

Mountain View VOICE

DECEMBER 1, 2006 VOLUME 14 NO. 49

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Holiday
dance

Smuin brings
Christmas ballet
to downtown

A&E | P.24



VERONICA WEBER

Marina Mikhailova (left) and Kaitlin Shorts (right) practice their expressions in the Peninsula Children's Chorale class at the CSMA in Mountain View.

CSMA goes extra mile for local arts

MOUNTAIN VIEW'S COMMUNITY SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND ARTS PUTS YOUNG STUDENTS FIRST

By Alexa Tondreau

Mountain View is lucky. For nearly 20 years, its elementary school children have been receiving a comprehensive art and music education courtesy of the Community School for Music and Arts.

On most weeks of the school year, CSMA instructors visit every elementary and middle school classroom in the Mountain View Whisman district, bringing to students a wealth of expert knowledge that not only meets state standards for education, but "in many cases goes way beyond," according to music director Arleen Pickett.

The art and music programs provided by

CSMA enrich the educational experience of school children throughout the district by offering a host of unique learning opportunities. Students receive training in art and music built on the idea of sequential skill building, so that with each new grade the students improve their abilities, whether they are in singing, reading music, or painting a landscape.

CSMA also works to give students varied extracurricular options, including choral singing at each school site, after-school art clubs and training, instruments, and free summer camps for students who aspire to play in a high school marching band.

CSMA goes to great lengths to encourage students to cultivate an appreciation for art, inviting them to make regular visits to exhibits and galleries at CSMA's Finn Center, located on San Anto-

► See **HOLIDAY FUND**, page 11



City picks site for affordable housing

LOT AT CORNER OF EVELYN AND FRANKLIN WILL HOLD 50 STUDIO APARTMENTS

By Daniel DeBolt

A city-owned lot at Evelyn and Franklin streets that has been considered for affordable housing for years finally got the go-ahead this week from the city council, setting the stage for 50 below-market-rate efficiency studios downtown.

The council had deadlocked in July on the issue, debating over which downtown lot to put the

project on. But this time around, council members said they felt compelled to move forward.

"I reluctantly support moving the project to Evelyn to get this project moving," said council member Mike Kasperzak.

Kasperzak said he brought the issue back to the council because a state law, the newly passed Propo-

sition 1C, means affordable housing projects will cost more if they're not pursued in the next few years.

"Every day we wait, costs go up," he said. "Costs are

going up far faster than invested returns on our saved below-mar-

"I reluctantly support moving the project to Evelyn."

MIKE KASPERZAK, COUNCIL MEMBER

► See **COUNCIL**, page 7

School district deals with flood of transfer requests

HIGH SCHOOLS OUT OF SPACE FOR STUDENTS WHO WANT TO SWITCH FROM LOS ALTOS TO MOUNTAIN VIEW

By Alexa Tondreau

Local high school officials are scratching their heads over a growing flood of student requests to transfer from Los Altos to Mountain View high schools.

This year, there were 391 requests to switch to Mountain View High, a trend that cannot be sustained according to Mountain View-Los Altos School District officials. During the same period, only 180 students requested a

move to Los Altos High.

The number of transfer requests to Mountain View has risen steadily over the past several years, a cause of concern because both schools are nearing maximum capacity. In addition, district officials say, very few students will be granted transfers in the years to come due to both schools reaching that maximum. The transfers are granted on a first-come, first-served basis.

During a district board meeting last week, Associate Superintendent Brigitte Saraff said a majority of the transfer requests came from students who had attended Blach Junior High in the Los Altos School District. Because of district

► See **HIGH SCHOOLS**, page 8

INSIDE

GOINGS ON 33 | MARKETPLACE 36 | MOVIES 25 | REAL ESTATE 42 | VIEWPOINT 18

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Reading between the emotional line makes the difference between finding a house and a home.

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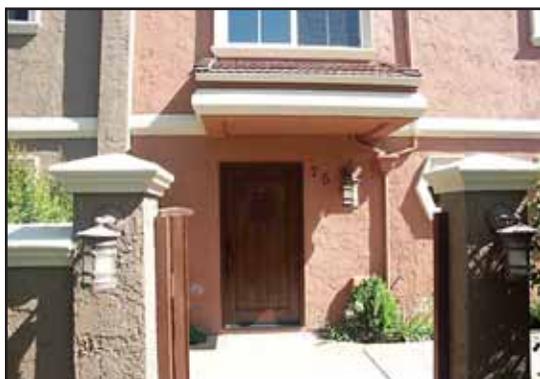
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Voices

A R O U N D T O W N

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

“What type of exercise do you do to stay fit during the holidays?”



“I walk my dog.”
Erika Costanzo, Mountain View



“I workout every day. I jump rope 2,000 times and run for 30 minutes.”
Feng Li, Mountain View



“I train for soccer.”
Ben Hur, Mountain View



“I workout at the gym.”
Anna Quijano, San Jose



“I take my dog for long walks.”
Amy Hyde, Berkeley

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■ QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“We don’t get an accurate explanation. People say it’s proximity, or ‘my friends are going there,’ or ‘I had an aunt who went to Mountain View’ and so they want to go there too. Very few curricular reasons are ever given.”

— BRIGITTE SARAFF

MVLA ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT, ON THE REASONS WHY HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS ARE ASKING TO TRANSFER FROM LOS ALTOS HIGH TO MOUNTAIN VIEW HIGH

■ CRIMEWATCH

ATTEMPTED ROBBERY, 600 BLOCK SAN ANTONIO, 11/22

Last Wednesday at 10:22 a.m., a man was seen attempting to shoplift at Rite Aid, placing several small items in his basket and moving to walk out of the store.

The cologne clerk was aware that the man didn’t pay and confronted him. An argument ensued and the clerk punched and kicked the thief in the groin. The man got away, although it is possible that he sustained injuries.

ASSAULT WITH A DEADLY WEAPON, 2100 BLOCK OLD MIDDLEFIELD, 11/22

At 1:37 a.m., a brawl broke out in front of a bar on Old Middlefield Road. Four men ganged up against one other man, and beat him until he was unconscious.

The attackers fled the scene, but were stopped in their vehicle nearby and arrested.

■ POLICELOG

AUTO BURGLARY

1500 block Canna Ct., 11/23
2700 Del Medio Ct., 11/23
Cottonwood Ct./Kent Dr., 11/25

STOLEN VEHICLE

600 block Tyrella Ave., 11/23
2500 block Wyandotte St., 11/24
2200 block Rock St., 11/26

BATTERY

2200 block California St., 11/26
200 block Evandale Ave., 11/26
700 block Continental Circle, 11/26
300 block Whisman Station Dr., 11/26

VANDALISM

100 block Central Ave., 11/24
1000 block Space Park Way, 11/24
1200 block Bryant Ave., 11/25
200 block Fair Oaks St., 11/25

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Trader Joe’s, 11/24
1900 block West El Camino Real, 11/26

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A true PAL

By Don Frances

THE AWARD GIVEN to police Chief Scott Vermeer by the Rotary Club last month was not, repeat not, because he's so darned handsome.

No, Vermeer was presented a Vocational Service Award by the Rotarians for his "outstanding professional achievement while maintaining very high ethical standards."

The award, presented Nov. 21, came with an \$800 donation to Mountain View's Police Action League, or PAL. Recently reestablished here after a several-year hiatus, PAL seeks to foster trust between local youth and police through group activities.

Vermeer was credited with resurrecting the local chapter of PAL (the original chapter was shut down in the mid-1980s). Apparently he'd come to appreciate its success in Redwood City, and worked for three years to bring it back to Mountain View.

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NICHOLAS JENSEN

The owners of the Satake Nursery are in talks with Summerhill Homes to possibly develop 30 homes on the 6.5-acre site.

City's last nursery may pull up roots

AFTER THREE GENERATIONS OF GROWERS, SATAKE FAMILY PLANS TO SELL BUSINESS

By Daniel DeBolt

Nestled in the middle of a residential neighborhood, with homes on all sides, the nursery at 1079 Marilyn Drive is one of the last significant agricultural properties in the city.

For three generations, the Satake family has grown mari-

golds, chrysanthemums and dahlias here to be sold all over the Bay Area. But if all goes as expected at a city council meeting later this month, the remaining six-plus acres of greenhouses and fields will be re-zoned for residential use, putting it one step closer to becoming a housing tract similar to its surroundings.

Owner Russ Satake clearly isn't happy about this idea, but "The issue is with the value of land around here. It doesn't make sense anymore," he said. He added that no sale has been finalized.

Neighbors and associates spoke highly of the family, and

► See **SATAKE**, page 7

Former Foothill president dies

VISIONARY EDUCATOR JAMES FITZGERALD LED SCHOOL FROM EARLY '70S TO EARLY '80S

By Amber Cleave

James S. Fitzgerald, president of Foothill College from 1973 to 1982, died at his home in Cambria on Nov. 23.

"We owe Jim a great deal," said interim Foothill College president Penny Patz in a press release. "He was a friend of Foothill and a life-long advocate for students."

Many of his colleagues say Fitzgerald's vision of Foothill was ahead of its time. He was responsible for expanding the college's independent study and tutorial programs, an uncommon move during the 1970s. Now, tutorial centers are the epicenter of most



James Fitzgerald

► See **FITZGERALD**, page 13

Peanut butter cheesecake a winner

LOCAL BAKER'S SINFUL DESSERT CHOSEN FOR WAL-MART COOKBOOK

By Amber Cleave

Kristen Crossley is a baker extraordinaire. "My cooking isn't very good, but the baking is great," she said. She claims all those who know her would agree.

Crossley moved from Massachusetts to California five years ago and has lived in Mountain View for the last four years. She learned of the Wal-Mart Family Cookbook competition while working at the store's local outlet in Mountain View, and it was there that she made her breakthrough as a baker.

Last year, Crossley's recipe for her strawberry kiwi cream cheese tart was selected for the cookbook. This year, her peanut butter

chocolate chip cheesecake was also a winner.

"It's so delicious that I have had people purchase the cheesecake from me for parties and events," Crossley said. "I figured, why not enter the dessert if it's this good?"

In the end, the cheesecake was good enough to beat out thousands of other entries and become one of "96 prize-winning recipes," as the book's cover puts it.

Wal-Mart says its cookbook was created to develop a sense of camaraderie and community between customers and associates. Entries for the illustrated cookbook — which covers the whole meal, from appetizers to main courses to desserts — came only from Wal-Mart

employees. Since the employees hail from all different cultures and ethnicities, their recipes vary widely.

