$201.6 million — uncovered, Crowell said.

Since the estimated deficits will only increase unless solutions are implemented in the next budget cycle, the budget overview recommends formulating plans for additional service reductions in the future.

"I am fairly sure we cannot continue on this path," Supervisor Liz Kniss said at the meeting. "We have to make some dramatic change."

Kniss, who represents Mountain View, asked the county executive's office to take a historical look at county subsidies to Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, the county hospital, which she said could end up placing an unbearable financial burden on the county if the trend of private hospital closures continues.

Supervisor Blanca Alvarado, meanwhile, called for a renewed look at the hospital's strategic business plan as well as other potential revenue-generating sources, such as the county fairgrounds, that could help strengthen the county's financial outlook.

In other business, the supervisors unanimously approved a 33-month labor contract with the Service Employees International Union Local 535, which represents almost 1,100 social services workers who care for abused children, the elderly and the poor. By ratifying the agreement, the county and the union officially ended a dispute over workload standards that nearly came to a strike just under three weeks ago. ▀



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■ EDITORIAL THE OPINION OF THE VOICE

Caltrain confronts suicides, bad judgment

Last week's announcement that nearly \$9 million in precious transportation funds will be spent to improve safety on the Caltrain line is a good thing, although we have to say it is a shame that such a huge outlay of money is necessary simply to protect people from killing themselves.

But that is what Caltrain will do with a \$7.4 million grant from the San Mateo County Transportation Commission, which will be used to build new pedestrian and vehicle gates at 35 grade crossings on the route between San Francisco and San Jose. Caltrain itself will throw in another \$1.5 million to rebuild pedestrian gates.

The Caltrain officials who made the decision had little choice, after 13 people, including one from Mountain View, have died on the tracks so far this year. That is a huge toll, and in almost every case, those dying attempted to beat the train or should have known the dangers of crossing Caltrain tracks when the pedestrian or vehicle gates are down.

The \$9 million will be used to pay for new center dividers and mechanical arms that cover the whole street to block drivers from going around crossing gates. Also, new "four-quadrant" pedestrian gates would block sidewalks when trains are approaching.

Over the years, Caltrain has continued to do its best to convince everyone to stay away from the tracks, which now carry fast "Baby Bullet" trains between San Jose and San Francisco. Running at nearly 80 miles per hour, a Baby Bullet can be on top of someone — who thought they might have time to scoot around the flashing lights and crossing arms — in seconds. Obviously, for those who misjudge the trains, there is no second chance.

That was true for the most recent person to be killed by a train along the Caltrain corridor, a man who ducked under the crossing gates in Redwood City earlier this month because he apparently figured he could beat the train going one way — but failed to notice another train coming from the opposite direction.

Six days before that, on Oct. 5, it was 69-year-old Consuelo Coronel of Mountain View who, according to the Caltrain conductor, attempted to cross at Rengstorff Avenue even though the mechanical arms, flashing lights and ringing bells were active.

We hope Caltrain's \$9 million effort will make a difference and help reduce the senseless fatalities that continue to occur up and down the Peninsula. We expect that no system will be good enough to stop individuals who are determined to thwart the barriers and place themselves in harm's way. But as for the accidental deaths, we must all remember to be vigilant: Keep away from the rails, and never cross the tracks when the crossing arms are down.

■ LETTERS VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

VOTE FOR MEASURE A

Editor:

One of the great things about living in Mountain View is that we enjoy the scenic backdrop of the forested green Santa Cruz Mountains to the west and the Mount Hamilton Range to the east. These vistas gave Mountain View its name. But a new type of sprawl, often referred to as monster homes built on ridgelines, increasingly threatens these views.

Measure A on the November ballot, known as the Santa Clara County Land Conservation Initiative, protects views of the hills from inappropriate development, preserves water quality by protecting watersheds and aquifers, and enhances agriculture by restricting the subdivision of ranchlands into small parcels suited only for large homes. In a nutshell, Measure A prevents urban sprawl into the county's rural lands and yet only impacts 0.01 percent of the county's potential housing stock.

Measure A is very similar to initiatives that were passed in San Mateo County in the 1980s and in Alameda County in 2000. Both of these initiatives have proved very successful in preserving rural lands and protecting agriculture. In fact, many who initially opposed the San Mateo County initiative now agree that it has proved beneficial to them and the county as a whole. Measure A is similarly crafted to preserve the essential rural character of the county's open space lands while protecting private property rights.

Groups that have endorsed

Measure A include every major environmental group; the South Bay Labor Council; the Santa Clara County Council of Churches; the League of Women Voters; and the Silicon Valley Leadership Group. Please support Measure A on Nov. 7.

Jeff Segall
California Street

COUNCIL SHOULD STEP UP ON MEASURE A

Editor:

I am disappointed with a recent action of the Mountain View City Council. I understand that they decided not to voice their opinion regarding Measure A — the initiative to preserve hillsides and large ranch lands in Santa Clara County.

They claimed it wasn't in their purview. There are 15 towns in Santa Clara County — 15 seats at the table — and only Mountain View chose to opt out of the conversation.

