

Mountain View VOICE

DECEMBER 15, 2006 VOLUME 14 NO. 51

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650.964.6300

mv-voice.com

Bistro feast

La Rioja a fun new option on Castro

WEEKEND | P.23



NICHOLAS JENSEN

LOCAL MOTION: For the past 25 years, Ernest Bianco has set up his model trains in the front yard of his Mountain View home during the holiday season. Those interested can view his trains in the evenings at 2387 Adele Ave. until Jan. 1.

Sweet deal for city employees

AMID NEW CONTRACTS, COUNCIL APPROVES BONUSES AND PENSION INCREASES, RETIREMENT HEALTH CARE CUTS

By Daniel DeBolt

The city gave hundreds of its highest paid employees an early Christmas gift Tuesday in the form of council-approved pension increases and annual cost of living increases worth millions of dollars. But at the same time, the city set the stage for significant cuts to retirement

health care benefits for future employees in the same ranks.

Performance-based bonuses were also awarded to the city manager, the city attorney and city clerk. The nine top department heads received increases in the amount of bonus pay that can be given upon good performance reviews.

The city also struck a deal last week with two of its major unions, the Eagles and the Firefighters Association, after seven months of arduous talks that stalled over retirement health benefits.

The fire-fighters took a one-year contract with few changes, while the Eagles, representing City Hall employees and low-level managers, received a four-year contract worth a total of \$3.5 million over four years. The Eagles took the lead in accepting what some believe to be inevitable cuts to increasingly expensive retirement health benefits.

Despite those cuts, the Eagles received a tremendous pension increase, from 2 to 2.7 percent. Assistant finance director Patty Kong said the immediate cost of the newly awarded pension plans to the Eagles and other unrepresented employees was \$6.9 million.

Council members Greg Perry and Matt Pear were not happy with the agreement.

"This is giving away the house," Pear said about the new pension plans. "People are going to be making more when they retire than they did when they were working for the city. This is going to hit five to 10 years from now in such a way we may need to cut services in certain areas."

INSIDE

In its final meeting together, current council makes big decisions on two housing projects. See p. 7

Musical chairs for local Dems

Kasperzak aims for Lieber's Assembly seat

By Daniel DeBolt

Council member Michael Kasperzak broke the news to the *Voice* this week that he is planning to make a run for the District 22 state Assembly seat currently held by Sally Lieber.

While the plan isn't set in stone, Kasperzak said he would form an "exploratory committee" to look into his candidacy. So far, Kasperzak said a number of people have told him he should "absolutely" enter the race.

Lieber, also a former Mountain View mayor, terms out of

office in 2008. District 22 covers Mountain View, Cupertino, Sunnyvale, most of Santa Clara and a slice of San Jose. Democrats outnumber Republicans in the district 44 to 30 percent, according to Smartvoter.org.

The race to fill the seat is expected to pick up in a matter of weeks. Santa Clara council



Kasperzak

► See **KASPERZAK**, page 11

Lieber stunner: She'll oppose Kniss in 2008

Palo Alto Weekly

Assemblywoman Sally Lieber, D-Mountain View, announced this week that she will break with tradition and run against fellow Democrat and county Supervisor Liz Kniss when Lieber is term-limited out of her Assembly seat in 2008.

Lieber had been planning to run for the District 3 supervisorial seat held by Pete McHugh in 2008, and Kniss has even endorsed Lieber in that race. But now, Kniss said, Lieber is planning to run for the District 5 seat

held by Kniss.

"I certainly find it is not only a puzzle, but I wonder why," Kniss said. "It's very unusual for two Democrats to run against each other, unless there is a major issue [dividing them]." Kniss said she didn't know of any such issue separating her and Lieber.

Lieber prefers to run for the District 5 seat "because District



Lieber

► See **LIEBER**, page 11



Katherine Frey



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Sharon & Marcella



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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 is driving Obama mania?



"The fact that he is getting press, such as the fact that he is on the cover of Time magazine. He has potential to be the next president, but I believe the first African American president needs to be a Republican."

John MacWilliamson,
Mountain View



"Obama mania is driven by the things he says and the words he chooses. He is eloquent and seems honest. I am in love with him."

Elaine Shussett, Mountain View



"I think he is an extraordinary person. I have his last book in my bag."

Tom Maser, Lake Tahoe



"Oh, he's got a cool name. 'Obama mania' is very onomonopoeiac."

Anand R., Palo Alto



"I don't know much about Obama, but for a micronutrient supplement, Odwalla Superfood is the best."

Brendan McCarthy, San Mateo

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Have a question for Voices Around Town? E-mail it to editor@mv-voice.com

■ QUOTE OF THE WEEK

'This is giving away the house. People are going to be making more when they retire than they did when they were working for the city. This is going to hit five to 10 years from now in such a way we may need to cut services in certain areas.'

— COUNCIL MEMBER MATT PEAR,
ON NEWLY APPROVED PENSION INCREASES FOR CITY EMPLOYEES

■ CRIMEWATCH

ARMED ROBBERY, 277 FAIRCHILD DR., 12/07

On Thursday, Dec. 7 at 7:08 p.m., four men wearing masks entered the Fairchild Grocery on Fairchild Dr. Two men took out handguns and went up to the cashier. They ordered him to lie down on the ground and tied his hands behind his back. The four suspects took cash from the register and left the store.

A customer came into the store immediately thereafter and

freed the employee. An extensive search has been conducted, but no suspects have been located.

MULTIPLE AUTO BURGLARIES, 3400 BLOCK STACY CT., 12/08

At about 5:22 a.m. on Dec. 8, police responded to a car alarm and discovered that the vehicle had been burglarized. They then discovered six additional burglaries in the immediate area, with the burglars smashing the vehicles' windows. There are currently no suspects.

■ POLICE LOG

ATTEMPTED SUICIDE
500 block Central Ave., 12/10

AUTO BURGLARY
3400 block Stacy Ct., 12/08
13100 block Lorene Ct., 12/08
1300 block Belshaw Dr., 12/08
2000 block Sunnyview Ln., 12/08
2400 Villa Nueva Way, 12/08
400 block Fairchild Dr., 12/09
1900 block Leghorn St., 12/09
1900 block Leghorn St., 12/10
10 block Santa Clara Ave., 12/11
60 block Willowgate St., 12/11

GRAND THEFT
700 block Continental Circle, 12/06
1000 block El Monte Ave., 12/09
30 block East Evelyn Ave., 12/11
10 block Owens Ct., 12/11

STOLEN VEHICLE
1900 block Latham St., 12/05
100 block West Evelyn Ave., 12/05
600 block San Antonio Rd., 12/06
500 block Showers Dr., 12/06
1200 block Cuernavaca Circle, 12/08
1700 block Vassar Ave., 12/08

BATTERY
Molly MaGee's, 12/08
101 North at Rengstorff Ave., 12/10
In and Out, Rengstorff Ave., 12/10

VANDALISM
300 block Sierra Vista Ave., 12/05
1300 block Park Dr., 12/11
2100 block Crittenden Ln., 12/11

DOMESTIC DISTURBANCE
700 block Luce St., 12/08

COMMERCIAL BURGLARY
2300 block Bayshore Pkwy., 12/08
400 block Clyde Ave., 12/10

■ CORRECTION

Last week's Holiday Fund story about the Community School of Music and Arts said the school provides art education in middle

schools, which is not correct. The CSMA programs are generally limited to elementary school students. The *Voice* regrets the error.