"The cookbook is meant to take us back to the days of pot-lucks and parties when people used to sit down and enjoy a good meal together," said Regina Walters, account services manager for Try-Foods International, a food industry promoter which represents Wal-Mart and publishes the book.

The contest is in its sixth year, and sales and entries have increased every year, Walters said. The cookbook is available at any Wal-Mart for \$5. ▣

E-mail Amber Cleave at acleave@mv-voice.com

PEANUT BUTTER CHEESECAKE RECIPE:

1 1/4 cups graham cracker crumbs
2/3 cups sugar
1/3 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
1/3 cup butter, melted
8 oz. softened cream cheese
14 oz. sweetened condensed milk
10 oz. peanut butter-flavored pieces, melted
4 eggs
2 tsp. vanilla extract
1 cup swirled peanut butter and semisweet chocolate-flavored pieces

Directions:

Preheat oven to 300 degrees. To create the pie crust, combine graham cracker crumbs, sugar, cocoa powder and butter in a bowl. Press the mixture into a 9-inch baking pan. Next, beat the cream cheese with a mixer in a large mixing bowl for about 30 seconds. Add sweetened condensed milk gradually and mix with cream cheese. Mix in melted peanut butter pieces until smooth and then add the eggs and vanilla. Stir in peanut butter and semi-sweet chocolate pieces. Pour over the crust mixture and bake for 55-65 minutes. Use a sharp knife to remove the edges from the pan and cool completely over a wire rack, then cover and chill for at least four hours before serving.

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500083Y-05 09/06



City vehicles like this truck, parked at the Municipal Operations Center on Whisman Road, may be run on biodiesel as early as 2007.

That truck smells like French fries

CITY TO CAUTIOUSLY TURN OVER PART OF ITS FLEET TO BIODIESEL FUEL

By Daniel DeBolt

We can thank Rudolph Diesel for inventing the diesel engine — that rattling contraption that powers trucks and tractors and belches black smoke — in 1892.

But few know that Diesel invented his machine to run on vegetable oil, which it actually does quite well; and it smells better, too.

Next year the city of Mountain View plans to use biodiesel — an environmentally friendly fuel derived from vegetable oil — in many of its diesel-powered machines and vehicles, but not without some caution. Despite its low emissions, the fuel has been known to pick up dirt, clog fuel filters and eat through rubber fuel lines when used improperly. That's why a few other cities, including Palo Alto and Berkeley, stopped using the fuel after some of their vehicles ground to a halt.

"Other cities had problems with it and we want to try and avoid that," said Steve Miller, Mountain View's fleet services manager.

The fuel can be fairly trouble-free, but not without a few

changes to equipment, especially older equipment. In the future, problematic rubber fuel lines may be replaced with lines resistant to biodiesel, but until then Miller hopes to fend off problems by introducing a mix of biodiesel diluted with standard petroleum diesel.

"As soon as we feel comfortable we will be starting with a mix of biodiesel," he said, adding that it would likely be the first quarter of 2007 before the fuel would start powering any of the city's 40 to 50 trucks, mowers, tractors and air compressors stationed at the Municipal Operations Center.

The city's comfort level may depend on how certain officials are that machines using the fuel won't break down. Neighboring Palo Alto had no trouble with it at first — but a few years in, problems began.

"We used it for about five years at our landfill pretty successfully," said Keith Lahaie, Palo Alto's fleet manager about biodiesel. However, he said, "We started running into problems with fuel filters. When you have a \$100,000 bull-

dozer disabled on a huge garbage face, that's a big problem."

Lahaie said Palo Alto plans to resume using biodiesel in the near future once it sorts out why the fuel filters became clogged. Palo Alto also plans to convert more of its diesel vehicles and equipment in the future.

"We really don't have facilities to implement it right now," Lahaie said. "You can't just convert all of your equipment. It's better to phase it in a few vehicles at a time."

Advocates of biodiesel believe the reduction in air pollution is worth the fuel's costs. According to the EPA, biodiesel emissions are 50 percent less likely to produce ozone than petroleum diesel, and the major components of acid rain — sulfur oxides and sulfates — are nearly nonexistent in biodiesel emissions.

Its use can also boost the economy by creating domestic jobs, including crop farming.

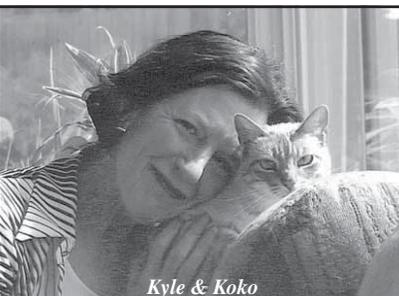
Mountain View's Valley Oil will supply the fuel, which it does not sell to the public. Biodiesel is still considered an experimental fuel by the state, and stations must apply for a special variance to sell it. In San Jose, a few hundred people a month buy a 99 percent mix from Western States Oil, but not without signing an agreement and joining a users group.

Nearly pure biodiesel is going for \$3.26 a gallon at Western States Oil. The current average price for petroleum diesel on the West Coast is \$2.60 a gallon, according to the Energy Information Administration, but was higher than biodiesel during recent spikes in the price-per-barrel of oil.

Miller says the city plans to use a 5 percent mix of biodiesel to start, but that could later climb to 20 percent or higher. ▀

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COUNCIL

▶ Continued from page 1

ket-rate housing money.”

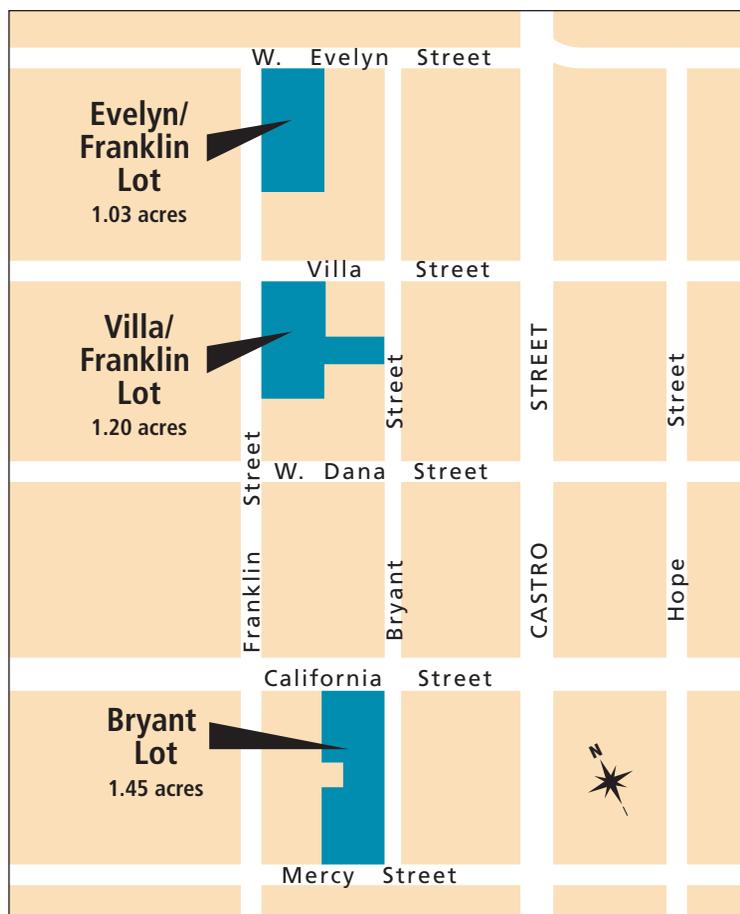
In July, three council members were in support of an alternative site at Bryant and California streets. But Tuesday's decision was unanimous, with Mayor Nick Galiotto announcing his changed vote at a previous meeting and Kasperzak and council member Laura Macias announcing their reluctant switch Tuesday from supporting the Bryant site.

The council decision came after a long public comment period, with several residents and representatives from housing nonprofits supporting the site at Bryant and California.

But many neighbors of the Bryant site spoke against affordable housing downtown, saying there would be negative impacts on business and the neighborhood. One man said he was concerned about domestic disturbances, crime and upkeep of the property.

Human relations commissioner Alicia Crank said there was a difference between affordable housing and “the slums.” She said part of the project would involve educating people about how nice affordable housing developments can be. Crank favored putting the project in the “heart of downtown” at the Bryant site, near the Center for Performing Arts, Pioneer Park and the library.

Two church leaders spoke in support of placing affordable housing downtown. Representatives from the Old Mountain View Neighborhood Association said they were in support of the Evelyn site. Several nonprofit housing developers were there to encourage the development



of affordable housing, preferably on the Bryant site, which would allow 70 units as opposed to the 50 at the one-acre Evelyn site.

There was also talk of using the Bryant site for the grocery store that so many nearby residents have asked for over the years.

The Evelyn lot is currently used for overflow parking for the Caltrain station, with about 60 available spaces nearly filled every morning. One business owner expressed frustration that the one downtown lot, which provides unrestricted parking hours, would be gone soon.

Transportation and policy manager Joan Jenkins said that a single deck parking structure for the downtown train station was

being considered by the VTA to be built in one to five years.

Funding the housing project will require state and county help. City staff described the process as “opportunistic” because funding is not always available from the state and certain projects are given priority over others.

The city's last affordable housing project, San Antonio Place, cost the city \$5.5 million, but other funding sources covered the rest of the total cost of \$22 million. The city purchased the land for \$3 million, which would not be an expense for the city-owned Evelyn lot.

The city council is considering how to spend about \$11 mil-

lion in funds it has received for below-market-rate housing. The funds are generated through fees collected from housing developers who choose not to include below-market-rate units in their project. The fund is expected to grow quickly in the coming years as 3,000 housing units now in the planning stages are built.

Council lines up new planning commissioners

While it's not official yet, on Tuesday the city council ranked John Inks, Bill Bien and Arnold Soderbergh as the best choices to fill three open seats on the Environmental Planning Commission. The decision will be made official on Dec. 12.

“I have never seen such strong candidates,” said council member Matt Pear.

Soderbergh had applied the day before and had experience with planning in another city. The council said he would bring a “fresh perspective” to the commission.

Bien is a human relations commissioner who studied law at Stanford and learned about planning while watching the Satake Nursery development near his home go through the planning process. He promised to recuse himself from decisions in his own neighborhood.

John Inks is a parks and recreation commissioner who recently lost in the city council election by a few hundred votes. He was the council's top pick for the planning commission.

The new commissioners will fill seats left behind by Mar-

garet Abe-Koga and Jac Siegel, who were both elected to the city council in November. Many see the planning commission as a stepping stone to the city council.

City funds July 4th event

Also on Tuesday, the city approved its annual subsidy for Fourth of July festivities at Shoreline Amphitheatre as it has done since 1987, but this time it wasn't without concern.