We elect council members to represent us and to act as leaders. I think they should have publicly supported Measure A. I still hope they will.

Katherine Greene
Plymouth Street

PROP. 1C SUPPORTS 'HOUSING FIRST' APPROACH

Editor:

The Community Services Agency deserves praise for rethinking its homeless services

► See **LETTERS**, page 19



Plan B is right for Cuesta Annex

TWO SURVEYS SHOW WHAT RESIDENTS WANT AND NEED: A NATURAL, SEASONAL, HERITAGE PARK

By Kevin McBride

Recent opinion pieces on the Cuesta Park Annex have been long on opinion and short on data, ignoring the two most comprehensive and unbiased sources of information on the Annex and the state of ball fields in the city: the 2006 Resident Survey and the 2004 Athletic Field Inventory Study.

Conducted at random by an independent consultant for the city of Mountain View, the Resident Survey asked several questions about the Cuesta Park Annex. It showed that 29 percent of residents — about 16,000 people — say they use the Annex.

The survey further shows that the Annex is serving a large and diverse portion of our community. For example, among the Annex's users, 35 percent are Caucasian, and 33 percent are Hispanic; 34 percent of the users make under \$20,000 a year, while 30 percent make over \$100,000; 28 percent have no kids, while 37 percent have two or more kids.

And the Annex is used frequently: 31 percent say they visit once a week or more, and 72 percent say they visit once a month or more. What do people do there? Fifty-eight percent say that they walk or hike, 20 percent play, 17 percent run. These are active recreational uses.

People were also asked what they'd like to see the Annex used for. Nature trails came out on top, with 71 percent saying it would be an excellent or good use. Ball fields came in fourth, after "extension of Cuesta Park" (a vague category) and community gardens. A heritage orchard was close behind in fifth place.

Note that three of the top five are natural uses. This is a theme that has come out again and again as the majority opinion in the planning process — people want a natural,

seasonal, heritage park.

The 2004 Athletic Field Inventory Study, conducted by the Parks and Rec Commission, also has very useful data. Did you know that the city maintains 11 soccer fields, 19 baseball/softball fields, and several multi-use fields? And that's not all. Go to Google Maps and look at the satellite view around the Annex — there are ball fields at McKelvey, Graham, Bubba, Huff, Cooper, Springer, St. Francis, MV High, and more.

It's no wonder the study concluded that "Most field users in Mountain View are pleased with the City's facilities and the level of maintenance and support provided by the City." Some shortcomings were identified, but the study said "Development of athletic facilities at Graham Middle School," on which the city spent \$3 million, "will go a long way toward addressing many of the concerns voiced."

(The fact that the Graham fields have been offline for the last few years may explain some of the concerns coming from the ball field users. The Graham fields will soon be back in operation, improved and expanded.)

Where is the balance of support from the city for all of those people wanting natural spaces for recreation? They've come out to all of the council and commission meetings, answered the surveys and questionnaires, and participated in the community workshops. Their voices have been clear and consistent: They want a coherent master plan that shapes Cuesta Park Annex as a natural, seasonal, heritage park — a unique and innovative recreational resource.

This is the vision represented by Plan B, put forward by the city's consultants and rated most highly by the community participants. The only question remaining is, will the city council listen to the data, respect the process, and vote for Plan B?

Kevin McBride is a leader of Save Open Space Mountain View. He lives on Begen Avenue.

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LETTERS

► Continued from page 17

program to use the successful "Housing First" model of getting homeless families and individuals into housing first and following up with supportive services.

The difficult part of implementing housing first, of course, is finding those affordable homes.

Charities Housing recently opened San Antonio Place in Mountain View, which provides safe, decent efficiency studios for 118 low-income households. As Mountain View residents well know, finding the funding to bring such projects to fruition is often a long, drawn-out process. And the need is still great: As the *Voice* points out, there are 250-300 homeless people in Mountain View. The efficiency studios, which opened in April, are full and already have a long waiting list.

On Nov. 7, Mountain View residents will have a chance to make safe, decent homes a reality for even more of their neighbors. Proposition 1C, the Housing and Emergency Shelter Trust Fund Act, would provide \$2.85 billion for affordable homes for the most vulnerable Californians, including low-income seniors, battered women, and homeless families.

Please remember to head to the polls on Nov. 7 and vote yes on Prop 1C.

Chris Block
Charities Housing
San Jose

that food.

In Cuesta Park the situation is basically the same. The squirrels are small wild animals after all. Think of it as our very own Yosemite — we don't kill the Yosemite bears in order to accommodate careless people. In fact, I believe we fine those people for ignoring the warnings, which are posted everywhere.

I propose a similar solution in Mountain View: an ordinance forbidding the feeding of the squirrels. If park visitors ignore the signs and feed the squirrels, city or park police could be summoned to issue a ticket.

Kate McDermott
E. El Camino Real

CASTRO WALKATHON WAS A HIT

Editor:

An update on Castro Elementary PTA's first Walkathon — it was a huge success! Thank you to the over 100 volunteers who helped support our students as they walked over 11,000 laps and served 650 homemade taquitos. The event is expected to raise over \$12,000, with the money going to help fund art, music and field trips.