Inspirations

A Guide to the Spiritual Community

Join us for our Christmas Cantata "Ceremony of Candles" and Christmas carol sing-a-long at 7 pm, Sunday, Dec. 17th

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Worship 10:30 am



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9:30am Breakfast@Union #2 Worship
9:45 am Church School Nursery
11:00 am Worship in the Sanctuary,
Club Sunday for Children, Nursery

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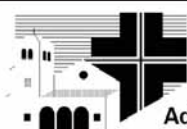
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9:00 a.m. Sunday School and Adult Forum
Adult Forum: "Expectations: Contemplations for Advent"
10:30 a.m. Holy Eucharist with Choir and Casavant Organ

December 10, Santa Lucia Festival

5:30 p.m. Potluck Smörgåsbord, 7:00 p.m. Santa Lucia Program

December 17, Lessons and Carols

7:00 p.m. The Christmas story in international carols and anthems featuring the First Lutheran Choir

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Phony 'city worker' burglars strike again

MEN POSE AS WORKERS TO GAIN ENTRY — SEVERAL INCIDENTS THIS MONTH ALONE

By Alexa Tondreau

Police say a series of unusual burglaries, where men pose as city workers in an effort to dupe senior citizens, is on the rise, with four more attempts in Mountain View this month.

Police have released sketches of three suspects in the burglary

scheme, where the men knock on doors claiming to be city employees requiring access to the homes. No victims have been harmed, but many have had cash stolen.

A rash of similar crimes has occurred throughout the Peninsula and South Bay region, police said. In Mountain View, residents told police that men claiming to work for the water department or as contractors ask for entry into residential homes to investigate supposed leaky or

damaged pipes. Upon letting the men into their homes, the victims, all of whom were in their 70s, 80s and 90s, have had cash stolen from the premises.

Whenever the burglars were denied entry, they fled immediately by foot, police said.

The recent incidents in Mountain View occurred on Dec. 6, 7 and 11, always between the hours of 10 and 11:30 a.m. In two of the cases, on McCarty

Avenue and Cuesta Drive, the burglars successfully tricked the occupants and got away with cash.

In the other cases, on N. Rengstorff Avenue and Grant Road, they fled.

A similar incident was first reported in Mountain View in late October, when two

men, posing as water department employees, entered a residence on the 400 block of View Street. The occupants there, both senior

citizens, reported that the suspects told one of them to go outside and turn off the water, while the other was distracted by the men, who stole a small amount of cash. The men fled and have not yet been identified or located.

In the earlier incident, the two suspects were described as Hispanic males in their 30s. One was between 6-foot and 6-foot-2, with short curly dark hair; the



►See **CRIME**, page 11

City in talks over cafe at train depot

By Daniel DeBolt

The city initiated talks last Tuesday with several businesses interested in leasing the indoor space at the Train Depot, which has been sitting mostly unused since it was built four years ago to replicate the city's 1888 depot.

The city council voted in March to use the depot's 800-square-foot space for a cafe after years of disagreement on several options, including a teen center.

In closed session at the Dec. 12 meeting, the city is scheduled to negotiate possible lease agreements with several interested parties, including Gary Hick for The Passing Track Cafe, Judith Green for Bistr "O," Jennifer Ayre for Savvy Cellar and Mike and Firoozhi Sadenghi for Rising Loafer.

The train depot is currently being used as a break room for VTA employees and also includes a bike locker and ATM machine inside. There are plumbing hook-ups for bathrooms, but so far no plans exist to build any. ■

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



NICHOLAS JENSEN

Volunteer nurse Sandi Kahn shows her patient Serina Perez, 4, how to press her lips against the thermometer at the RotaCare Clinic in Mountain View.

Last refuge for the uninsured

ROTACARE CLINIC OFFERS FREE SERVICES AND MEDICATION

By Alexa Tondreau

Step into the waiting room at Mountain View's RotaCare Health Clinic, and you'll find a standard doctor's office scene during the flu-ridden holiday season — coughing abounds; family members, looking tired, mill around; and children play on the floor with toys and books.

On the walls hang cheerful decorations including a Santa Claus cut-out, Jewish dreidels and a "Happy Kwanzaa" sign, intermixed with posters reminding patients to get their immunizations and to practice healthy living.

In most ways, the RotaCare clinic is like any other in Mountain View, but with one very notable exception: None of the patients here have any

insurance, and all services are free of charge.

On the *Voice's* tour of the facility, Barbara Avery, program coordinator, said the clinic's purpose is to reach out to those who have few, if any, options when they are ill, and are almost never able to take preventative health measures in the way of check-ups or early screenings.

"I think of my own family, and what it would be like to have nowhere to go," Avery said. "These are people in our community who we really need to help."

Most of the patients who visit RotaCare, which is located on the El Camino Hospital campus on Grant Road, are immigrants who can't qualify for health insurance.



►See **HOLIDAY FUND**, page 12

School workers get a raise

INCREASE IS FIRST IN FOUR YEARS FOR NON-TEACHING JOBS

By Alexa Tondreau

For the first time in four years, workers in the Mountain View Whisman School District will receive a wage increase of 5 percent, starting in January 2007.

The district ratified its contract with the California School Employees Association (CSEA) this week, roughly two weeks after approving a similar wage increase for teachers. The CSEA employees in the district include bus drivers, maintenance workers, food service workers, custodians and other non-teaching staff.

The terms of the contract include the district paying an additional 1.7 percent towards workers' medical costs. Employees who worked in the 2005-06 school year will receive a \$500 bonus, an item approved in the teachers' contract as well.

Additionally, employees who have worked in the district for seven years or more will see \$25 added to their salary per month, as part of a "longevity schedule" benefiting long-term staff.

Christian Pedersen, CSEA labor representative, said, "We're pleased with the contract. We believe we received everything the district

►See **SCHOOL CONTRACT**, page 17

dreams What ~~assets~~ do you have?

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COUNCIL

► Continued from page 1

Perry called the pension increase a “retroactive gift” for longtime city employees, and said that 2.7 percent was unusually large. He said he knows of cities that have it set at 1.1 percent.

The benefit allows employees with 30 years of service, for example, to receive 2.7 percent of their highest salary for each year worked, or 81 percent. By contrast, a 2 percent pension benefit would be worth 60 percent after 30 years.

Council member Mike Kasperzak noted the concessions made for retirees’ health by the Eagles, and said that was positive.

“I think where we have ended up with the Eagles is cutting-edge for cities,” Kasperzak said. “I’m really impressed with how thoughtful the Eagles were. They realize this is taxpayer money, and taxpayers don’t get these kinds of benefits. To make those concessions really shows a lot.”

Kasperzak had just returned from the National League of Cities conference, where he found that retirement health care costs and new accounting standards to keep track of them “are incredible and create real headaches for municipalities across the country.” Mountain View is the only city making real headway with the problem, he said.

Under the new Eagles contract, employees hired after June 30, 2007, will have to work 15 years before they can have 85 percent of an HMO plan paid during retirement. Those not planning to stay with the city for 15 years will have the option, after five years of employment, to receive \$200 a month during retirement towards any health plan, and up to \$300 a month will be available to those who have worked 10 years for the city.

“You have a liability that accrues from a defined benefit,” said Eagles representative Fred Erwin about the old standard retiree health benefits. His remark echoed city finance manager Bob Locke’s concerns about health care costs rising dramatically in the future to an unknown level, creating an unpredictable “liability” the city would have to pay no matter how impractical.

Enrollment in the city’s most expensive medical plan has been frozen for the Eagles, and a cap has been put on the plan’s cost at \$1,497 per employee.

On top of the pension increase, Eagles employees also get a 3.5 percent cost of living increase for the first two years of the contract

Position	Annual Salary*
Assistant City Manager	\$171,897
City Attorney	\$183,725
City Clerk	\$106,683
City Manager	\$203,173
Community Development Director	\$171,897
Community Services Director	\$171,897
Employee Services Director	\$149,646
Finance & Administrative Services Director	\$171,897
Fire Chief	\$174,664
Library Services Director	\$140,182
Police Chief	\$175,230
Public Works Director	\$171,897

*Not counting benefits

and a 3.2 percent increase the following two years — a total of 13.4 percent over four years.

Several other unrepresented employees received contracts similar to the Eagles, raising the number to 234 employees with a new contract.

Firefighters buy time

Meanwhile, firefighters took a one-year contract with no changes in order to buy more time and deal with the retirement health care problem.

John Miguel, president of the

“There is no need to make rash decisions that would take away such an important benefit.”

— JOHN MIGUEL,
FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION

Firefighters Association, said he has seen several firefighters in Mountain View die from diseases linked to the job, such as exposure to chemical fumes in fires, which is why his union believes the retirement health benefit should be a priority.