The city received a \$10 million settlement from the venue's operator, Live Nation, earlier this year after a drawn-out court battle with an earlier operator, Clear Channel. For years, the city had accused Clear Channel of hiding millions in profits to avoid paying the city its full due.

The Fourth of July subsidy of \$75,000 for Live Nation was described as quite large by council member Greg Perry. One public speaker called it a “sweetheart deal.”

The money is meant to cover 27 percent of the cost of the event. The city has felt the cost was justified because many of those who enjoy the event watch the fireworks from outside the venue. Residents also receive a discounted price on tickets, which equals about \$8,000 of the subsidy.

This year, the city says, 2,000 free tickets will be given to residents.

“It's a better deal than we've had before,” Macias said. ■

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

“I have never seen such strong candidates.”

MATT PEAR,
COUNCIL MEMBER

SATAKE

▶ Continued from page 5

said they're glad the Satakes intend to stay in their home near the edge of the nursery if the sale goes through.

“We wish them the best,” said Jo Dohler, assistant manager at Summer Winds nursery on San Antonio Road, which sells plants grown by Satake Nursery. “They are a wonderful place, wonderful people.” She said Satake is the only nursery left in the city with actual growing grounds.

Located not far from Castro Street, the nursery is one of the last three working agricultural properties in the city — the other two are the Franzia family orchard and the Grant Road farm — which are being considered for development. The Grant Road farm development is scheduled to come before the council next year with a plan for 55 homes on 15 acres. The Franzia family has only expressed interest in developing their large orchard on

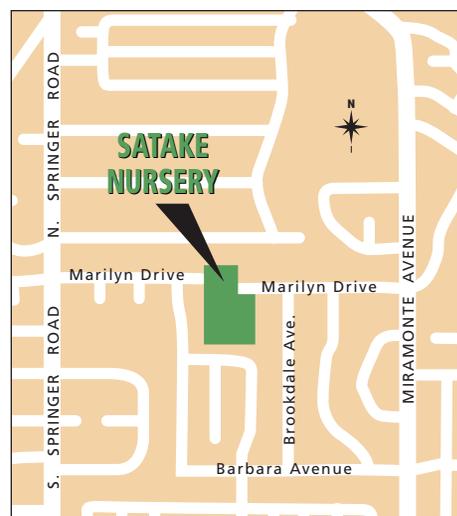
Whisman Road.

The next council meeting on the Satake Nursery will be Dec. 12, when council members will decide on re-zoning the land.

Neighbors of the Satake Nursery have been watching the project closely for almost a year. Summerhill Homes wants to build 30 single family houses on the 6.5 acres there, while some neighbors want a lower density zoning that would allow only 26.

Despite the efforts by Summerhill to work with the community on traffic and other concerns, resident Roy Mize said some neighbors are still very concerned about the density of housing proposed. He also said some residents were told that major decisions on the project would not be made until 2007 — making him wonder about the Dec. 12 meeting.

“There is a perception that the review process has been accelerated so this council can vote on it,” Wize said. “Everybody knows the three people coming in are far



more sensitive to density.”

City planner Martin Alkyre disagreed with that notion.

“I don't think we ever communicated that to the neighbors,” he said about a perceived schedule change.

Two of the three newly elected mem-

bers are Jac Siegel and Margaret Abe-Koga, both of whom are leaving seats on the Environmental Planning Commission. Both joined most of their peers in approving a commission recommendation for R1 zoning, with an average lot size of 7,000 square feet, which would allow for a maximum of 33 homes on the property. (Commissioner Paul Lesty was the only one opposed, as he favored zoning that would have allowed 38 homes.)

The Satakes are known for their high-quality plants, and Russ Satake received an award in 1999 for his work by the California Association of Nurserymen. In 2001, his father James Satake received a Congressional Award for his service in World War II and for his community involvement in Mountain View.

The family also owns a nursery in Morgan Hill. Together, both nurseries employ 50 people. ■

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Castro garden gets a hand from OSH

HARDWARE CHAIN'S DONATIONS MEANT TO HELP KIDS DEVELOP THEIR GREEN THUMBS

By Alexa Tondreau

There's a trend in education sweeping the state, a newfound idea relying on old-fashioned skills.

Gardening, a pastime traditionally practiced by adults, is finding a place in elementary school curriculums as students are being encouraged to get their hands dirty.

Mountain View's Castro Elementary has seized on the idea of gardening as a practical tool for learning, and recently announced that the school was partnering with Orchard Supply Hardware (OSH) in a year-long project that will help the school develop several large gardens.

In celebration of its 75th anniversary, each of OSH's 86 stores in California has partnered with a local school and will donate up to \$1,000 in supplies, plants and tools, as well as gardening expertise, to help create and maintain school gardens.

Rob Lynch, CEO of OSH, said that in order to commemorate the company's 75th anniversary, "We decided to give back to the community and we were looking for a way to do something to help schools."

The company, founded by orchard farmers in San Jose, felt

that assistance with gardens was appropriate given the fact that "farming, gardening and agriculture are such a big part of the [local] economy," Lynch said.

For its part, Castro was already taking steps to implement a school gardening program, brought to the school by the PACT (Parent, Child, Teacher) program, which until last year had resided at the now-closed Slater School.

Judy Atterholt-Petti, Castro's librarian and coordinator of the OSH program, said the school plans to build two major gardens using funds from a variety of places, including OSH, the Castro PTA, the Mountain View Whisman School District and a grant from the Western Growers Foundation. One of the gardens will feature 19 raised beds, and another will be a "bird and butterfly garden" with walking paths and boulders, Atterholt-Petti said.

Each classroom at Castro will have exclusive domain over one of the flower beds, and Atterholt-Petti said that, thanks to the hard work of a group of parent volunteers last Saturday, the irrigation system is in place and students should be able to grow plants in time for spring.

Castro principal Carmen Mizell told the *Voice* in an e-mail that she believes "growing a school garden exposes students to valuable life

skills such as encouraging exploration, patience and tolerance."

The coordinated effort between Castro and OSH is in keeping with the state Department of Education's school gardening program, which began in 1999 with former state Superintendent Delaine Eastin's "a garden in every school" program. Subsequently, the Department of Education published a resource packet called "A Child's Gardens of Standards" to act as a guideline for schools wishing to implement gardening curriculum.

In late September of this year, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed legislation which allocates \$15 million in the state budget for instructional school gardening programs. As of Dec. 1, schools can apply for gardening grants from the allocated funds.

Lynch said that for now, the gardening partnership with Castro and other schools is slated to last one year, but he believes the permanence of a growing garden is what makes it such a special gift for students.

"They can nourish and use the gardens over time," he said, "and subsequent classes can use them as well." ■

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



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HIGH SCHOOLS

► Continued from page 1

boundary lines, 85 percent of Blach students attend Mountain View High School, and it is the remaining 15 percent slated to go to Los Altos who account for the largest portion of transfer requests.

Sarraf said it was "very understandable" that these students wished to be with their peers in Mountain View, and traditionally these transfers have always been granted.

Always granted until this year, that is, when former Blach students experienced denials for the first time because of the number of other students requesting transfers. Sarraf said this new batch of requests, which accounted for nearly 20 percent of all transfer requests this year, is somewhat of a mystery.

When students apply for the transfers, they are asked to voluntarily supply a reason. In an interview with the *Voice*, Sarraf said the district considers the explanations provided in the transfer requests to be "very nebulous and superficial."

"We don't get an accurate explanation. People say it's proximity,

or 'my friends are going there,' or 'I had an aunt who went to Mountain View' and so they want to go there too. Very few curricular reasons are ever given."

School board president Julia Rosenberg lives in the Blach School area of Los Altos and has had one of her own children transfer from Los Altos to Mountain View. Rosenberg said she thinks parents may not realize the transfers are approved on a first-come first-served basis.

"People might be afraid that the reason they give is going to affect their chances of getting in," she said.

Sarraf believes the district is dealing with students' and families' stereotypes and assumptions about each of the two high schools.

"Most of this is about perceptions. People put their own spin on things, and you don't know exactly what it is you're dealing with," she said.

Part of the larger perception about the two high schools may be that Mountain View High is considered safer than Los Altos. While this reason has never been officially listed in a transfer request, Sarraf said that an informal survey she conducted resulted in several people telling her they believed the

perception to be true.

But both Sarraf and Superintendent Barry Groves said that it isn't.

"It's not accurate in terms of our statistics. The schools are almost identical" in terms of safety, Groves explained.

One important difference between the high schools that may be influencing public opinion is the way the demographics fall in terms of two categories: academic performance and socio-economic background.

Mountain View High has a majority of students who fall right in the middle in terms of both categories. Los Altos, on the other hand, has a student body that operates in the extremes. With very few students falling in the middle, Los Altos has a large number of both high performing students and students who come from high-income families. Additionally, the school reports quite a few low performing students and students who come from low-income backgrounds.

Sarraf thinks the public is influenced by the fact that "the two extremes are blending in one environment." She added that

► See **HIGH SCHOOLS**, page 16



What Every Parent Needs to Know About Eating Disorders

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About the Holiday Fund

Voice readers who want to increase the impact of their charitable donations this season can give to the Holiday Fund, which helps arrange dollar-for-dollar matching grants that can double the size of contributions to six local nonprofit agencies.

This year, the Wakerly Family Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation will match, to the extent possible, all contributions to the *Voice* Holiday Fund

on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Last year, *Voice* readers gave \$23,000, which after the matching grants created a total contribution of \$46,000, or \$7,600 for each of the six nonprofit agencies.

This year, all funds received will be held by the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, and be dispersed to the six nonprofit agencies in February or early March. No fees are assessed by the foundation, so that 100 percent of every contribution will go to the nonprofit agencies.



VERONICA WEBER/

Dana Guerin helps 14-year-old Shahan Salim find the right beat during their private drum lesson at the CSMA.

HOLIDAY FUND

► Continued from page 1

nio Circle. Additionally, a program called the Family Concert Series features cultural music from around the world and is free for students and their families to attend. This year, music teachers will focus on music from Japan, Africa and the Middle East in order to link the curriculum in the classroom to the performers who are in residence or will be visiting CSMA.

CSMA has been around for 30 years and serves 30,000 people in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. It provides education in schools in other local communities too, including Los Altos. But Mountain View Whisman is the only district “where we reach every elementary school,” Pickett said.

Evy Schiffman, the director of marketing and communications at CSMA, said that giving children a strong arts education “benefits all of us.” The unique collaboration between the nonprofit and the school district is funded through various organizations, including the Mountain View Educational Foundation, the city of Mountain View, and the school district. But Schiffman estimated that “25 percent of funds” are provided directly from CSMA.