The enthusiasm of Castro's community of PACT, Spanish/English Dual Immersion and English Only families enjoying the music, walking and food was catching, and the students' rainbow-colored T-shirts lit up the field.

Jenny Murray, Church Street
and Michelle Perry, Sunnyvale

► See *LETTERS*, page 20

SQUIRREL COVERAGE WAS INFLAMMATORY JOURNALISM

Editor:

I am usually pleased with the professionalism of the *Voice's* coverage. However, its "squirrels in the park" coverage was a sad and unfortunate departure from this standard ("City trapped in squirrel debate," Oct. 6).

That article infuriated me, and when I read it over several times I realized my reaction was stimulated by the article as written. The *Voice's* coverage seems designed to inflame the matter rather than expose it to the light. I am still trying to sort out the intention of this approach.

Meanwhile my town, my adopted town which I have come to love, is nationally defamed and a laughable example of reactive solutions. What we have here is our own version of the bears in Yosemite. In that case, people bring human food to consume while visiting the bears' home, and are responsible for their management of

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For more information please visit TianHarter.org
Paid for by Tian Harter for City Council, FPPC ID #1289659

VOTE
Harter
Mountain View
City Council Nov. 7

LETTERS

► Continued from page 19

CITY MUST DO MORE TO PROVIDE HOUSING FOR ALL

Editor:

In the Voice's endorsements of Oct. 20, you stated that a primary issue in this election is "How much housing is enough?" We believe that a more important, if still oversimplified, question is, "What kind of housing does the city need?"

In our view, the incoming council will need to provide balance to the housing in the city across all income levels. Such a balance is currently missing. Market rate affordable rental units are being rapidly lost by conversion into high-priced condos and single-family homes.

Well over 90 percent of the new housing units in the city is built for those with incomes above the mid point. Since 1980, no new units that offer secure affordable housing for working families with incomes below the mid point have been added here. A generation of low-income families has been gradually squeezed out of Mountain View. The effects can be seen every day.

The mantra that "Mountain View has done its share in providing housing" may have been true 25 years ago, but the new city council will need to update its posture and its actions. We agree that your recommended candidates are well qualified. We would add Alicia Crank as

being well qualified and ready for election.

Roy and Janet Hayter
Yale Drive

QUICK CITY RESPONSE TO UNEVEN SIDEWALK

Editor:

I would like to personally commend the swift action taken by Gerald Pollock, the street supervisor at the Public Works Department, for the repairs made to our neighborhood city sidewalk.

Last month I tripped and fell on the sidewalk along the 1300 block of Montecito. To say the least, at my tender age of 82 it was both painful and embarrassing.

Many elderly seniors walk that same block every day. As a matter of fact, after I was able to pick myself and make sure I was intact, I met another elderly person who told me he had fallen twice on this very block.

I asked for a meeting with the responsible city department, and voiced my concerns about the poor condition of that block. After a pleasant meeting with Mr. Pollock, he assured me that something would be done.

I drove directly home. On the way I was amazed to see a service truck with several men at work parked next to the sidewalk where I had fallen. A worker waved at me as I passed by. The men were working on leveling the old cement repairs done in the past. How about that?

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■ RESTAURANT REVIEW

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■ RESTAURANT REVIEW

The culture of Calderon

EL CALDERON OFFERS A FESTIVE INTRODUCTION TO SALVADORAN CUISINE

By Elaine M. Rowland

What's Salvadoran cuisine? Before this month, I couldn't have told you. But I recently sampled some foods of El Salvador at a place that's been dishing up the goods since Nixon took office: El Calderon, on Calderon Avenue in Mountain View. This restaurant, on the corner of Church Street in a small shopping center (that still sort of looks Nixon-era), features both Salvadoran and Mexican dishes.

A family-run neighborhood spot, El Calderon has a small dining room with only about 10 indoor tables, and another

three outdoors. It's festive, with silk flowers, colorful placemats, and Central American decorations — ranging from black velvet paintings to toy parrots — and (at the moment) fall foliage decor. Family photos on the front console table as you enter give you the feeling you've walked into the home of owners Roberto and Lita Lopez.

The Salvadoran dishes I tried were generally milder than the Mexican ones (such as the incendiary salsa that starts the meal). The Salvadoran dinner-for-two special (\$24.95) is a one-stop introduction to Central American cuisine, starting with thick and chunky fresh guacamole with chips. This is followed by savory refried beans (not too thick) topped with fried plan-



NICHOLAS JENSEN

El Calderon features Salvadoran dishes and mainstays of Central America cuisine and as well offers traditional Mexican food.

► See CALDERON, page 22

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The interior of El Calderon showcases family photos, silk flowers and Central American decorations.

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CALDERON

► Continued from page 21

tains, an interesting and mildly sweet note against the beans.