“There is no need to make rash decisions that would take away such an important benefit,” Miguel said.

He added that CalPERS may soon make its giant retirement health care fund available to cities like Mountain View, which would provide the city with an investment fund to make retirement health care costs more viable.

“As we learn more about this, there will be more options available,” Miguel said.

The Service Employees International Union local 715 has also been in negotiations with the city for seven months, but did not reach an agreement before press time.

Merit pay for officials

Also Tuesday, after receiving good performance reviews from the city council, the city manager, city attorney and city clerk received an increase in bonus pay.

Kasperzak said the increase in merit pay, which is a calculated salary percentage, was “definitely” worth it. Mayor Nick Galitto said the three officials had not received any merit pay while navigating the city through tough economic waters in recent years.

The city attorney received an 8 percent merit adjustment, the city manager a 5 percent merit adjustment and the city clerk a 4 percent merit adjustment.

“When city employees see that, that may not sit well,” Perry said.

Perry registered the only no vote, saying the officials had already received their high-paying positions through merit. According to Kathy Ferrar, employee services director, the city attorney’s annual salary is \$184,000, the city clerk’s is \$107,000 and the city manager’s is \$203,000. The figures do not include benefits.

In a staff report, city manager Kevin Duggan announced increases in merit pay for the nine major department heads, which did not require a council vote. The merit pay is given when department heads receive positive annual performance reviews. Duggan noted that Sunnyvale provides merit pay for the same positions up to 10 percent of salary, and Palo Alto sometimes exceeds 10 percent.

Duggan said he’ll raise it to 10 percent.

“I am concerned with encouraging existing department heads to remain within the organization as long as possible while also positioning the city to compete effectively with other organizations for their eventual replacement,” Duggan wrote in the report. ▀

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

Unprecedented use of BMR fees

COUNCIL DESIGNATES MONEY TO RELOCATE EVANDALE RENTERS, RE-ZONES SATAKE NURSERY FOR 30 HOMES

By Daniel DeBolt

When the unusually intense, five-hour city council meeting kicked off Tuesday, the chamber was packed with residents of one of Mountain View's more upscale southern neighborhoods.

The group had come to fight off a plan for 30 \$1.5 million homes at the six-acre Satake Nursery at the end of Marilyn Drive. They wanted the plan recommended by city staff — only 26 homes, on larger lots — which they said was a compromise. Several speakers said it was a matter of saving the character of the neighborhood, where the average lot size is 9,500 square feet.

But the Environmental Planning Commission had recommended zoning for 30 homes on average lot sizes of 7,000 square feet. After several eloquent speeches and another of the thorough presentations that Mountain View neighborhood associations are famous for, the council dismayed neighbors by going with the EPC recommendation.

The council also expressed interest in doing away with the cul-de-sac design, which the neighbors had proposed after raising concerns about traffic. But once they realized that any further change would require more costly studies, the council let it be.

Then the well-to-do residents left the chamber, and the low-income ones came in to watch the council approve high-density zoning on Evandale Avenue.

Several of the 250 residents of the complex — 64 units of cheap rental space at 291 Evandale Ave. — had come to the meeting, and a translator spoke to more than two dozen of them through headphones. As expected, the council approved high-density zoning for the site, meaning the complex will be torn down and replaced with 144 condos.

Then, in an unprecedented move, the council directed staff to investigate using in-lieu fees from the development, earmarked for below market rate housing, to help them relocate. The audience members, who were among Mountain View's poorest, broke into applause.

If the 144 condos sell for \$500,000

each, the BMR fees generated will equal \$216,000, which could add more than \$3,000 to the relocation funds given to each household.

Tenants had already been promised a \$500 moving allowance, full deposit refund, bilingual advice on renting, 180-day notice and a subscription to a rental guide. Architect Sal Caruso added that the owner was now willing to make the last month's rent free and explained that the owner had allowed rents to be unusually low over recent years since he knew the residents would be displaced.

With an average of four residents per unit at 291 Evandale, it's not uncommon for several families to live in one unit. One renter said he lived with a single mother and three children who barely survive at the current low rent. He said he didn't know where she would go if evicted.

Speakers said they wanted to stay in Mountain View, with one describing it as "tranquil" and others saying they had jobs locally.

It will be hard for them to find units as cheap their current ones. One resident reported paying \$950 for a three-bedroom apartment at Evandale, while a recent apartment search showed rents in the \$1,500 range. Every speaker agreed that the original relocation allowance was much too small.

Council members Greg Perry and Mike Kasperzak were the only ones to vote against the plan. They said it was "discriminating" toward those in similar situations — getting evicted to make way for recently approved developments — who lacked such a large relocation allowance.

Council member Tom Means made the motion to use the BMR fees, saying that it was a fitting use of the money.

Mayor Nick Galiotto was passionate about the idea, and responded to concerns about being discriminatory by saying that the project was the largest displacement from a development he had seen.

Council member Matt Pear provided the swing vote to pass the motion.

Plans for the new development were unveiled at the meeting, showing four three-story buildings with a parking garage half underground. The four buildings surround a large courtyard which would include a playground and a pool.

The 1,100-square-foot condo units are expected to sell for between \$500,000 and \$600,000. ▣

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County puts off LA Hills decision

HUNDREDS ARRIVE, DOZENS TESTIFY OVER REDISTRICTING PROPOSAL

By Alexa Tondreau

Watchers of the Los Altos Hills redistricting debate will now have to wait till late January for a decision on the issue, after a multitude packed the county Department of Education chamber last week for a five-hour session.

Nearly 200 people came to San Jose on Thursday, Dec. 7 to watch the debate, filling the seats and lining the walls of the chamber. But after hours of impassioned public comment from dozens of people, the 11-member committee — the Santa Clara County Committee for School District Organization — put off deciding the future of public education in the Hills until Jan. 25.

In the meantime, committee members said, local residents should begin a “healing” process to mend the divide between them.

“You are a community that has been involved in a very intense dialogue,” committee chair Josephine Levy told the audience. “Once the decision is made, you need to begin communicating as neighbors.”

Committee member Robert Bench agreed, saying “This is so difficult because I see a 50/50 split. Whatever way we vote, we’ll make half the people unhappy.”

Debate in Los Altos Hills, where some residents want to break from the Los Altos and Palo Alto school districts to form their own local K-8 grade, has hit a high point among its 7,900 residents. Those in support of redistricting have been dubbed “secessionists” by opponents, a term which drew rancor at the hearing for its pejorative ties to the Civil War era.

Public testimony Thursday was a circus of community participation, with pleas coming from children and teenagers, parents and grandparents, district superintendents

and local leaders, all of whom lined up for hours to speak.

Currently there is no neighborhood public school in the Hills. On the other hand, Hills Mayor Craig Jones told the committee, Los Altos and Palo Alto “have plenty of them, so they must think they are very important. But the schools are all in their towns, and not in ours. We want to have the same opportunity for this precious commodity.”

Testimony from community members in support of redistricting portrayed a town where neighbors didn’t know neighbors and

— is set to reopen in August 2008, they said, and Superintendent Tim Justus reported that the site will be renovated and remodeled at a cost of \$10.9 million. Improvements will include new multi-purpose rooms, indoor and outdoor stages, a new library, wireless connectivity for the entire campus and enhanced recreational areas.

“The one precious commodity they have asked for, we are delivering in 2008,” Justus said.

The three superintendents — including Barry Groves, superintendent of the Mountain View-Los Altos school district — also cautioned that “seceding” from neighboring districts would prevent Hills children from attending top-rated schools at the elementary, intermediate and high school levels. Families in the southern part of the Hills would lose the option of going to Loyola Elementary or Egan and Blach Intermediate in Los Altos, and families in the northern part would be excluded from Nixon Elementary, Terman Middle School and, possibly, Gunn High School in Palo Alto.

Committee member Nick Gervase, in his closing comments, echoed the sentiments of the three superintendents when he told Hills residents, “I know that those are good school districts and those kids are doing well. I don’t think you’ll really surpass what the unified school districts can offer.”