The nonprofit is housed in the Finn Center, a 25,000-square-foot facility completed

two years ago. The center includes 17 music studios and classrooms, a ceramics studio, a digital arts lab, the Tateuchi Concert Hall and the Mohr Gallery.

Classes offered at the Finn Center in the daytime and evenings encompass a variety of subjects. This year will see another diverse selection, ranging from comic book illustration to jewelry making and a “laptop orchestra” class that teaches students of any age how to arrange music on a computer.

At the heart of CSMA’s work is a mission to provide arts education to everyone. For

those who cannot afford the tuition fees, CSMA has a number of merit scholarships and aide opportunities, with CSMA giving more than \$150,000 annually to its students.

Contributions collected through the Holiday Fund this year will most likely go towards financial aid, and Schiffman attests to the fact that “everyone from preschoolers to senior citizens” needs the extra help.

“We really do mean it when we say that this is arts for all,” Schiffman said, “regardless of age, economic background or skill level.”

To find out more about CSMA, visit its Web site at www.arts4all.org — or drop in at the Finn Center, located at 230 San Antonio Circle in Mountain View. ▀

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

“We really do mean it when we say that this is arts for all.”

EVY SCHIFFMAN

How to Give

Your gift helps children and others in need



Contributions to the Holiday Fund will be matched dollar for dollar, to the extent possible, and will go directly to the nonprofit agencies that serve Mountain View residents. Last year, readers contributed \$23,000, which was matched dollar for dollar for a total of

\$46,000, or \$7,600 for each agency.

No administrative costs are deducted from the gifts, which are tax-deductible as permitted by law. All donations are shared equally by the six recipient agencies listed here.

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

■ **THE COMMUNITY SERVICES AGENCY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW AND LOS ALTOS.**

Assists homeless families and seniors with short term housing and medical care; the CSA shelter is a cooperative effort between 17 faith communities in Mountain View and Los Altos.

■ **THE COMMUNITY HEALTH AWARENESS COUNCIL**

Serves Mountain View, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills and seven school districts. Offers school-based programs to protect students from high-risk behaviors, such as drug and alcohol abuse.

■ **MOUNTAIN VIEW ROTACARE CLINIC**

Provides uninsured community residents with medical care and medications and is frequently the last resort for this underserved clientele.

■ **DAY WORKER CENTER OF MOUNTAIN VIEW**

Provides a secure place for workers and employers to negotiate wages. Serves 50 or more workers per day with job-matching, English lessons and guidance.

■ **THE SUPPORT NETWORK FOR BATTERED WOMEN**

Operates a 24-hour bilingual hotline, a safe shelter for women and their children and offers counseling and other services for families facing this problem.

■ **COMMUNITY SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND ARTS**

Provides hands-on arts and music projects in the elementary classrooms of the Mountain View-Whisman School District. Nearly 40 percent of the students are low-income and 28 percent have limited English proficiency.

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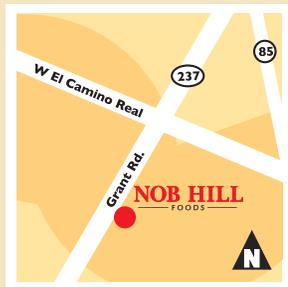
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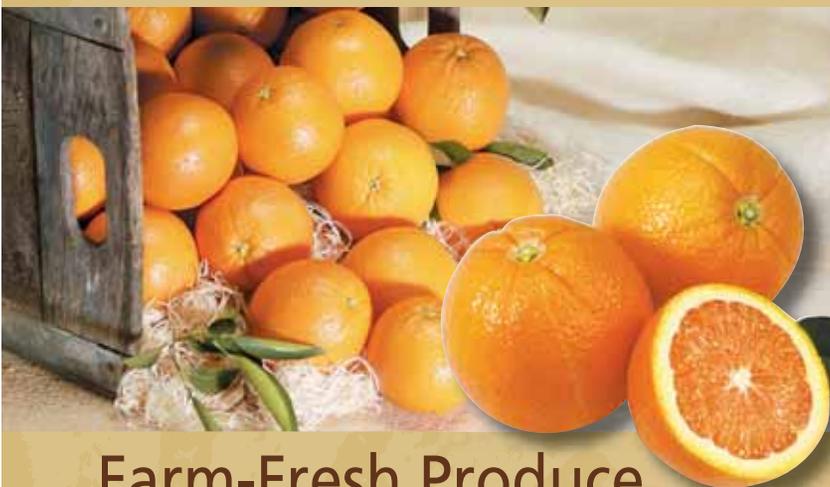


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■ OBITUARIES

FLORA C. PERNA

Flora C. Perna passed away on Nov. 20. She was 91.

Perna was the widow of the late Emo Perna. She is survived by her brother-in-laws Giacomo Maggi and Jim Perna; sister-in-law Rose Perna; and many nieces, nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews.

Visitation was held Nov. 25 at the Mountain View Chapel of Spangler Mortuaries. Rosary and Funeral Mass followed immediately. Perna's interment is at the Gate of Heaven Cemetery.

KATSUYUKI FUJIMOTO

Katsuyuki Fujimoto, a longtime resident of Mountain View, passed away on Nov. 18. He was 81.

Fujimoto is survived by his wife Eiko Fujimoto; sons Kenneth, Ronald and Terry; daughter Janice; stepchildren Michi, Judy and David Hayashi; siblings Reiko and Aki-

ra; and many grandchildren.

A memorial service was held Nov. 27 at the Palo Alto Buddhist Temple.

SARAH E. ISH

Sarah E. Ish, a real estate agent in Mountain View for more than 40 years, passed away peacefully on Sunday, Nov. 19. She was 89.

Ish was born in San Francisco on Oct. 24, 1917. Those who knew her say they will not forget her generous ability to love, laugh and spread warmth.

Ish is survived by her children Maryetta Meltzer of Mountain View and Charles Ish of Sebastopol; five grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren.

A memorial mass is being held to celebrate her life on Nov. 30 at 12 p.m. at St. Martin Parish Chapel, 590 Central Ave., Sunnyvale. In lieu of flowers, her family requests donations to the American Cancer Society.

FITZGERALD

► Continued from page 5

college campuses.

Fitzgerald was also instrumental in the development of media-oriented courses, satellite centers and distance learning programs. These programs put Foothill in a leadership position for off-campus or "distance" learning and on the forefront of audio and televised programming.

With these innovations, Fitzgerald set the stage for Foothill's continued success, according to those who came after him.

"Foothill's involvement in televised video instruction, and in distance learning, was a precursor to the college's clear leadership position that was established at the turn of the century," said Foothill's recently retired fourth president, Bernadine Chuck Fong, Ph.D., in a press release. She said the trend has continued to the present day, as the college expands into online delivery of education.

Fitzgerald brought many celebrities — such as Ray Bradbury, Red Skelton and Ralph Nader — to the Los Altos Hills campus to address or perform for the students. He led the campus-wide history effort in 1981, and helped launch what would become the college's Japanese Cultural Center.

A talented musician, Fitzgerald was a music instructor and dean of instruction at Orange Coast

College in Costa Mesa before he took over at Foothill. He held a bachelor's, master's and doctorate degree from the University of Southern California.

Memorial services will be held on Saturday, Dec. 2 at 2 p.m. at the Community Presbyterian Church of Cambria, 2250 Yorkshire Dr., Cambria. The

family suggests donations be sent to your charity of choice in Fitzgerald's name, or to the Cambria Music Foundation or the Alzheimer's Foundation. Call (805) 927-4356 for more information. ▣

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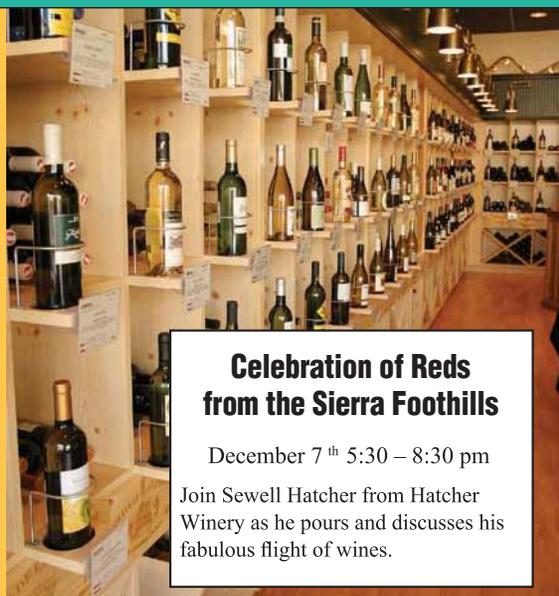
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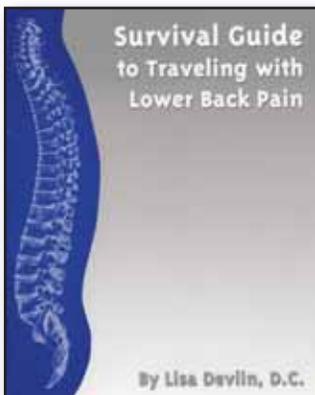
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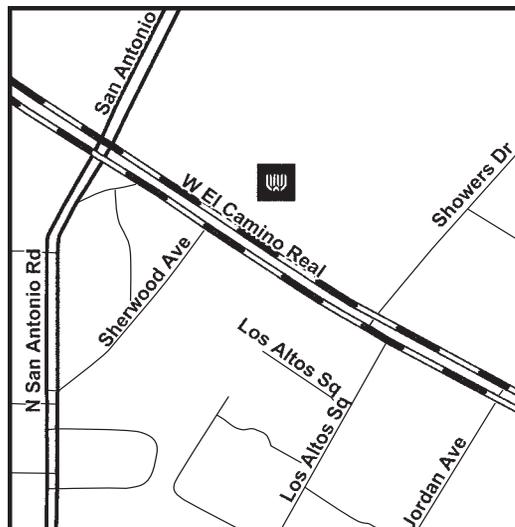
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HIGH SCHOOLS

► Continued from page 8

the SAT scores at Los Altos High are higher than at Mountain View, but that "the community doesn't always see those things."

Sarraf said she plans to spend more time in the upcoming year interviewing the families who seek transfers — but regardless of their reasoning, the fact remains that fewer students are able to switch from Los Altos to Mountain View.

Rosenberg said the 2001 reopening of Covington School in Los Altos was meant to serve the pur-

pose of directing more elementary school children to Egan Junior High, from which all students transfer to Los Altos High. The first year of students to have graduated from Covington are freshmen now at the high school level, and Rosenberg thinks the numbers eventually will work so that there are far fewer students asking for transfers.