You'll either really like it or find yourself picking out the platanos. There's a side of Spanish rice, and then the house specialty: pupusas. This quesadilla-like dish is stuffed with cheese and ground pork, and served with a small bowl of curtido, a pickled cabbage salad. You're supposed to slice the pupusa in half and stuff the cabbage in, which adds some zip to this otherwise quiet dish. The dinner also includes yucca con chicharrones — pork served on a bed of lettuce and somewhat overcooked when I tried it. A dessert of hojuelas, crispy fried wafers in a spicy cinnamon syrup, and coffee wrap up the meal-for-two.

We'd also ordered the chile relleno a la carte (\$3.25), but it wasn't necessary — there was

plenty to eat in the dinner for two. I like it when the relleno is crispy fried; this was a little squishy instead, and didn't have much flavor.

Given the choice of beer, caffeinated drinks, sodas, or tropical drinks in decorative gourds, you surely can guess which we chose: Who can pass up "decorative gourd" on the menu? The guanabana (\$3.25) passion fruit drink-in-a-gourd was sweet and mild and quite refreshing.

On my next trip to El Calderon, I explored the Mexican side of the menu, which tended to be more heavily seasoned and truthfully more to my taste. I started with another gourd goodie, this time the tamarindo (\$2) which was not as sweet as the passion fruit, and took a few sips to grow on me. The chile colorado with beef (\$9.25), from the platillos especiales section of the menu, includes rice, refried beans and salad with French dressing. It was loaded with chili powder or chorizo or both, but

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■ DINING NOTES

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the beef was pretty tender and I certainly got enough to eat. You may find less expensive Mexican food, but you'll be well-fed for the money here.

The menu also includes a section of vegetarian plates, Salvadoran specialties, tostados, and soups including menudo, a tripe soup. Perhaps on another visit.

I think the most tender chicken I can remember eating in a restaurant was in the chicken

fajitas at El Calderon. Along with rice, beans and fresh, soft tortillas for \$11.95, the fajitas here don't arrive on a platter the size of an aircraft carrier like they do at, say, Chili's. But they're better and, frankly, just the right size. Really nice chicken, not overpowered with too many seasonings. You could even taste the grilled fresh veggies.

With its homey atmosphere and careful service, El Calderon

is the kind of place that can (and did) settle into a neighborhood for the long haul. The wait staff made sure we had all we needed, explaining the Salvadoran food when we looked like we needed help (who knew the curtido went in the pupusa?). And though the El Calderon is open fairly short hours for meals, it doesn't seem to discourage people, since the scarce seats are taken quickly. ▀

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MOVIE REVIEWS

THE DEPARTED ★★★1/2

(Century 16, Century 12) Director Martin Scorsese's latest masterpiece defies the crime-fiction genre and throws more curves than a Major League pitcher. Wily Irish mobster Frank Costello (Jack Nicholson) is wanted man number one for the Boston State police. The unhinged gangster stays one step ahead of the men in blue thanks to Colin Sullivan (Matt Damon), a mole in the department who's worked for Costello since childhood. On the other side of the spectrum is undercover cop Billy Costigan (Leonardo DiCaprio), an honorable yet hot-tempered young officer who manages to infiltrate Costello's crew thanks to a helping of suspect family history. Sullivan and Costigan quickly find themselves in a cat-and-mouse game to try and unmask the other. Sullivan uses every detective tool at his disposal to identify Costigan but gets no help from the surly sergeant (Mark Wahlberg as Dignam) responsible for Costigan's undercover assignment. Meanwhile, Costigan does his best from inside the seedy underworld to track down Sullivan and blow the whistle. Deceptions, double-crosses and deaths ensue. With the help of slick writing, an A-list cast and plenty of twisted surprises, Scorsese scores again. *Rated: R for strong brutal violence, pervasive language, some strong sexual content and drug material. 2 hours, 29 minutes.* — T.H.



FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS ★★★

(Century 16, Century 12) In the midst of the United States' clash with Japan on the unforgiving island of Iwo Jima during world War II, six soldiers were photographed planting an American flag atop Mount Suribachi. The men involved in the flag-raising and the lore of the image itself form the foundation of Clint Eastwood's most ambitious film to date. The three young soldiers who survived — John "Doc" Bradley (Ryan Phillippe), Rene Gagnon (Jesse Bradford) and Ira Hayes (Adam Beach) — were treated like celebrities for contributing to an image that helped fuel American hope. The picture bounces around periodically, utilizing dry voiceover and failing to find a cohesive structure. But Eastwood does an amazing job portraying the time period. From set design to costuming to dialogue, the mid-1940s are recreated with remarkable aplomb. A valuable snapshot of World War II history, but this flag won't be raised when Oscar season hits. *Rated: R for sequences of graphic war violence and carnage, and for language. 2 hours, 29 minutes.* — T.H.

GRIDIRON GANG ★★★

(Century 20) The Rock no longer exists.

MOVIE TIMES

ACCEPTED (PG-13) Century 20: 12:50, 3:10, 5:35, 8 & 10:25 p.m.

THE BRIDGE (R) ★★★

Century 16: 11:40 a.m.; 1:40, 3:50, 5:50, 7:50 & 9:50 p.m.