Ultimately, the decision may come down to simply abiding by state law, which mandates that newly formed districts have an adequate number of children to justify the need. While redistricting proponents claim they can fulfill that criteria, opponents say they doubt the claim, believing that the supposed 900-plus students include a large portion who currently attend private school and are not likely to switch over.

Groves was blunt on the subject, telling the committee he thought the redistricting plan “so blatantly unlawful there is no point in going forward.”

The Santa Clara County Committee of School Organization is scheduled to hold its next meeting on the issue on 4 p.m. Jan. 25, in a hearing open to the general public. At that time, committee members said, they will give 50 people unable to testify Thursday the chance to speak before delivering their decision. The Department of Education is located at 1290 Ridder Park Drive in San Jose. ■

“The one precious commodity they have asked for, we are delivering in 2008.”

SUPERINTENDENT TIM JUSTUS,
LOS ALTOS SCHOOL DISTRICT

children living on the same street had never met. Officials estimated that 50 percent of children in the Hills attended private schools.

Bart Carey, from the Hills’ planning commission, said that “Despite the fact that we have two of the best school districts in the state, almost 50 percent of our kids don’t attend. We want to draw these kids back into our community. We are proponents of public education.”

The message from the superintendents representing Mountain View, Los Altos and Palo Alto was that the promise of a local neighborhood school was already being fulfilled.

Bullis Elementary — the Hills school which was closed in 2003, setting off the original debate

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Siegel starts volunteer 'database'

INCOMING COUNCIL
MEMBER KICKS OFF NEW
COMMUNITY GROUP

By Daniel DeBolt

Jac Siegel has already done the hard work of conducting a winning city council campaign during last month's election. But he doesn't start his term until Jan. 9, so what to do in the meantime?

In the meantime, Siegel has started new group called Community Helping Community, which is a "database," as Siegel put it, of volunteers who can help those in need.

"The idea is to help people build community by people working together," Siegel said. "We're a city with a heart."



Jac Siegel

So far, people have volunteered their skills in fund raising, carpentry, plumbing and electrical work. On a recent weekend, 14 members got together on the corner of Castro Street and El Camino Real to paint the wall of the building on the southwest corner that had been charred by a fire.

"Everybody had a good time," Siegel said. "It was done rapidly."

The next project will be helping a woman who needs to have a structure removed from behind her house because it isn't up to code.

"People want to help people," Siegel said. "What's missing is someone to lead it." The work is done "with no strings attached," he added.

Another upcoming project may be reinstating the city's program of having volunteers, including families and children, plant wildflowers along the front of the Cuesta Annex.

"It used to be gorgeous in the springtime," Siegel said, noting that the flowers, once they're up, don't require any extra work.

Siegel said he's received dozens of e-mails from people who would like help with the group but haven't had the opportunity yet. Those interested in helping, or receiving help, can reach Jac Siegel at (650) 988-9115 or at jacsharon-siegel@comcast.net.

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

LIEBER

► Continued from page 1

5 is where I live and where I have much stronger ties," she said. She added that she was urged to run for that seat by others.

"This is a difficult decision," Lieber said. "I've always been a strong supporter of women in public office."

Mountain View City Council members Greg Perry and Michael Kasperzak were surprised.

"I was flabbergasted," Kasperzak said. "I supported Liz eight years ago and my intention would be to support Liz now. Liz has done a great job on the Board of Supervisors."

Perry looked on the bright side.

"The trouble is Sally needs something to do before she can

run for state Senate," he said. "But it's going to be a competitive race. We don't get many of those. I wish all races had two strong politicians in it."

Kniss said she will run for reelection in 2008 and has already picked up the endorsement of state Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, as well as those of the mayors of most of the cities in her district, which includes Palo Alto and Mountain View.

Lieber is a former Mountain View mayor who was recently elected president pro tem of the Assembly, its second-highest-ranking post after speaker. Kniss is a former Palo Alto mayor and Palo Alto school board member. ▀

Daniel DeBolt contributed to this story.

KASPERZAK

► Continued from page 1

member Rod Diridon Jr. confirmed that he is also considering a run. The list of candidates may also include Dolly Sandoval, a Cupertino council member, and Paul Fong, a Foothill-De Anza trustee. Calls to Fong and Sandoval were not returned by press time.

Kasperzak, a longtime liberal Republican, switched to the Democratic Party earlier this year. At the time, there was speculation that he did it to make a run for state office — as any Republican would have a tough time gaining election in the mostly Democratic district — even though Kasperzak is more liberal than most Republicans.

"During most of my council term people thought I was a Democrat," Kasperzak said. "Everybody knows I'm a moderate. I think that's what Californians want. I think the voters really want people to go to Sacramento and work as close to a non-partisan fashion as they can, like we do on the city council and board of supervisors."

Kasperzak cited the state's many fiscal issues as a major reason he wants to run, as well

as battling frivolous laws that he says seem to pile up in the state government. While he considers state office, he said, he isn't leaving behind a possible future continuing the work he does locally, as a mediator settling municipal disputes.

As a city council member, Kasperzak said, he was proud to see the city get into the "affordable housing game" again when he first joined eight years ago. He said he's also proud of his outreach efforts to businesses as the mayor, and the development of a housing impact fee for commercial development.

Kasperzak is also known for his participation in the League of Cities on a state and national level, most recently joining them in their fight against Proposition 90 on eminent domain, which was defeated in November.

Among the challenges Kasperzak faces in the world of state politics is fund raising. Part of the work of the exploratory committee will be to see how much support he would receive.

"Unfortunately, in this day and age you can't run unless people are willing to support you financially," he said. ▀

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

CRIME

► Continued from page 5

other between 5-foot-10 and 6 feet tall, with short light-brown hair. Both were seen wearing gray pull-over work vests with orange trim.

Police gave a sketch of a third suspect as well, but provided no further details as of press time.

Mountain View police are ask-

ing residents to always ask for identification of city employees who come to the door, and if there is any doubt of their legitimacy, to call the utility department to verify the order. If anything about the people or situation is suspicious, call the police immediately by dialing 9-1-1. ▀

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

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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.

HOLIDAY FUND

► Continued from page 5

Over half of the patients served are children, and half of the total patient population is female.

Avery said it's easier than we imagine for better-off families to become uninsured in times of hardship.

"When the dot-com bust happened, a lot of really humbled people came here. They didn't ever think they'd be in a RotaCare, but they didn't have any insurance after they lost their jobs."

Founded 10 years ago by the Sunnyvale chapter of the Rotary Club, with nine current locations across the Bay Area, RotaCare is able to see upwards of 30 people on Monday and Wednesday nights. The free services cover a wide range, including pediatrics, internal medicine, chronic illness, family health and women's health. All immunizations and prescription medications are free as well.

Because many patients visit irregularly at best, the clinic tries never to miss an opportunity to provide as much health care as possible. A patient coming in with a specific complaint, for example, will also be encouraged to get a flu shot and immunizations on the spot, and will take home educational materials on healthy food choices and portion control.

RotaCare relies on a rotating volunteer staff of 65 medical doctors and pharmacists, 12 nurse practitioners and several translators, who come to the clinic in the evenings after a full day's work from hospitals and clinics around the Peninsula.

The array of volunteers at RotaCare provides a unique atmosphere, explained Avery. "Sometimes you step into the kitchen and you'll see a Kaiser doctor eating with an El Camino nurse and a Longs pharmacist."

This sense of community collaboration is mirrored throughout RotaCare's operations. A food spread laid out for staff on the evening of the Voice's visit was donated by Casa Lupe, a local Mexican restaurant, and delivered to the clinic by volunteers from the Los Altos Rotary chapter.

Avery's teenage son was also on hand that evening to help with grant applications, and Avery said the clinic often gets students volunteers and community members looking to do anything from office work to baking sweets for the staff. Furniture, toys, and the fish tank in the waiting room were all donated.

"We're kind of the hand-me-down clinic," Avery said. "People want to get rid of things and think, 'Oh, maybe RotaCare would like it.'"