"We just need to give it some time before we implement any policies," she said.

Speaking as a mother of children who have graduated from both high schools, Rosenberg added that she is sure "they are both great schools." ▀

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

HIGH SCHOOL INFO NIGHTS NEXT WEEK

An "information night" will be held for incoming freshman and their parents on Tuesday, Dec. 5 at 6:30 p.m. in the Mountain View High School gym, and on Wednesday, Dec. 6 at 6:30 p.m. in the Los Altos High School gym.

The evenings will offer an opportunity to learn more about the performance arts, athletics, curricular and extra-curricular offerings of each school. Administrators, counselors, students, parents and teachers will be available to answer questions in an informal setting.

Child care and Spanish translation will be provided. MVHS is located at 3535 Truman Ave., and LAHS is located at 201 Almond Ave.

AMERICANA BALLROOM HOSTS ARTS AND CRAFTS SALE

Unique and creative works from artists all throughout California will be on display in Mountain View during the "Art Through Women's Eyes" holiday arts and crafts exhibit and sale.

The works include mediums from acrylics, ceramics, craft, fine jewelry, mixed media, oil and photography. The event will be held on Saturday, Dec. 2 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Americana Ballroom, located at 707 Continental Circle, Mountain View.

Art Through Women's Eyes is part of a grassroots movement to promote emerging artists and provide a place for them to display their work. More information can be found at www.artthroughwomenseyes.com.

— Amber Cleave

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County preserves historical records

DOCUMENTS, PHOTOS, MAPS AND MORE MADE AVAILABLE FOR GENEALOGISTS AND RESEARCHERS

Bay City News

Lovers of history of the Santa Clara Valley can now feast upon records and materials dating back to the 1850s thanks to the efforts of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors.

The county has launched an archive program to preserve Santa Clara County's past under the supervision of county archivist Michael Griffin.

The program will collect and preserve items such as the will of Stanford University cofounder Jane Lathrop Stanford, the oaths of office from the county's first elected

officials, and sample election ballots dating from the 1920s.

The county began transferring historical records to the archives facility in April. The facility will be a center for research and information about the county in an effort to foster an appreciation and understanding of the county government's history and development.

"The county archives is a valuable one-source location for records," said Gina Alcomendras, the acting clerk recorder for Santa Clara County. "Eventually it will be useful to community groups, college students, genealogists

and diverse members of our community."

According to the county, the archives will contain legal and financial records, photographs of officials and historic buildings, maps, architectural records, artifacts, court records and election records.

As records are transferred to the archives and processed, collection descriptions will be posted on the Online Archive of California.

For a current listing of materials available for research, visit the Web site at www.oac.cdlib.org and then click on Santa Clara County Archives under the "List of Contributing Institutions."

The archives facility is located at 1875 Senter Road in San Jose. ■

Invasive grass designated a dangerous weed

SLENDER FALSE BROME A THREAT TO PENINSULA REDWOODS, OPEN SPACE DISTRICT SAYS

Bay City News

A harmless-looking green grass that some Woodside residents may find growing in their yards has now been classified by a state agency as a serious threat to the area's redwood ecosystem, according to the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.

Biologist Cindy Roessler said she is still trying to figure out how the innocuously named culprit, slender false brome, a perennial grass native to Europe and North Africa, arrived only in Woodside. Roessler speculated that it could have been brought in by someone purposely to plant in their yard, or its seed could have been hidden in straw or hay brought to the area.

The only other place in the U.S. where the plant has been reported is Oregon, where it has overrun more than 10,000 acres of Douglas fir forestland over the past 70 years, Roessler said.

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District biologists discovered slender false brome in Woodside's Thornewood Open Space Preserve in 2004 and estimate that it has been spreading over about 100 acres of public and private lands in the Woodside area for the past 10 years.

Officials from the district made their case to the California Department of Food and Agriculture that the weed, which can grow easily in sunny or shady, wet or dry conditions, was a threat to Woodside's redwood trees, which have an ecological

relationship with forest undergrowth, according to Roessler.

That ecology could be strained if the slender false brome is allowed to propagate and use up water required for young redwoods or other small plants, Roessler said.

A few weeks ago, the state agency agreed to reclassify slender false brome as an A-rated weed, the highest designation for noxious weeds, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District spokesman Rudy Jurgensen said.

While the district has already allocated \$1.2 million over 10 years to eradicate slender false brome, its reclassification will allow the district to coordinate with the Department of Food and Agriculture and the San Mateo County Agriculture Department to take a much more aggressive eradication

approach, according to Jurgensen.

Slender false brome is now "public enemy No. 1 as far as dangerous weeds are concerned," Jurgensen said.

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District biologists have already had success with slender false brome eradication efforts on district lands in Woodside, and with more state and local cooperation, they hope to work with local residents to convince them to voluntarily let the district eradicate the weed on their properties, before its area expands as it has in Oregon, Roessler said.

Roessler estimated that the slender false brome could be completely removed from Woodside lands in five to 10 years.

For more information on slender false brome, including photographs of the weed, visit www.openspace.org. ■

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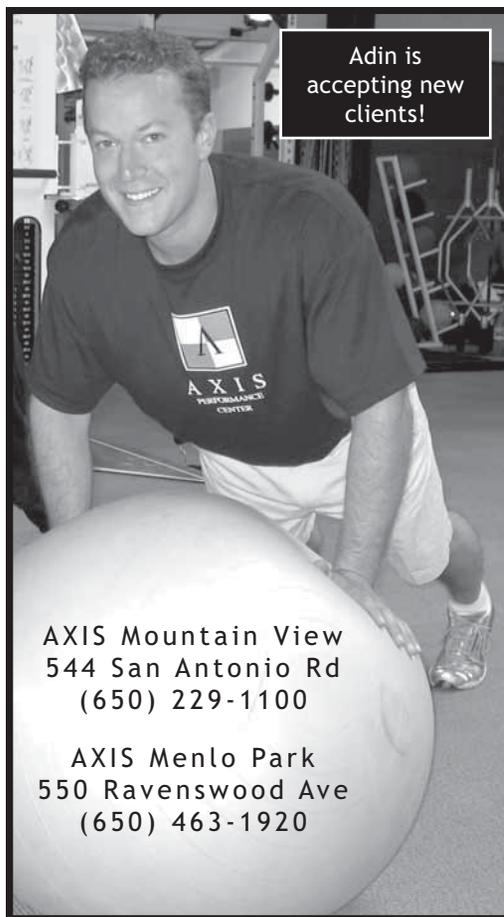
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Viewpoint

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- YOUR LETTERS
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circulation@MV-VOICE.com

The Voice is published weekly by Embarcadero Publishing Co. and distributed by U.S. Mail to residences and businesses in Mountain View.

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The Mountain View Voice is mailed free upon request to residents in Mountain View. If you are not currently receiving the paper, you may request free delivery by calling 964-6300. Voluntary subscriptions at \$30 per year, \$50 per 2 years, are welcome from residents of Mountain View. Subscription rate for businesses and for residents of other communities is \$50 per year, \$80 per 2 years.

■ EDITORIAL THE OPINION OF THE VOICE

Teachers get a break

When teachers from the Mountain View Whisman School District began bargaining during contract talks this year, salary and benefits were definitely big issues. And as it turned out, the teachers were successful in hanging on to all their benefits and, better yet, negotiating a 5 percent pay raise retroactive to Nov. 1.

But in many teachers' minds, the biggest victory was getting the district to correct the disparity in preparation time allowed to teachers in various grades.

For example, fourth and fifth grade classes in the district often are substantially larger than kindergarten through third grades. Those lower grades are limited to 20 students, while teachers in grades four and five can expect up to 32 students per class. This requires more work, which means more preparation time.

A key bargaining point for teachers in the negotiations this year was to provide these mid-elementary grade teachers with additional time to prepare. Although details have to be finalized, teachers in grades four and five soon will get two additional 45-minute preparation (or "release") periods a week, which certainly will help them set up better lesson plans for their students.

This makes sense, and perhaps there is a way for the district to monitor whether students are doing better in class due to this increase in teacher prep time. We expect students will do better, if for no other reason than the improvement in teacher morale.

Besides the additional prep time, the 5 percent pay increase also will be a morale-booster for teachers. MV Whisman has endured lean times over the last three years, which had effectively abolished any hope of a pay raise for teachers.

But next year, according to longstanding agreement, the district's entire contract with teachers will be reopened, including salary and benefits. This year, the benefit package was left untouched. That was good for teachers, who can receive medical, dental and vision coverage until they are 65.

So far, there is no indication that the benefit package will be an issue next year — another bit of welcome news for the teachers of Mountain View Whisman.

We expect students will do better, if for no other reason than the improvement in teacher morale.

MOUNTAIN VIEW'S RETIREES DESERVE HEALTH BENEFITS

Editor:

The city of Mountain View must provide equitable health care to retired workers ("City hits wall in union talks," Nov. 24). All of us need increasing health care as we age. Medicare does not cover everything, and many people retire before 65.

As volunteer firefighters in the East, we were exposed to toxins at each incident, including carcinogens whose effects take years to show. They are in smoke from fires, fumes from car crashes, gas leaks, and accidents with hazardous materials. These are daily threats. Exposure lasts longer than the incident. It continues when firefighters wash equipment, launder turn-out gear, and shower.

Many patients in my medical practice there had long-term problems from exposures and accidents at work. I recall an assistant fire chief with epilepsy and permanent brain damage from a few minutes' exposure to fumes in a shed storing illicit materials for making methamphetamine.

If our city's workers, particularly the firefighters, are not covered for the consequences of working for us, we will have trouble finding workers and we won't attract good ones.

The answer to rising health costs breaking our city's budget isn't to short-change the people who give years of their lives to our city. The answer is for all of us to put pressure on the state and federal government for comprehensive, equitable, affordable, quality health care for everyone.

Pieter Kark, M.D.
Villa Street

CITY MUST ACT NOW TO AVOID FISCAL CRISIS

Editor:

The city of Mountain View and its unions are caught up in a nasty economic reality that has roiled private industry for many years. Defined benefit retirement plans, such as pension plans with guaranteed monthly payments and health benefits, have become far too expensive to be sustained in a market economy.

This mainly is because of an explosion in health care costs and longer life expectancies for retirees, both of which have driven pension plan costs to unsustainably high levels. Consumers will not pay the increased costs, and companies face bankruptcy, as in the steel, airline, and soon the auto industries.