CATCH A FIRE (PG-13) ★★★1/2 Century 16: 11:45 a.m.; 2:30, 4:55, 7:30 & 9:55 p.m. Century 12: Noon, 1:30, 2:30, 4, 5, 6:40, 7:40, 9:10 & 10:10 p.m.

DEATH OF A PRESIDENT (NOT RATED)

Guild: 2:30, 4:45, 7 & 9:15 p.m.; Sat. & Sun. also at 12:15 p.m.

THE DEPARTED (R) ★★★1/2 Century 16: 11 a.m.; 12:20, 2:15, 3:45, 5:40, 7:05, 9 & 10:15 p.m. Century 12: 12:40, 2:55, 4:10, 6:25, 7:50 & 9:50 p.m.

THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA (PG-13) ★★★

Century 20: 7:15 & 9:45 p.m.

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH (PG-13) ★★

Century 12: 11:55 a.m.; 5:20 & 10:20 p.m.

EVERYONE'S HERO (G) Century 20: 11:35 a.m.; 2:20 & 4:30 p.m.

FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS (R) ★★★ Century 16: 11:50 a.m.; 1:10, 2:45, 4:05, 5:45, 7, 8:45 & 9:50 p.m. Century 20: 11:40 a.m.; 12:55, 2:35, 3:50, 5:30, 6:45, 8:25 & 9:40 p.m.

FLICKA (PG) (NOT REVIEWED)

Century 16: 12:15, 2:25, 4:50, 7:15 & 9:35 p.m. Century 20: 11:30 a.m.; 12:40, 1:50, 3, 4:05, 5:20, 6:25, 7:40, 8:45 & 9:55 p.m.

GRIDIRON GANG (PG-13) ★★★ Century 20: 1:25, 4:15, 7:05 & 9:50 p.m.

THE GRUDGE 2 (PG-13) Century 16: 12:10, 2:40, 5:10, 7:45 & 10:05 p.m. Century 20: 12:30, 2:50, 5:20, 7:50 & 10:20 p.m.

THE GUARDIAN (PG-13) ★★★1/2 Century 20: 11:30 a.m.; 2:30, 5:40 & 8:40 p.m.

THE ILLUSIONIST (PG-13) ★★★ Century 20: 11:35 a.m.; 1:55, 4:20, 7:25 & 9:55 p.m.

INFAMOUS (R) ★★★1/2 Century 20: 11:55 a.m.; 2:25, 5:15, 7:55 & 10:30 p.m.

JACKASS: NUMBER TWO (R)

Century 20: 1, 3:25, 5:50, 8:10 & 10:20 p.m.

JET LI' FEARLESS (PG-13) ★★ Century 12: 2:40 & 7:55 p.m.

THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND (R) ★★★1/2

Century 16: 12:55, 3:55, 6:55 & 9:40 p.m.

LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE (R) ★★★ Century 20: 11:45 a.m.; 2:15, 4:40, 7:10 & 9:35 p.m. Aquarius: 2:10, 4:30, 7 & 9:20 p.m.

MAN OF THE YEAR (PG-13) ★★★ Century 16: 11:25 a.m.; 1:50, 4:15, 6:50 & 9:15 p.m. Century 20: 11:40 a.m.; 2:15, 4:50, 7:35 & 10:15 p.m.

MARIE ANTOINETTE (PG-13) ★1/2 Century 16: 11:20 a.m.; 2, 4:35, 7:25 & 10:10 p.m. Century 12: 12:15, 1:10, 3:50, 4:35, 7:10, 8:20 & 10:30 p.m.

THE MARINE (PG-13) Century 12: 1:40, 4:45, 7:05 & 9:40 p.m.

OPEN SEASON (PG) Century 16: 11:35 a.m.; 1:45 & 3:55 p.m.

Century 12: 11:50 a.m.; 2:15, 4:40, 7 & 9:30 p.m.

THE PRESTIGE (PG-13) 1/2 Century 16: 11:05 a.m.; 12:25, 1:55, 3:25, 4:45, 6:25, 7:35, 9:25 & 10:30 p.m. Century 12: 12:30, 3, 4:15, 6:15, 7:30, 9:20 & 10:25 p.m.

THE QUEEN (NOT RATED) ★★★★ Palo Alto Square: 2, 2:45, 4:20, 5:05, 7, 7:45, 9:25 & 10:05 p.m.; Sat. & Sun. also at 11:30 a.m. & 12:15 p.m.

RUNNING WITH SCISSORS (R) ★★ Century 16: 11:15 a.m.; 2, 4:40, 7:20 & 10 p.m. Century 12: 1:20, 4:30, 7:20 & 10:15 p.m.

SAW III (R) (NOT REVIEWED) Century 16: 11 a.m.; 1:30, 4, 6:30, 8, 9:10 & 10:25 p.m. Century 20: 11:45 a.m.; 12:25, 1:05, 1:45, 2:20, 2:55, 3:40, 4:15, 4:55, 5:30, 6:15, 6:55, 7:30, 8:05, 8:50, 9:30, 10:05 & 10:35 p.m.

THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP (R) Aquarius: 2:50 & 7:40 p.m.

THE SHINING (1980) (R) Aquarius: Fri. & Sat. at midnight.

SHORTBUS (NOT RATED) ★★ Aquarius: 5:10 & 10 p.m.

STEP UP (PG-13) Century 20: 12:15, 2:40, 5, 7:20 & 9:45 p.m.

THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE: THE BEGINNING (R) Century 20: 1:10, 3:20, 5:25, 7:45 & 10:05 p.m.

Note: Screenings are for Friday through Tuesday only.

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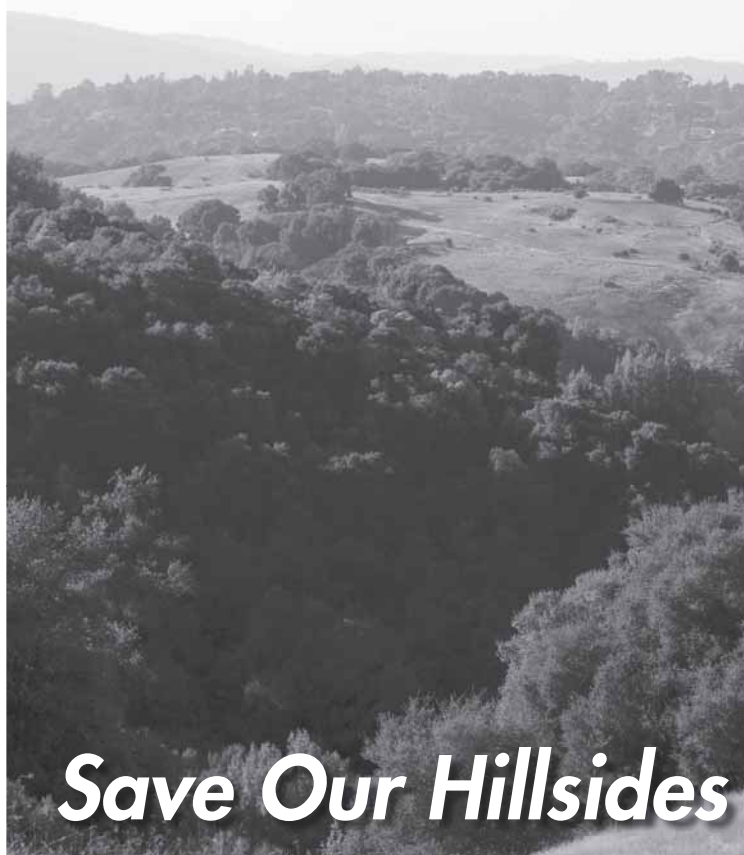
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Dwayne Johnson has finally shed the identity that turned him into a wrestling legend and earned the right to go by his real name. Johnson often brings a sympathetic humanity to his roles, which is plainly evident in his portrayal of real-life probation officer and football coach Sean Porter. Based on a true story, "Gridiron Gang" follows Porter and his colleague Malcolm Moore (Xzibit of "Pimp My Ride" fame) as they launch a football program at grim juvenile detention facility Camp Kilpatrick. The troubled residents of the camp mostly come from the violent gang life of East L.A. Willie Weathers (Jade Yorker) saw his cousin murdered in front of him. Shocked with grief, Willie lands in the camp after killing his abusive stepfather in a moment of rage. Coach Porter and the fledgling football program may be Willie's only chance at a better life. Despite some seen-it-before pigskin scenarios, "Gang" tackles difficult issues revolving around the brutality of gang life. *Rated: PG-13 for startling scenes of violence, mature thematic material and language. 2 hours.* —T.H.

wait for the inevitable. Capote redux: worth going down that road again. *Rated: R for language, violence and mature themes. 1 hour, 58 minutes.* —J.A.

THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND

★★★1/2

(Century 16) When Forest Whitaker makes his entrance as Idi Amin, his massive frame fills the screen and the crowd erupts in cheers. It's a defining moment. Whitaker commands attention and never relinquishes it, whether rousing Ugandan villagers with promises of "a government of action, not words" or whispering threats in the ear of his closest advisor. He can be charming, child-like, cagey, crazy and absolutely terrifying in a performance that has Oscar written all over it. Adapted from Giles Foden's 1998 novel of the same title, the narrative unspools from the bemused perspective of Nicholas Garrigan (James McAvoy). Armed with a newly conferred medical degree and sense of adventure, the young Scotsman heads to Africa on a whim. Garrigan's in the right place at the

right time to tend to Amin after an accident, impressing the imposing figure with his frankness and the fact that he's a Scot who won't bow down to the Brits. Once Garrigan agrees to become the dictator's personal physician, the journey into the heart of darkness begins. Whitaker's acting resurrects the dictator and his deeds with stunning immediacy. *Rated: R for or some strong violence and gruesome images, sexual content and language. 2 hours, 1 minute.* —S.T.