Funding the clinic is a collaborative effort as well, with assistance from El Camino Hospital and the hospital's charitable foundation, Camino Medical Group, the Peninsula Community Fund, the Health Trust and Bay Area Rotary chapters.

But with rising medical costs, and at least \$70,000 in bills this year alone, fundraising is a full-time effort for RotaCare. Inclusion in the Voice Holiday Fund this year will be a major help, Avery said, with donated funds set to go towards pharmacy bills and medical supplies.

Surveying the noisy scene in the waiting room, Avery said, "We really try to be the community's clinic."

At that moment, a woman walked up behind Avery to take a free sample of calcium supplements on display.

"Sometimes I forget," the woman said bashfully.

"It's really good for you," Avery said. "Take a few!" ■

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

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**
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Linda and David Williams for the Community Services Agency (MV-LA)
Brendan Timmer in memory of David J. Timmer

Mountain View kids to dance with the Russians

MOSCOW BALLET ENLISTS HELP OF LOCAL CHILDREN IN UPCOMING PERFORMANCE OF 'NUTCRACKER'

By Amber Cleave

Jean Roberts was ecstatic when the Moscow Ballet approached her for assistance with their production of "The Great Russian Nutcracker," a close relative of the classic that adheres more closely to its Russian roots.

A Moscow Ballet soloist, Boris Baskakov, flew to the U.S. and hand-picked local children in the upcoming production. Roberts will teach the local kids, who practice every Sunday for the show.

"This gives us something to offer our students that they wouldn't normally get to do," said Roberts, the founder of Dance Attack!, a dance school for children and teens that began in Mountain View but moved to Sunnyvale five years ago.

Of the children selected, nine are from Mountain View. Open auditions were held in the community during October, and Roberts said all but one of the children from Mountain View were original Dance Attack! students. Their parts range from snowflakes and mice to Russian and Spanish dancers.

"I am really excited," said 13-year-old Megan Templeman, who plays the part of a Russian dancer. "I've never been in the Nutcracker before."

"I feel really great about the experience," said 9-year-old Whitney Ross. This is also a first time for her brother, 6-year-old Braydon Ross, who is a Spanish dancer.

Ten-year-old Maggie Costales, who plays an angel and a party guest, said, "it seems like a lot of fun."

Another Spanish dancer, Jack Waiblinger, 14, said, "I am excited to dance with a professional ballet company. The opportunity is a first for me and will open my eyes to what the professional dance world is really like."

The other Mountain View children who will be performing in the ballet are Linda Price, 10, French dancer; Stephnie Hing, 8, Russian dancer; Breanna Gambini, 9, Chinese dancer; and Vanessa Paravati, 8, snowflake.

The Cupertino performance at Flint Center is one of 70 stops on the Moscow Ballet's U.S. tour.

In 14 years of the tour, this is the first time Cupertino has been selected as a performance stop.

"Numerous factors play into the selection of a city and a dance school," said Beth Murdock, publicist for the Moscow Ballet. "Roberts had a good reputation and she was available to participate." ■

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

■ INFORMATION

What: 'The Great Russian Nutcracker,' performed by the Moscow Ballet with help from local children

Where: Flint Center, 21250 Stevens Creek Blvd., Cupertino

When: Dec. 30 at 3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Cost: \$25-\$35

Info: Tickets can be purchased through Ticketmaster by calling (408) 998-8497

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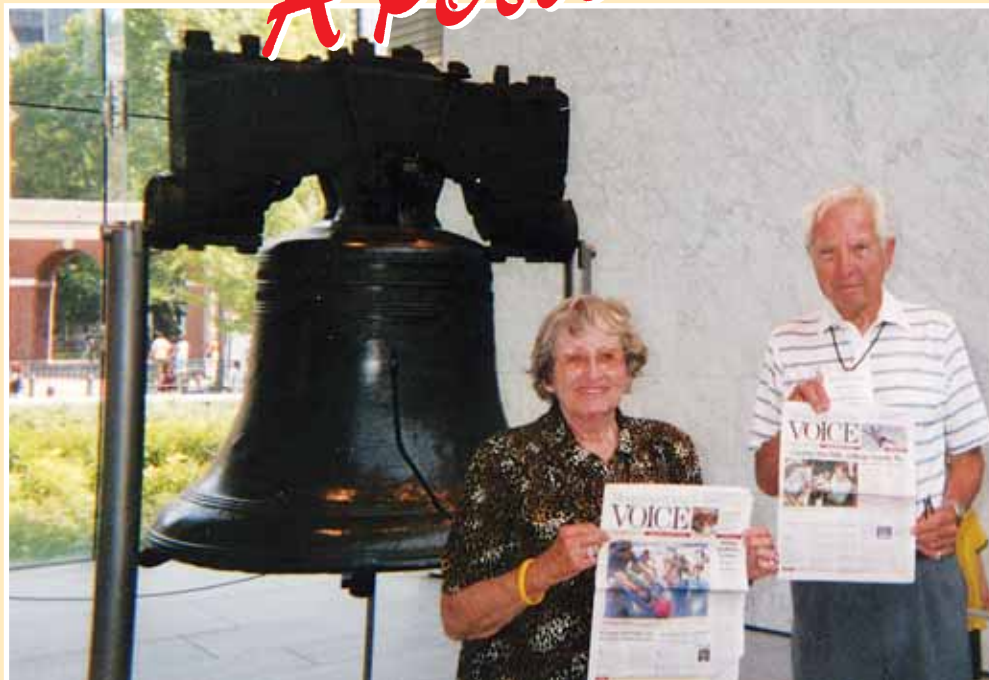


Photo of Jackson and Pat Eaves at the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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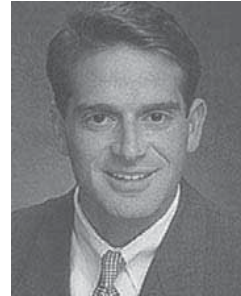
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Home Depot eases neighborhood fears

A visiting team of Home Depot officials last week attempted to ease local residents' concerns about the impact of a new store replacing Sears at San Antonio Center.

Although attendance was light at the meeting, held at the Senior Center, Home Depot spokesperson Kathryn Gallagher said "the project team received much feedback, most of which was positive."

Elna Tymes, president of the Monta Loma Neighborhood Association, said comments by the Home Depot officials imply the new store should not affect the surrounding area any more than Sears does. Residents have raised concerns about traffic.

"It isn't going to be any worse than it is now," she said. "It turns out that this particular store is less aimed at the contractor audience and more towards the individual buyer."

"Home Depot will only accept deliveries between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.," she added. "That allayed a lot of people's concerns [about noise]."

Residents' worries were further eased by the promise that large florescent lamps in the parking lot won't be on all night, and an effort will be made to add some "green" to the parking lot, Tymes said.

— Staff Report

■ COMMUNITY BRIEFS

MOUNTAIN VIEW HOLDS FIRST MENORAH LIGHTING

Local and community leaders will be on the scene to help to light a giant 8-foot menorah during the city's first-ever public menorah lighting. The kindling will be followed by Chanukah gifts and treats, live music, balloons, face paintings and crafts such as "make your own candle."

The celebration will be Wed., Dec. 19 at 5:30 p.m. in the downtown City Center Plaza, at the corner of Castro and Mercy streets.

COPS BRING GIFTS FOR CHILDREN IN NEED

The Mountain View Police Department is hosting its 4th Annual Cops That Care Program on Saturday, Dec. 23. The program provides gifts to children in the community through donations.

Those who wish to donate may bring unwrapped gifts to the police department, located

at 1000 Villa St., from now until Dec. 22 between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. Gifts will be handed out on Dec. 23. For more information, call Officer Ron Cooper at (650) 903-6712.

CHOPSHTICKS SERVES UP CHRISTMAS EVE LAUGHS

A tradition of comedy and Chinese food continues for its fourth year this Christmas Eve with the Chopshticks comedy show in Palo Alto.

The show, intended to provide a fun-filled night for the local Jewish community, will be held at Ming's Restaurant in Palo Alto and stars Cory Kahaney and Dan Naturman from NBC's "The Last Comic Standing."