To fulfill its legal obligation to act with fiscal responsibility, Mountain View has no choice but to do what the private sector has been doing for well over a decade. It must begin to terminate its open-ended defined benefit plans and move its employees to "defined contribution" plans — plans in which the future costs to Mountain View and its citizens (its "consumers") are fixed and predictable. Not to do so now is to invite fiscal crisis, taxpayer revolt, and disruptive labor unrest in future years. It is far better to begin the painful process now while Mountain View still has surpluses, and not to wait until we are bankrupted by out-of-control pension plans.

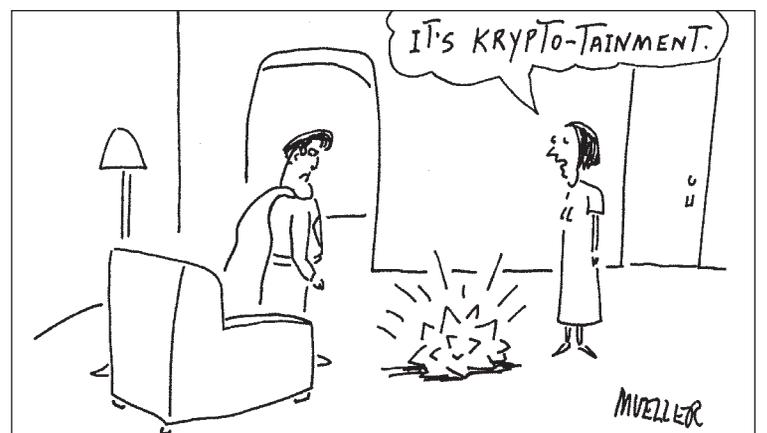
William R. Hitchens
Sunnyview Lane

DON'T MISS LEAGUE WORKSHOP ON HEALTH CARE

Editor:

School and college districts, cities and counties as well as

► See **LETTERS**, next page



LETTERS

► Continued from page 18

private sector employers large and small struggle to maintain adequate health care coverage for their employees without short-changing their services. And too many of us suffer with no health care coverage at all.

Clearly, significant changes in our current health care "system" are needed to fully cover everyone. Happily, we have an opportunity to learn more about one effort to bring health care coverage to all in California. This may very well be a solution for employers and "clients" and health care providers alike.

I urge everyone to attend the informational event presented by the League of Women Voters, Los Altos-Mountain View, "Health Care for All for Life," on Monday, Dec. 4, 7:30-9 p.m. at Foothills Congregational Church, 461 Orange Avenue, Los Altos.

Co-sponsors are American Association of University Women, Los Altos-Mountain View Chapter; California Physicians Assistance; and HealthCare for All, California.

The program consists of a video and panel. The panel will include an emeritus professor and medical doctor from Stanford, a surgeon from El Camino Hospital and the executive director of Health Care for All, California.

Joan MacDonald
Emmons Drive

GRAHAM MISPLACED BLAME FOR PHARMACY TROUBLES

Editor:

I found your interview with Ken Graham, new CEO of El Camino Hospital, quite disturbing ("Graham: Hospital is back on track," Nov. 24).

After months of hard work to correct unsafe practices in the hospital pharmacy, Graham places blame on "a lot of new employees." Having new employees on staff requires training and supervision by management, and not allowing them to make decisions on patient safety until they are ready. As to why there are so many new employees in the first place is also a function of management, as they either got rid of experienced employees or chose not to retain them.

Your interview certainly does not show El Camino Hospital is back on track, but certainly does show Mr. Graham is masterful at finger pointing and spin.

John Niemic
Latham Street

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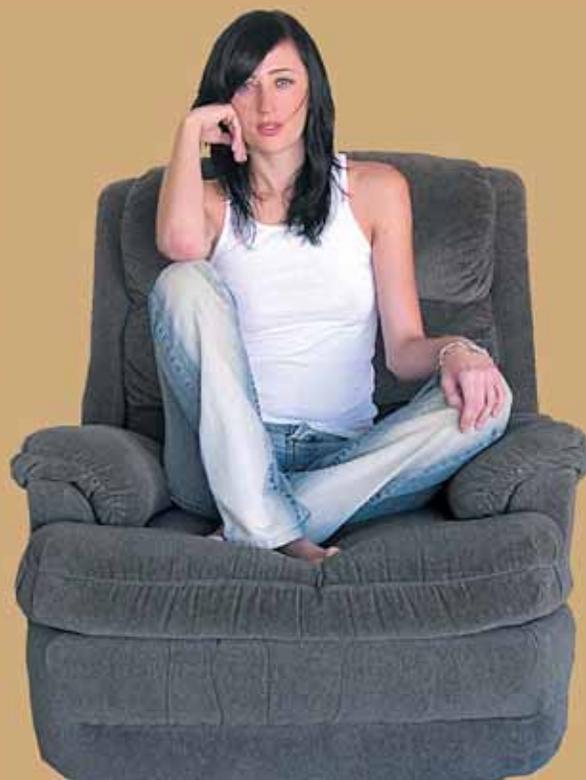
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ViewPoint

GUEST OPINION

Senior softball comes to Mountain View

By Jim Callan

For almost 20 years, the Vintage Softball Club of Santa Clara County has provided people 50 and over an opportunity to play organized softball. Until recently we played all our games deep in San Jose, but now we've moved our Saturday league to Moffett Field in Mountain View. So if you want to play some softball and you're 50 or over this year, come on out.

Not good enough, you think? Don't worry about it. Some of us have a hard time knocking it out of the infield, but a few can put it over the fences. Diversity is what we're all about. And fun. We're firemen, lawyers, bus drivers, venture capitalists, contractors, writers, doctors, cops, salesmen, engineers and a lot more — but on game day we're all the same thing, ballplayers. We play hard and we play to win, but we never forget that what we're there for is to play.

You can be too young for the Vintage Club, but you can never be too old. We often talk about old Toby, who kept showing up us younger guys until he was 85. Nobody walked when Toby was on the mound and nobody took him for granted at the plate either, even after he couldn't run any more. That's because we allow unlimited pinch runners, even from the plate. We have a lot of other rules that are designed for people our age. A number of them help us avoid collisions so we stay

healthy for the next game. The Saturday morning league at Moffett Field is our great melting pot, with men and women of all skill levels playing for the glory of the moment. Then we often head out for a beer to regale in our victory or figure out how to rebound from defeat. Our only problem is that we don't know the Mountain View scene well enough yet, so we need some new, local blood to show us the really cool sports bars in the neighborhood.

We also have morning leagues on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, plus a weekday evening league during daylight savings time, all of which play at various fields in the South Bay. Some of the leagues are a little more competitive, others are even more "strictly fun" than the Saturday league.

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Jim Callan is president of the Vintage Softball Club of Santa Clara County. He lives in Belmont.

Let's Hear from You!

Letters to the editor and guests columns are welcome.



■ RESTAURANT REVIEW

■ MOVIE TIMES

■ BEST BETS FOR ENTERTAINMENT

■ RESTAURANT REVIEW

Just like the old country

GYRO'S HOUSE DOES A KEBOB STAND
THE RIGHT WAY: SIMPLE, CHEAP AND GOOD

By Andrew MacLeod Doerschuk

Two swarthy guys wearing white jackets and paper hats greet you with heavy accents from behind the counter. A large menu in all caps hangs on the wall behind their heads. You might think you've stepped into the "Saturday Night Live" skit from the mid-'70s, with Dan Akroyd and John Belushi hypnotically chanting "cheesebugga, cheesebugga, cheesebugga."

But Gyro's House has nothing to do with cheeseburgers. This place is about kebab.

Walk through the doors of Gyro's House and you have entered another world — Turkey, in fact. I'm no stranger to that country (as a boy I lived in Ankara, where

my father was a diplomat), and can verify that the kebob joints there — the Turkish equivalent of a fast food restaurant — all look precisely like Gyro's House. To wit: Two guys with paper hats. Spartan decor. Chairs pulled up to linoleum tabletops on a linoleum floor. Skewers of meat rotating in the window. A few prints of mountains that may or may not be Ararat hanging on the wall.

Proprietor Rossi Kolche is a Turk through and through — a bit formal and serious at first, but as soon as you say *merhaba* and *teshekk, r ederim*, Turkish for hello and thank you, his face lights up. You might even find an extra dolma on the plate if



The Adana kebab at Gyro's House.

NICHOLAS JENSEN

► See **GYRO'S HOUSE**, page 22

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GYRO'S HOUSE

► Continued from page 21

you're lucky. Originally from Istanbul, Kolche has lived and worked throughout the world, and opened Gyro's House in 2003 after moving to the U.S. in 1988. He knows that the secret to good kebab is in the meat, which he serves in two basic ways: on a plate or inside bread. Tamam!

In bread it's called a gyro. But Gyro's House breaks tradition by wrapping the requisite meat,

lettuce, tomato, cucumber and dribbled tahini in flat lavosh bread rather than stuffing it into a pita. The platter, meanwhile, offers a bit more of everything: a big serving of meat accompanied by a warm mini-loaf of bread, a heaping mound of rice with occasional peas and carrot bits, a yogurt sauce with dill and paprika on the side for dipping and drizzling, and a lettuce and tomato salad dressed with oil and balsamic vinegar.

Three out of our four kebab plates were served in that fashion, including the delicious lamb shish

kebab (\$9.95 platter/\$7.25 sandwich). Thick cubes of lamb are marinated in olive oil with garlic and white pepper, then skewered with bell peppers and grilled. The lamb was served medium-well, and edges of the peppers were nicely charred. Like everything we sampled at Gyro's House, this dish was lightly seasoned in order to allow each ingredient to speak out. The exotic flavor of the lamb held center stage even when combined with the yogurt sauce and a fractional forkful of rice.

We also tried the grilled Kofte kebab (\$9.95, available only as a platter) and the Adana kebab (\$9.95 platter/\$6.96 sandwich), which proved to be remarkably similar, distinguished only by their shapes. The Kofte is a grilled skewer of 1-inch ovals of ground lamb and beef combined with black and white pepper, oregano, paprika and cumin. The Adana — similarly cooked on a skewer and made of the exact same ingredients — is shaped into a long, flat patty. They both taste like a hamburger without the fixings, and the yogurt dip didn't add much splash. To be honest, I wasn't a big fan of Kofte when I was 9 years old, either.

But even before taking this assignment I could tell you exactly what my favorite dish would be: the yummy Iskender kebab (\$10.95, available only as a platter). It barely resembles the other entrees. Half the plate is heaped with sliced compressed lamb and beef atop squares of pita bread. The other half swims with a pool of creamy yogurt. A rich tomato sauce is poured over the meat, followed by drizzled melted butter, which all seeps down into the bread by the time it reaches your table. Grilled green bell pepper and tomato selectively adorn the plate. It's a huge portion of

DINING NOTES

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incredibly sumptuous glop, to be honest. Close your eyes and smell the scents, and envision yourself kneeling beside an open fire on one of Alexander's countless battlefields, noshing on this stuff in conquest. «ok g,zel!