MAN OF THE YEAR ★★★

(Century 16, Century 20) Robin Williams and director Barry Levinson evoke memories of their 1987 collaboration "Good Morning, Vietnam" with this insightful political dramedy. Tom Dobbs (Williams) is a political talk-show host with passionate viewpoints along the lines of Jon Stewart or Bill Maher. Late during one of Dobbs' comedic tirades, a fan half-jokingly suggests that Dobbs make a run for the presidency. Dobbs quickly embraces the idea


► *Continued on next page*

THE GUARDIAN ★★★1/2

(Century 20) Kevin Costner turns in a fine performance in this passable action film that treads the salty waters of the United States Coast Guard. Costner is Senior Chief Ben Randall, the most decorated swimmer in the history of the USCG. When a tricky at-sea rescue goes fatally awry, Ben gets cold feet and reluctantly accepts a position training the next wave of top guns in the Guard's A-school. Among the freshman plebes is an idealistic candidate determined to topple Randall's high water marks. He's Jake Fischer (Ashton Kutcher), a cocky state swim champ with more attitude than brains. The two are oil and water from the get-go, relentlessly testing each other to the limits of their endurance and their patience. Not surprisingly the pair ultimately team up on a dangerous rescue mission, forced to defend each other's lives with nautical know-how. Although "Guardian" lays down the clichés with a trowel and follows an all-too familiar pattern (think "Officer and a Gentleman," "Top Gun," etc.) the energetic performances and a neat twist at the end breath some life into an otherwise stale genre. *Rated: PG-13 for language and adult themes. 2 hours, 16 minutes.* —J.A.

INFAMOUS ★★★1/2

(Century 20) Truman Capote reappears onscreen in yet another take on the "In Cold Blood" days that were the undoing of the mercurial author. English thespian Toby Jones plays the effeminate scribe, the darling of New York City's post-war cafe society who was obsessed by a scrupulously premeditated serial murder in the desolate plains of the great Midwest. Capote sets out for Kansas with gal pal authoress Harper Lee (Sandra Bullock), whose frank wit and refreshing candor keep him on the straight and narrow. As he absorbs himself in his research for a psychological study of a village shocked by a vicious crime, Capote develops an intensely open relationship with delusional murderer Perry Smith (Daniel Craig), one that intensifies over years of court appeals, stays of execution and the interminable


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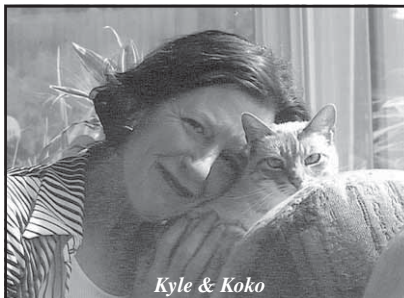
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and soon finds himself on the campaign trail along with his manager (Christopher Walken) and speech writer (Lewis Black). It couldn't happen in a better year for the ambitious comedian. A mega-bucks software company called Delacroy installs state-of-the-art voting systems across the nation — but there's a glitch in the technology, discovered by Delacroy employee Eleanor Green (Laura Linney). When the company covers up its mistake to protect profits and Dobbs illegitimately wins the election, Eleanor is victimized by Delacroy with only one person willing to believe her: Dobbs himself. Humor, suspense and political insight unite for an unusual but enlightening cinematic experience. *Rated: PG-13 for language including some crude sexual reference, drug related material, and brief violence. 1 hour, 56 minutes.* —T.H.

MARIE ANTOINETTE ★1/2

(Century 16, Century 12) Watching "Marie Antoinette," you may learn more about writer and director Sofia Coppola than about the 14-year-old who journeyed from Austria to France to marry the Dauphin who would later become King Louis XVI. Fashion, food, sex and post-punk music are at the center of this pretty-as-a-picture but boring biopic of Marie Antoinette. Depicted as giggly and girly, the future queen of France (Kirsten Dunst) is a foreigner disliked at the Court of Versailles. The fashion-obsessed party girl has big hair and an "oh, wow" vocabulary that doesn't get lost in translation. She's the Paris Hilton of the 18th century, replete with small-dog accessories and Manolo Blahnik shoes. All she lacks is a sex video, given that her husband (an always awkward-looking Jason Schwartzman) would rather snooze than consummate their marriage. Coppola's third feature is all surface and no substance, leaving you as undernourished as the French in the bread-shortage months preceding the revolution. *Rated: PG-13 for sexual content, partial nudity and innuendo. 1 hour, 58 minutes.* — S.T.

THE PRESTIGE 1/2

(Century 16, Century 12) As described by illusion designer Cutter (Michael Caine), the third act of a great magic trick "is the part with the twists and turns, where lives hang in the balance, and you see something shocking you've never seen before." It's the big finish, the satisfying payoff, the ta-da! ending that never materializes in this disappointing movie. Granted, successfully adapting Christopher Priest's similarly titled novel to the screen would have required a magic wand rather than a pen. The 1995 prize-winning story of two Victorian-era magicians consists of first-person diary entries. In "The Prestige," a little voice-over narration here and there, in this case delivered by Cutter, fails to reveal the innermost thoughts of arch enemies Alfred "Le Professeur" Borden (Christian Bale) and Robert "The Great Danton" Angier (Hugh Jackman) that lie at the gothic heart of the tale. The film shows instead of tells, presenting events that make no sense without an explanation. There's no real magic here. For more likeable characters and better sleight-of-hand storytelling, see "The Illusionist."