The show begins Sunday, Dec. 24 at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$65 and can be purchased online at www.planitjewish.com. For a table of 10 or more, call Deborah Alexander at (650) 852-3508. Ming's Restaurant is located at 1700 Embarcadero Rd., Palo Alto.

—Amber Cleave

HUNGRY?

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MountainView
VOICE



EDUCATION BRIEF

SCHOOL BOARDS PICK NEW PRESIDENTS

Trustees from the Mountain View Whisman and Mountain View-Los Altos district school boards elected new presidents this week.

Fiona Walter will replace Gloria Higgins as president of the Mountain View Whisman district board.

Susan Sweeley will replace

Julia Rosenberg in Mountain View-Los Altos. At Monday night's board meeting, Sweeley said Rosenberg had presided over a particularly eventful tenure, in which Freestyle Academy was opened and Barry Groves was hired to replace former Superintendent Rick Fisher.

Presidents' terms last one year and duties include formally running board meetings.

—Alexa Tondreau

NEWS BRIEF

MT. VIEW MAN ARRESTED ON DRUG CHARGES

A Mountain View man was arrested last Thursday by the Santa Clara County Specialized Enforcement Team for allegedly possessing cocaine and heroin for sale as well as reportedly using a hidden compartment to transport narcotics.

Ricardo Alvarez, 25, was

booked on charges of offering to sell cocaine, transportation of cocaine and heroin, possession of cocaine and heroin for sale, and driving under the influence of narcotics, according to police. He allegedly used a hidden compartment to transport the drugs.

His bail was set at \$300,000.

— Bay City News

SCHOOL CONTRACT

Continued from page 5

had to offer. There was basically nothing left on the table." Of the wage increase, Pedersen added, "They clearly understood the employees have not had a raise in years."

Changes to the CSEA workers' contract will cost the district \$229,219 a year, for the next three years.

Negotiations with the district began 18 months ago, as part of the total renegotiation of the service workers' employment contract.

"We went line by line, item by item," Pedersen said. "We worked to clean and fix up any problems we've been up against."

The district said it was able to ratify wage increases for CSEA workers and teachers because of


extra funds available this year.

Stephanie Totter, director of administrative services for the district, said "Money that was potentially available last year was used to maintain and keep Slater open. Once the school closed, it freed up money and finally allowed the district to award the employees' hard work with a raise. We'd have loved to give them a raise last year."


Totter reported that under the new scheme, the lowest monthly salary for a CSEA worker will be \$1,973. The highest monthly salary will be at \$4,631. CSEA workers have 10-, 11- and 12-month contracts with the district.

Every year, the union renegotiates one article in its contract, and every three years the entire contract is reviewed. ■

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



Jennifer Guderlund,
Soprano: Toured internationally with CalPoly Polyphonics, studied voice with Annelle Delfs and has concertized throughout the Peninsula. She is the Director of Vocal Music at Graham Middle School, Mountain View, where she directs three performing choirs and an annual musical.



Julia Hunt-Nielsen,
Soprano: Debuted at Carnegie Hall in 1991. She is a frequent soloist in the Bay area, including with the Berkeley Symphony under Kent Nagano, and with the Sonoma City, Stockton, and SF Pocket Operas. A Stanford graduate and Ph.D in voice from Indiana University.

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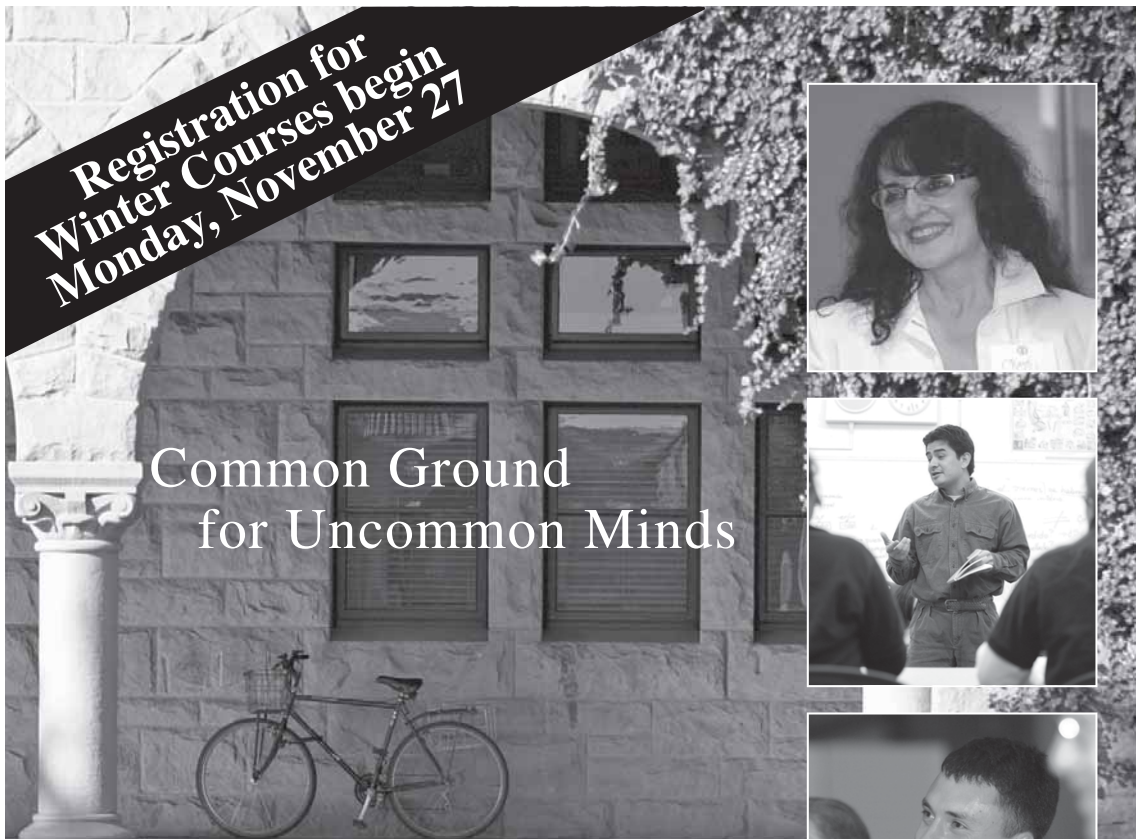
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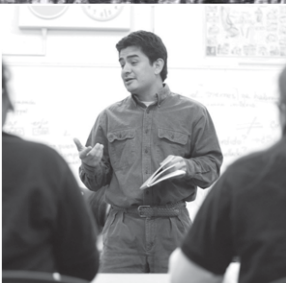





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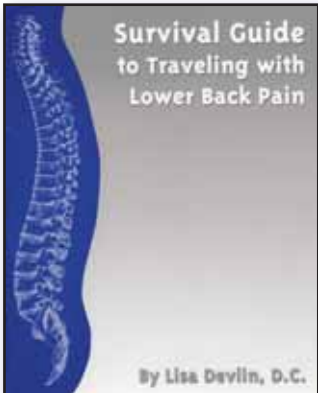
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■ EDITORIAL THE OPINION OF THE VOICE

Say no to Hills school district

We urge county school officials to send a clear message and stop the misguided effort of the Los Altos Hills City Council to form its own K-8 school district, a plan that would drastically impact the neighboring districts in Los Altos, Palo Alto and Mountain View.

The affluent Hills community has been in an uproar ever since the Los Altos School District closed Bullis Elementary, the only school remaining in the Hills. And plans to establish a Bullis charter school in the Hills were thwarted when the district forced it into portable classrooms on a campus several miles away.

But Los Altos' high-quality K-8 district has now promised to refurbish and reopen the Bullis campus in 2008, which would return a local campus to the Hills and enable life to go on as it has in the past. Besides, there are numerous other reasons why the county committee should just say no. For example:

■ The Los Altos elementary and Palo Alto Unified districts would lose all the Hills students, and the property and parcel tax revenue that go with them. About the same number of students attend each district now through eighth grade and go on to high school at Mountain View, Los Altos or Gunn high schools. This is a good arrangement that has been successful for many years, administrators say.