Gyro's House is a place for carnivores, but others will find something palatable on the menu. A couple token chicken kebabs and a sad little vegetarian sandwich skulk on the menu. I tried the meatless and nourishing falafel sandwich (\$5.95), wrapped in lavosh bread with diced cucumber, tomato, and tahini, which tasted good, although I prefer a tad more crunch — the falafel balls were a bit underdone for my taste.

I also ordered a lamb and beef gyro sandwich (\$6.95), which

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The baklava cevizli at Gyro's House.

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Weekend

combines thin slices of meat, lettuce, cucumber, and tomato, with dribbled tahini wrapped in lavosh bread. It's nice and tidy, wrapped in aluminum foil like a burrito, and tastes good, but I confess missing pita bread.

The shepherd's salad (\$6.95) is a refreshing mixture of chopped tomato, cucumber, onion and bell peppers dripping with olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Here's a tip: One order is plenty for two people as a starter. I also nibbled on a dolma plate (\$4.95) while awaiting various entrees. These grape-leaf bundles are stuffed with rice, cumin, raisins and parsley, and drenched in olive oil.

Naturally, we couldn't resist a hearty slice of baklava cevizlu (\$2.50), the ultra-rich, honey-drenched pastry filled with a sugary walnut paste. I've known it to be so syrupy that it practically hurts your teeth upon contact, but this batch was rich and buttery,

while still extraordinarily sweet.

In fact, most of Gyro's House dishes were satisfying, filling, and easy on the pocketbook. I loved the whole scene too, with

its authentic atmosphere and friendly staff. Less than \$20 at Gyro's House can transport you halfway around the world and back. Now that is a deal. ▀

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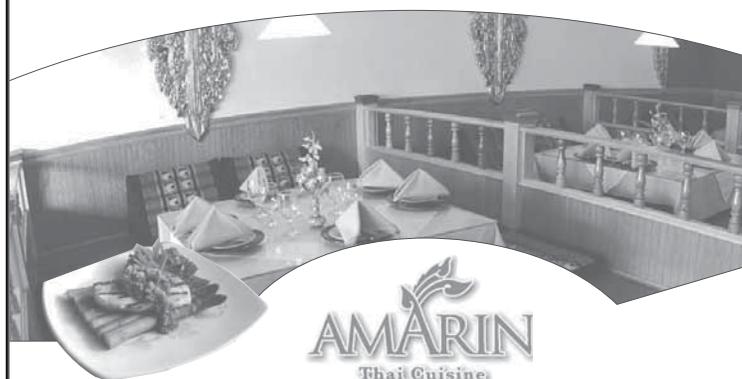
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Smuin Ballet, with bells on

HOLIDAY SPECTACULAR RETURNS TO CENTER FOR PERFORMING ARTS WITH SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

By Alexa Tondreau

"The best way to describe the show is to say that it is very much like a picture-perfect holiday card," said renowned choreographer Michael Smuin as he talked about the Christmas Ballet, a two-part show he produced and choreographed with his San Francisco-based ballet troupe.

Smuin, who has won several Emmy Awards as well as a Tony for choreography, first brought his production to Mountain View eight years ago, and similarly has showcased it in San Francisco, Walnut Creek and Carmel. Though by now it can be considered a Bay Area holiday tradition, Smuin says the 2006 production is bigger and better than ever, with seven new dance pieces, revamped sets and special effects by Douglas Schmidt and new costumes from designer Sandra Woodall.

"We always do something new, but this year really is a big move up for us," Smuin said. "It's particularly ambitious."

The production will be at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts from Nov. 29 to Dec. 3, and Michele Roberts, public relations manager for the Center, says they couldn't be happier.

"We're delighted to have the Christmas Ballet back," she said. "It's been thrilling audiences here for years."

The two-part ballet offers something old and something new, Smuin explained. The first half, called the "classical act," is set to various traditions of religious holiday music, including pieces by Bach and Handel, traditional carols and Russian Hanukah klezmer.

With the entire set and all of the dancers draped in white, the "classical act" has "a vocabulary that is pure ballet," Smuin said. Pieces in the first act include a solo by a male dancer set to a recording by Plácido Domingo, and a piece featuring three couples dancing to a choral ensemble.

Act two, or the "cool Christmas," features a red and green color scheme and draws on ballet, tap and swing styles of dance to celebrate modern holiday traditions. Music includes songs by Eartha Kitt, Willie Nelson and the Chieftains, to name a few.

The second act will showcase a song called "Christmas by the Bay" from a locally released album of the same name. With lyrics by Clark Sterling and music by award-winning composer Nolan Gasser, the song pays homage to the specific names and places in Bay Area



Nicole Trerise performs "Santa Baby" in Michael Smuin's "The Christmas Ballet."

TOM HAUCK

■ INFORMATION

What: Smuin Ballet presents *The Christmas Ballet, 2006 edition*

Where: The Mountain View Center for Performing Arts

When: Now through Dec. 3. Thursday and Friday at 8 p.m., Saturday at 2 and 8 p.m., Sunday at 2 p.m.

Cost: Adults \$45-\$55, seniors \$42-\$51, students \$40-\$50

Info: Visit www.ci.mtnview.ca.us/mvcpa/mvcpa.html or www.smuinballet.org, or call (650) 903-6000

the draw of the production is its universal appeal.

"It's got something for everyone. The first act is very classical, and the second act is more fun," she said.

Audiences should find the performers' dancing prowess to be impressive as well. The Smuin Ballet troupe has been around since 1994 and consists of nearly 20 professional dancers. Smuin says that although each performer is essentially a ballet dancer, he tries to "find people who have had different dancing backgrounds and take advantage of that."

As the former principal dancer of the San Francisco Ballet, Smuin is known for choreography that blends classical ballet with contemporary forms. He has danced and choreographed on Broadway, served as resident choreographer for the American Ballet Theatre, and has appeared in television and film multiple times. ■

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



Robin Cornwell in Michael Smuin's "The Christmas Ballet."

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MOVIE TIMES

BABEL (R) ★★★1/2 Century 16: 12:45, 4:05, 7:25 & 10:20 p.m.
Century 20: 11:35 a.m.; 2:30, 5:30 & 8:30 p.m.

BLOOD DIAMOND (R) (SNEAK PREVIEW)
Century 16: Sat. at 7:30 p.m. Century 20: Sat. at 7:30 p.m.

BOBBY (R) ★★ Century 16: 11:05 a.m.; 1:50, 4:35, 7:20 & 10 p.m.
Century 20: 11:50 a.m.; 2:20, 4:55, 7:30 & 10 p.m.

BORAT (R) ★★★1/2 Century 16: 11:40 a.m.; 1:45, 3:50, 5:55, 8 & 10:10 p.m. Century 20: 11:50 a.m.; 12:50, 1:55, 3, 4, 5:05, 6:15, 7:10, 8:20, 9:20 & 10:20 p.m.

CASINO ROYALE (PG-13) ★★★1/2 Century 16: 11 a.m.; 12:30, 2:20, 3:45, 5:40, 7:10, 9 & 10:30 p.m. Century 12: 11:55 a.m.; 1, 2, 3:30, 4:30, 5:30, 7, 8, 9 & 10:30 p.m.

DECK THE HALLS (PG) (NOT REVIEWED) Century 16: Noon, 2:30, 5:05, 7:30 & 9:45 p.m. Century 20: 11:25 a.m.; 12:20, 1:05, 1:45, 2:50, 3:45, 4:20, 5:25, 6:20, 6:55, 7:45, 8:40, 9:15 & 10:05 p.m.

DEJA VU (PG-13) ★★★ Century 16: 11:10 a.m.; 12:25, 1:55, 4:50, 6:20, 7:45, 9:25 & 10:30 p.m. Century 12: 11:50 a.m.; 12:50, 1:50, 2:50, 3:50, 4:50, 6, 7:10, 8:20, 9:20 & 10:20 p.m.

THE DEPARTED (R) ★★★1/2 Century 16: 9:10 p.m.
Century 12: 12:40, 4 & 7:45 p.m.

FAST FOOD NATION (R) ★★★1/2 Palo Alto Square: 2:15, 4:45, 7:30 & 10 p.m.; Sat. & Sun. also at 11:40 a.m.

FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS (R) ★★★ Century 20: 11:40 a.m. & 5:30 p.m.

FLUSHED AWAY (PG) ★★★ Century 16: 11:30 a.m.; 1:35, 3:40, 5:45 & 7:50 p.m. Century 12: 12:30, 2:45, 4:55, 7:20 & 9:30 p.m.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION (PG-13) ★★1/2
Century 20: 11:45 a.m.; 1:50, 4:10, 6:15, 8:20 & 10:25 p.m. Aquarius: 1:30, 3:45, 4:45, 6:05, 7:05, 8:10 & 10:15 p.m.; Sat. & Sun. also at 12:30 p.m.

THE FOUNTAIN (PG-13) 1/2 Century 16: Fri., Sun.-Tue. at 11:50 a.m.; 2:40, 5:15, 7:40 & 10:05 p.m.; Sat. at 11:50 a.m.; 2:40, 5:15 & 10:25 p.m. Century 12: 12:20, 1:25, 3, 4:10, 5:20, 6:40, 7:50, 9:10 & 10:25 p.m.

HAPPY FEET (PG) (NOT REVIEWED) Century 16: 11:15 a.m.; 12:40, 2, 3:20, 4:40, 6, 7:15 & 9:50 p.m. Century 20: 11:20 a.m.; noon, 12:40, 1:20, 1:55, 2:45, 3:15, 3:55, 4:35, 5:15, 5:55, 7:25, 8, 8:25, 9:55 & 10:25 p.m.; Fri., Sun.-Tue. also at 6:40 & 9:10 p.m.

THE HOLIDAY (PG-13) (SNEAK PREVIEW) Century 16: Sat. at 7 p.m.

LITTLE CHILDREN (R) ★★★ Guild: 1:10 p.m.; Fri.-Mon. also at 3:50, 6:30 & 9:10 p.m.

LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE (R) ★★★ Aquarius: 2:30 & 9:20 p.m.

NATIONAL LAMPOON'S VAN WILDER: THE RISE OF TAJ (R) (NOT REVIEWED) Century 16: 11:25 a.m.; 2:15, 4:55, 7:40 & 10:15 p.m. Century 12: Noon, 2:30, 5, 7:30 & 10 p.m.