Rated: PG for violence and disturbing images. 2 hours, 15 minutes. —S.T.

THE QUEEN ★★★★★

(CineArts) Helen Mirren is perfection as Queen Elizabeth, not the be-wigged and Tudored version but the contemporary royal for whom a stiff upper lip is the order of the day. That credo is put to the test when Princess Diana is killed in a dramatic car crash inside a dark tunnel in Paris while being pursued by paparazzi. Newly elected British Prime Minister Tony Blair (Michael Sheen) is between a rock and a hard spot, anxious to spit-polish his image with a face of public concern yet clashing mightily with the tightly contained, ritual-bound world of his Queen. Blair and Her Royal Highness do emotional battle with all the diplomatic and procedural forces they can bring to bear while a staid Prince Philip (James Cromwell) staves off reality by stalking an elk that's furtively roaming his summer estate. What ensues is a captivating fictional account of real events that transpired in August of 1997. Mirren deserves every year-end award available for her spot-on portrayal of a reigning royal caught between the crosshairs, forced by a country in mourning to put protocol and personal judgment aside and break with long-standing tradition. *Rated: PG-13 for language and adult situations. 1 hour, 43 minutes. —J.A.*

SHORTBUS ★★


(Aquarius) John Cameron Mitchell ("Hedwig and the Angry Inch") makes

a bold declaration on the state of adult sexuality with unappealing consequences. A colorful assortment of emotionally challenged players — straight and gay, male and female — have reached a critical juncture in their personal relationships and yearn for a deeper connection between love and sex. Sex therapist Sofia (Sook-Yin Lee) preaches carnal bliss yet continually fakes orgasms with husband Rob (Raphael Baker), who is none the wiser. James and Jamie (Paul Dawson and PJ DeBoy) have been cohabitating for years but James can't commit, and the pair end up on Sofia's couch. It's not long before Sofia owns up to her own issues and the Js invite her to join them at New York's Shortbus, a weekly Brooklyn salon that fosters a loving, open community of music, politics and public sex. And how. Threesomes, fellatio, orgies: All manners of sexual behavior are well represented at the kinky Shortbus, ultimately detracting from Mitchell's poignant message about the slim and subtle connections between physical and emotional love. *Rated: Unrated but should be NC-17 for graphic sexual images and frontal nudity. 1 hour, 42 minutes. —J.A.*

■ **MOVIECRITICS**

S.T.-Susan Tavernetti,
J.A.-Jeanne Aufmuth, J.S.-Jim Shelby,
T.H.-Tyler Hanley

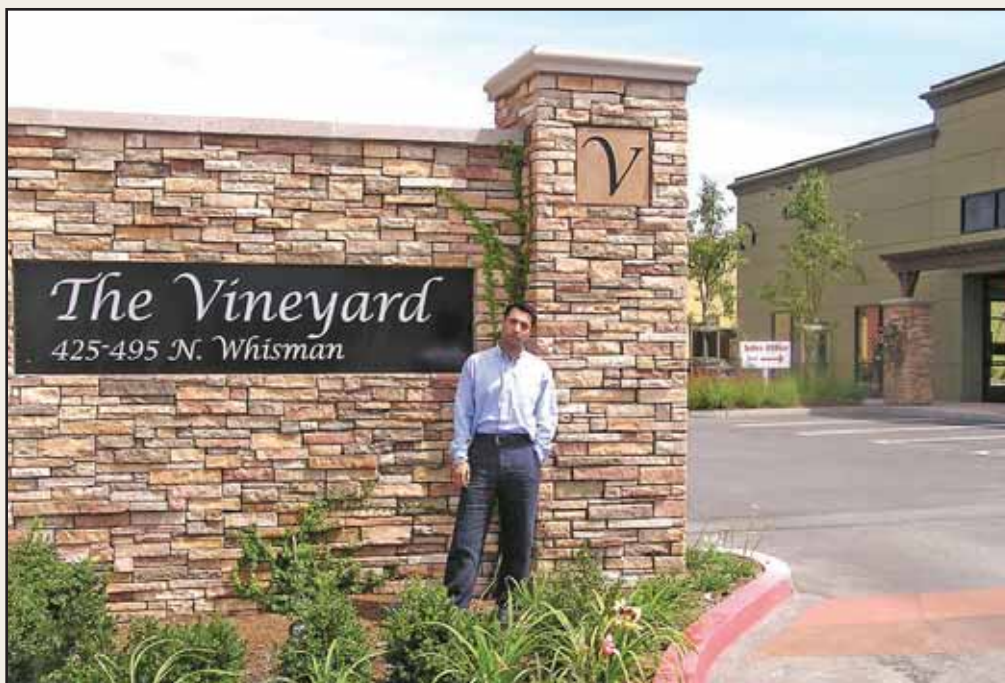
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