■ A new district would buck the long-standing state policy that seeks to consolidate schools into larger districts, not create tiny new ones like that proposed by Los Altos Hills, where 50 percent of eligible students attend private schools.

■ Last week, all three superintendents of the affected districts (Los Altos, Mountain View-Los Altos High and Palo Alto) circulated a joint statement opposing the move. All three said it would adversely affect their districts, and that the loss of revenue would cause teacher layoffs and other financial shortcomings.

It is not difficult to understand the frustration felt by Hills parents, who would like all their students to attend the same elementary school. But many, if not most, California school districts are drawn without city limits in mind. More than 900 Mountain View children attend Los Altos schools, and many Los Altos students attend Mountain View High School.

And the pledge by the Los Altos district to spend \$10.8 million or more to upgrade the Bullis-Purissima site is a pricey olive branch that Hills parents should eagerly accept. With a newly refurbished school in their community, and the excellent reputation and ranking of Los Altos and Palo Alto schools, Hills parents have a win-win situation by just staying put.

We urge the county Committee on School District Reorganization to turn down the Hills' foolhardy and self-centered request for its own district. It is a waste of time and money and we doubt that a newly formed district would ever reach the excellence already achieved by the current districts.

■ LETTERS VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

KATZ AND WESLEY DON'T SPEAK FOR US

Editor:

Mr. Katz and Mr. Wesley deserve the ridicule of the community for the self-centered legal maneuvers that delay voter-approved bonds for the Foot-hill-De Anza district ("Colleges prevail in Katz lawsuit," Dec. 8).

Far from being "the kind of people who helped found this country," they are the shadow operators that twist a judicial system to its civil limits. Their belief that a "system that doesn't work for us, certainly won't work for you" assumes obnoxious obstructionism is a value we share with them. We don't.

Our legal system bends over backward to allow the widest range of objections to be heard in the pursuit of an enduring justice. In this case, I'd like to see this pair bend over forward to receive the justice they deserve.

Allen Rice
Velarde Street

COOPERATION CAN SOLVE PARKING PROBLEM

Editor:

Four community groups hold the key to Mountain View

High School's continuing parking problem. The four are the school, the city, the neighbors and the families. Which one will take responsibility?

The problem is years old and the costs in time, energy and anger are mounting. Yet anyone who tries to point a finger at that one group which should solve the problem is stymied. Why? Because these are city streets, the students have the cars, the school district provides limited parking, and the neighbors bought property near a school. Each of the four owns the problem.

If school parking is a joint problem, then getting the four groups together to work for a solution is the first practical step towards change. Is it possible to craft a mutually agreed upon solution? Yes! Other school communities have done this, including Palo Alto's Gunn High School.

Once all that disparate energy and desire for an answer, now manifested by each of the four groups, is marshaled into a common channel, the Mountain View community can create beneficial change.

Joan Marx
Palo Alto



■ EDITORIAL OPINION

What's eating Aaron Katz

SARATOGA LAWYER
MAY BELIEVE IN WHAT
HE'S DOING, BUT HIS
METHODS ARE MADNESS

By Don Frances

Those who've met Aaron Katz in person describe him as an average-looking man in his late 50s, slightly on the short side, slightly portly, with salt-and-pepper hair and large-rimmed glasses. In the courtroom at least, he has a manner in keeping with his e-mail persona: sarcastic and confrontational, with a tone of exasperation.

According to California State Bar records, Katz earned his law degree from Santa Clara University, and has been eligible to practice law off and on since 1973. He lives in Saratoga, but owns property around the county, including in Mountain View.

It is not clear if Katz has retired from practicing law — his member status, inactive since 2000, was reactivated only last month — but he seems to stay busy as a landlord and property manager.

In January 2004, Katz filed suit against an upcoming parcel tax measure for the Mountain View-Whisman School District (Measure J passed that March, by 69 percent), kicking off a new phase in his career as a fighter of district tax measures. He has since filed suits against the El Camino Hospital District, the West Valley-Mission Community College District, the Campbell Union High School District and, most recently, the Foothill-De Anza Community College District.

Even though he's never scored a legal victory, at least two of his lawsuits — against El Camino and West Valley-Mission — ended well for Katz: The former district paid him \$200,000, the latter \$60,000, to make his suits go away.

Katz' reasoning for his suits has always hinged on two unrelated points:

1) District tax measures are unfair and unconstitutional. This is because non-landowners (like Katz' Mountain View renters) can vote on them but don't have to pay for them, and because some landowners (like Katz) can't vote on them since they live outside the district.

2) Districts are run by greedy and incompetent officials who don't deserve any more taxpayer money.

Arguing these points with Katz

is slow going when he's on the defensive, because his writing, shot through with insults and faux-legalism ("notwithstanding and insofar as your comment request is concerned ...") can get loopy. Here's an example from a May e-mail to a *Voice* reporter, in which he remarks on his settlement with El Camino and presages the coming fight with Foothill-De Anza:

"Insofar as your comment 'and

"This new tax measure has nothing to do with fixing the college and everything to do with more administrative overhead."

— AARON KATZ

what you think the settlements mean for voter rights? I have a question for you. Name me anyone in this community; anyone; who has come forward to do anything for voter rights? Assuming you can't come up with anyone, there aren't any voters whose rights are affected.

"Now may I suggest you make more productive use of your time examining the Foothill-De Anza Community College District's Measure C on this June's

Barring a visit from the Ghost of Christmas Future, it is unlikely Katz will change his mind anytime soon."

ballot? You should be running a comprehensive examination of that measure which lacks merit. ... this new tax measure has nothing to do with fixing the college and everything to do with more administrative overhead."

Katz sees corruption every-

where, and believes news entities like the *Voice* don't care to report it because we have an agenda of our own. The districts are on the make, he says, taxpayers are getting bilked, and we won't point this out because, for us, the ends justify the means.

No districts are spared Katz' gaze. In an e-mail to me last week, he ran through a long analysis meant to demonstrate that local high school districts (which rely totally on property taxes) are ill-run. The system, he wrote, "is an infrastructure which has been created to employ people, and in many instances, at obscenely high salaries."

"Now go through the same analysis for community college districts," he wrote. "Same result." He listed more districts — library, park, hospital, water, vector control — and after each of them, "same result."

Everywhere it's the same: beleaguered landowners preyed upon by insatiable local districts, who gladly take advantage of the feckless majority of non-landowning voters. The usual notion of class war is turned on its head.

As he often does, Katz ended his recent message with an ominous word of warning:

"The day is going to come when local agencies have extracted as much from landowners as they're able to extract. When that happens, they're going to turn to your non-landowning 'locals.' And just to make things fair, I hope they'll let only non-resident and non-natural person landowners vote on the proposition of whether non-landowning residents should be taxed as much as they.

"When the shoe's on the other foot, it will be very interesting to see how your story changes. I'll be watching."

From this language, you might have thought Katz was talking about something more sinister than your local vector control district. But there is no middle ground with Aaron Katz — which is probably the most salient fact driving these lawsuits.

Ends vs. means

Many people have offered me their opinion of Katz, and the main problem they have with him is not his underlying ideas. In fact, though he may not believe it, many of his critics (including me) see kernels of truth there:

▶ See **KATZ**, page 22

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The tax system in California is unfair; many districts can be run more efficiently.

Katz' problem isn't just that these complaints are lost beneath all the bitterness and extremism (which they are). It's the way he goes about voicing them. He's not the first lawyer to use lawsuits as personal protest. But particularly when it comes to bond measures — since no district can issue bonds with a lawsuit hanging over them — Katz has touched a weakness which cripples our current system, without even the merit of resolving, legally or politically, the issues he raises.