THE NATIVITY STORY (PG) ★★ Century 16: 11:10 a.m.; 1:40, 4:20, 7 & 9:30 p.m. Century 20: 11:30 a.m.; 12:45, 2, 3:10, 4:30, 5:40, 7, 8:10, 9:30 & 10:30 p.m.

THE PRESTIGE (PG-13) 1/2 Century 20: 2:40 & 8:25 p.m.

THE QUEEN (NOT RATED) ★★★★★ Century 20: 12:15, 2:35, 4:50, 7:05 & 9:25 p.m. Palo Alto Square: 2, 4:30, 7 & 9:30 p.m.; Sat. & Sun. also at 11:30 a.m.

THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW (R) (NOT REVIEWED)
Aquarius: Sat. at midnight.

THE SANTA CLAUSE 3: THE ESCAPE CLAUSE (G) (NOT REVIEWED) Century 20: 11:35 a.m.; 2, 4:25, 6:50 & 9:05 p.m.

SHUT UP AND SING (R) (NOT REVIEWED)
Century 20: 12:05, 2:15, 4:40, 7:15 & 9:40 p.m.

STRANGER THAN FICTION (PG-13) ★★ Century 16: Fri., Sun.-Tue. at 11:20 a.m.; 2:25, 5, 7:35 & 10:15 p.m.; Sat. at 11:20 a.m.; 2, 4:30 & 9:40 p.m. Century 20: 11:55 a.m.; 2:25, 5, 7:40 & 10:20 p.m.

TENACIOUS D: THE PICK OF DESTINY (R) (NOT REVIEWED)
Century 16: 9:50 p.m. Century 12: 12:10, 2:40, 5:10, 7:40 & 10:10 p.m.

TURISTAS (R) (NOT REVIEWED) Century 16: 12:15, 2:45, 5:10, 7:55 & 10:25 p.m. Century 20: 12:25, 2:50, 5:10, 7:50 & 10:15 p.m.

Note: Screenings are for Friday through Tuesday only.

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★ Skip it
★★ Some redeeming qualities
★★★ A good bet
★★★★ Outstanding

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MOVIE REVIEWS

BABEL ★★★1/2

(Century 16, Century 20) On a remote Moroccan mountain, a young goat herder mindlessly fires his father's newly acquired rifle at a tour bus. The bullet hits an American passenger (Cate Blanchett), whose distraught husband (Brad Pitt) exhibits the same mix of fear and entitlement as his fellow Western travelers. In San Diego, the couple's Mexican nanny (Adriana Barraza) gets word that they won't return in time for her to attend her son's wedding across the border. Having cared for their two children since birth, she decides to take them with her. Her gun-toting, easily startled nephew (Gael Garcia Bernal) makes the return trip complicated. They, too, are stranded in a wilderness. Meanwhile, a deaf Japanese teen (Rinko Kikuchi), desperate for love, wanders through the neon wasteland of Tokyo. Her widowed father (Koji Yakusho) was the former owner of the gun that started the disaster-chain of events. Director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu criticizes the way of the gun and the clash of cultures in a world where bad things happen to good people. **Rated: R for violence, some graphic nudity, sexual content, language and some drug use. In English and French, Spanish, Japanese, Berber, Arabic and Japanese sign language with English subtitles. 2 hours, 22 minutes.** — S.T.

BOBBY ★★

(Century 16, Century 20) One of the iconic images of 1968 is U.S. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, sprawled on the kitchen floor of the Ambassador Hotel after being gunned down by Sirhan Sirhan. The 42-year-old presidential hopeful had just delivered his victory speech for the California primary in the hotel's ballroom. Revisiting the routine day leading up to the peace-and-justice politician's assassination, screenwriter-director-actor Emilio Estevez doesn't shadow Bobby Kennedy, the heir apparent of his older brother's Camelot. Instead he focuses on the dozens of campaign supporters and hotel employees whose lives touched and exploded with a bang shortly after midnight on June 5 in Los Angeles. A cross between a Robert Altman ensemble piece like "Nashville" and the classic "Grand Hotel," the star-studded drama moves at a fast clip. The reel rendition fails to capture the reality of the times but conveys an earnest message against violence, as timely today as almost 40 years ago. **Rated: R for language, drug content and a scene of violence. 1 hour, 51 minutes.** — S.T.

BORAT ★★★1/2

(Century 16, Century 20) Batten down the hatches and hide the children because Borat is coming to town. That's Borat Sagdiyev, a sex-crazed, single-monikered, obscenity-spouting Kazakhstani reporter for a state-owned TV network who's crossing the U.S. of A. in search of the pulse of mainstream America. As Borat (comedian Sacha Baron Cohen) zigzags his way across the country, he interviews all manner of unsuspecting Americans eager to help a foreigner in need. No one is immune to Borat's outrageous antics thinly masquerading as "charming" misunderstandings. Throughout the film, Borat's humor crosses

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Weekend

► Continued from previous page

every line of decency and taste: scatological, anti-Semitic, sexist and pervasively offensive. But it's damn funny for most of its short running time. Credit Baron Cohen with the guts to go out on a comic limb with this vulgar yet courageous fish-out-of-water tale and wacky mockumentarial adventure that's destined to become a cult classic: plucky, uproarious and totally uncompromising. *Rated: R for obscenities and nudity. 1 hour, 22 minutes.* — J.A.

CASINO ROYALE ★★1/2

(Century 16, Century 12) The verdict is in: The deliciously brooding Daniel Craig is an edgy and eclectic James Bond, deftly grabbing the reins from uber-Bond Sean Connery. This go-around, James is tackling the money man for the world's most notorious terrorists. Le Chiffre (Mads Mikkelsen) is a criminal mastermind with an unquenchable thirst for hard currency. A series of explosive events lead Bond and the creepy Le Chiffre to face off in a high-rollers poker showdown at the luxurious Casino Royale in posh Montenegro. Aiding Bond in his quest to vanquish evil is British treasury agent Vesper Lynd (Eva Green), a brainy beauty who will shape Bond's heart and his future with calculated charm. From Africa to Lake Como, Prague to the Bahamas, the beat is positively heart-pounding. "Casino" is pure testosterone pleasure. *Rated: PG-13 for violent action, torture and some nudity. 2 hours, 24 minutes.* — J.A.

DEJA VU ★★

(Century 16, Century 12) New Orleans, Fat Tuesday: A ferry filled with naval recruits and children on a field trip suddenly explodes, killing more than 500 people. Seasoned ATF agent Doug Carlin (Denzel Washington) quickly realizes the tragedy was a deliberate act, and federal officials struggle to find a suspect. Meanwhile, the charred body of a beautiful young woman (Paula Patton as Claire) washes up on the shore with clues that could help Carlin track down the killer. Carlin's Sherlock Holmes-esque talents of observation endear him to FBI agent Andrew Pryzwarra (Val Kilmer), who invites Carlin to join his team of high-tech detectives and unveils an elaborate network of satellite-powered cameras that can literally look back in time. Carlin and company track Claire's final days while desperately trying to identify the terrorist. And the big question inevitably arises: If it's possible to look back in time, could Carlin perhaps travel back too and keep the ferry from ever exploding? "Deja Vu" is the kind of pulse-pounding action flick that you need an astrophysics degree to understand but only a pair of eyes to appreciate. *Rated: PG-13 for intense sequences of violence and terror, disturbing images and some sensuality. 2 hours, 8 minutes.* — T.H.

FAST FOOD NATION ★★1/2

(CineArts) This unflinching expose into the dark underbelly of the All-American burger is a thought-provoking cinematic meal. Director Richard Linklater masterfully opens the film with a happy-go-lucky family enjoying a bite at the local fast-food eatery, Mickey's (a fictional chain that resembles McDonald's). The father lifts the bun of his burger and the camera pans down into the patty. It's time to learn what else we bring to the table with that circular hunk of meat. Cut to Mexican couple Raul

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(Wilmer Valderrama) and Sylvia (Catalina Sandino Moreno) as they illegally cross into the United States where Raul is ushered to work at the nearby meat-processing plant. Across the country, executive Don Henderson (Greg Kinnear) is reveling in the success of "The Big One," Mickey's latest marketing masterpiece. But there's a problem with the popular burger and Don is sent to the processing plant to uncover the source. The disturbing climax — filmed at an actual slaughterhouse — may make the picture hard to swallow, but the importance is undeniable. You'll never look at a hamburger the same way again. *Rated: R for disturbing images, strong sexuality, language and drug content.* 1 hour, 46

minutes. — T.H.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

★★1/2

(Aquarius, Century 20) Christopher Guest knows a good spoof when he sees one. Unfortunately he's seeing them in every conceivable nook and cranny, and his shtick is getting stale. "Consideration" touches on a topic that's rife with comic possibilities: the nauseating egos inherent in the film business. The project in question is a low-budget indie by the name of "Home for Purim," an intimate drama about a Jewish family's troublesome reunion at the celebration of their dying matriarch's

favorite holiday. The "Purim" players are fringe celebs, a motley crew of wannabes and used-to-bes desperate for a break. One little mention on an obscure movie blog is all it takes to start tongues wagging over a rumor that faded personality Marilyn Hack (Catherine O'Hara) may be crafting an Oscar-worthy performance. That tiny flame of thespian glory is fanned into a wildfire of publicity; suddenly everyone who is anyone is talking about "Purim." Guest is a gifted director with a devoted group of talent willing to take one for the team. He needs to move on. *Rated: PG-13 for language and adult themes.* 1 hour, 26 minutes. —J.A.

LITTLE CHILDREN ★★★★★

(Guild) Todd Field's adaptation of Tom Perrotta's exacting novel of dubious adult behavior is a dark and delicious treat. "Children" opens with the idyllic picture of innocence as toddlers navigate the local playground under the eyes of their pretty suburban mothers. On closer inspection, the women are snide and snippy gossip-mongers, waxing less than rhapsodic about sex, marriage and things that go bump in the night. Enter Brad Adamson (Patrick Wilson), dubbed "The Prom King," a handsome, married Mr. Mom whose devotion to his own little guy is exceeded only by his studly good looks and his delightfully puzzling background. Not one for standing on

ceremony, free-spirited mom Sarah Pierce (Kate Winslet) gets to the bottom of Brad's daily appearance at the park by striking up a conversation. A tiny spark becomes a brushfire and ultimately a raging inferno of love and lust. "Children" reads like a contemporary fantasy, a stark adulterous reality with darkly curling comic edges. Original, challenging and resonant. *Rated: R for language, nudity and sexual situations.* 2 hours, 17 minutes. — J.A.

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