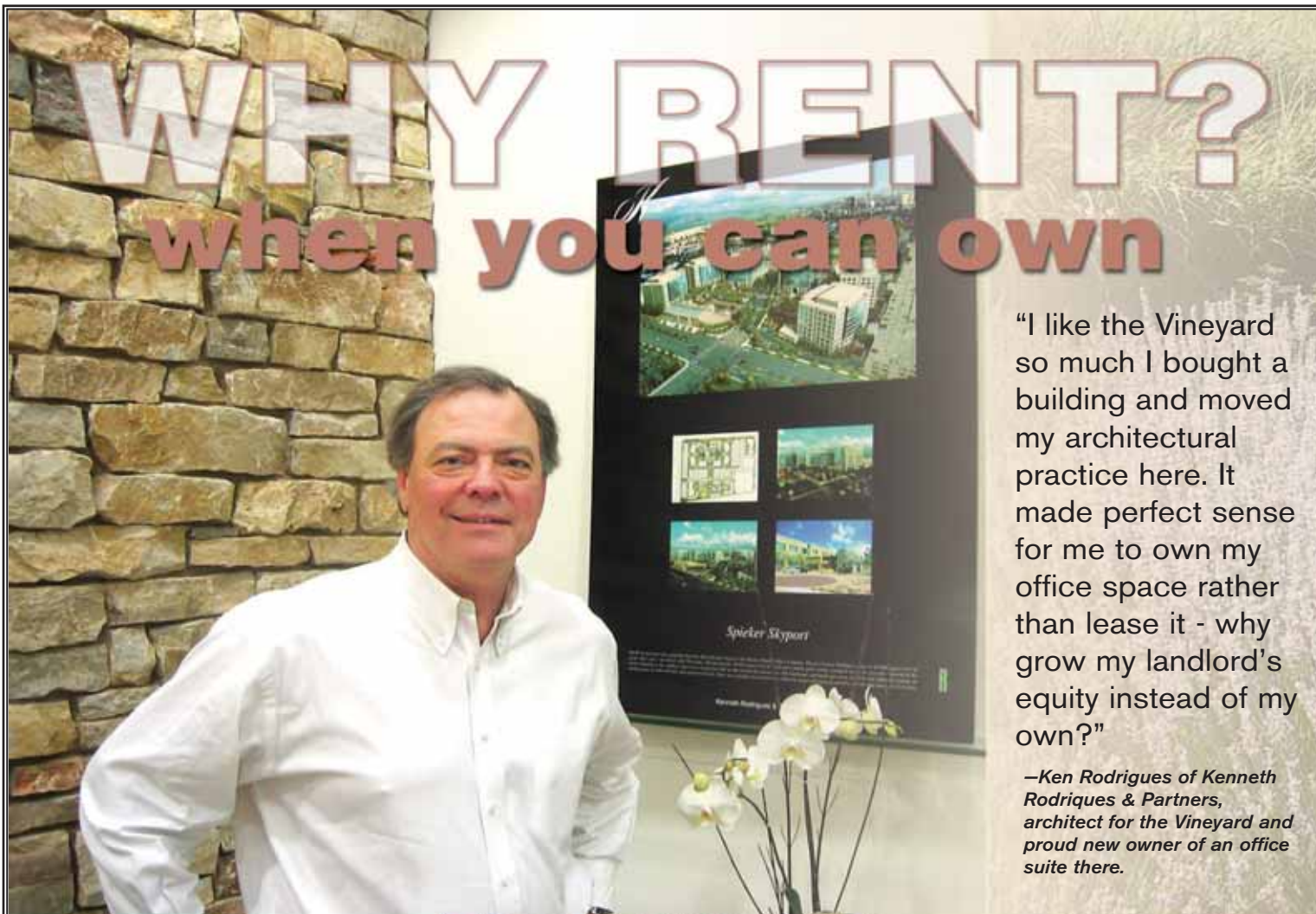
So the districts are left twisting in the wind until his suits are resolved, which can take any amount of time. While the bonds are held up, projects are held up, costing many millions (\$140 million in the case of El Camino Hospital). Two districts decided that even victory wasn't worth the cost, and settled. It remains to be seen what Foothill-De Anza will do.

Barring a visit from the Ghost of Christmas Future, it is unlikely Katz will change his mind about his methods, or anything else, anytime soon. And given the slow pace of the courts, it looks like his strategy will continue to work against districts hoping to issue bonds. This makes a legal solution untenable — but a legislative solution has never properly been explored.

I call on this region's representatives, particularly state Assembly member Sally Lieber, to look for a way to close this loophole, so that our local agencies can go about their business without a one-man cloud hanging over their heads. Maybe then we talk about fixing the tax system.

Don Frances is editor of the Mountain View Voice.

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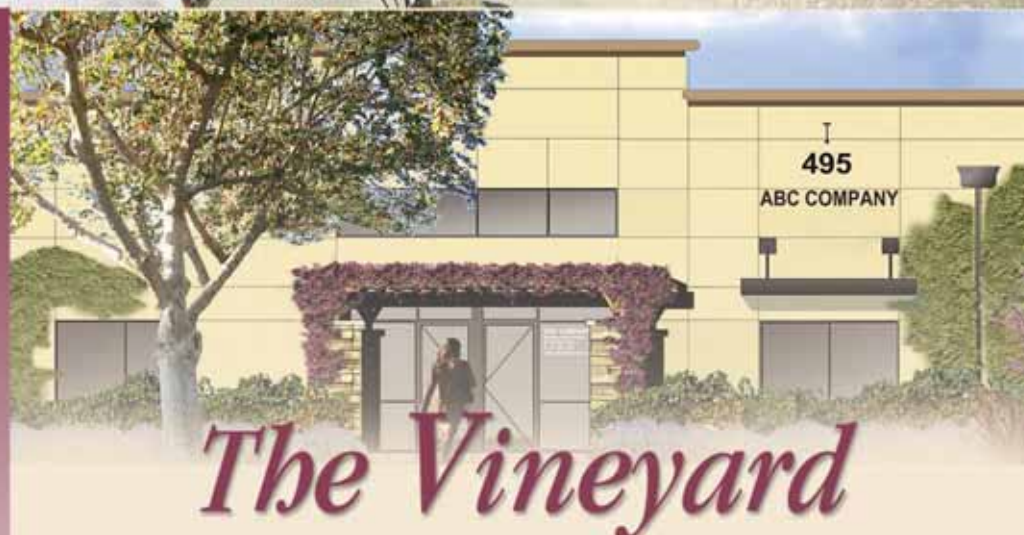
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La Rioja stirs excitement

NEW LATIN BISTRO, TAKING UP RESIDENCE NEXT TO MONTE CARLO NIGHT CLUB, SHOWS LOTS OF POTENTIAL

By Elaine M. Rowland

The new Latin bistro La Rioja, in the site of the old theater on Castro Street, has been open a few months now and seems to have a regular gaggle of passersby peeking in the windows. Why is the old Monte Carlo sign still up, they wonder, when there's a new restaurant in its place?

To clear things up: the old Monte Carlo restaurant is gone, but the nightclub Monte Carlo remains, under the same roof as the new restaurant La Rioja.

The bistro features Spanish-influenced foods from around the world, from Mexican tortilla soups to riojas and ham from Spain. Lunch and dinner start with lightly toasted soft garlic but-

ter rolls with a hearty, mild salsa fresca. It's easy to stuff yourself on this without noticing.

Since the menu includes soups (small or large sizes) and salads, but not small-plate appetizers, we did stuff ourselves on the bread until our soup arrived. In a head-to-head competition, the crema de papas (\$5.75 a cup) beat out the sopa de tortilla (\$6 a cup). The very rich, creamy potato soup had a buttery flavor and a liberal helping of ham and potato chunks. The beef tortilla soup had melted cheese on top and those crunchy tortilla strips going for it, but I'd recommend it to fans of avocados more than to fans of beef soup.


Our appetizers arrived on funky

► See **LA RIOJA**, page 24



KARNA KURATA

The dessert tray at La Rioja Latin Bistro in Mountain View has an array of choices, including fruit sorbets, tiramisu, copa catalana and seasonal desserts.



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For \$14.25, patrons at La Roja Latin Bistro can get the lomito aragan dish, a grilled pork loin dressed in wine sauce with a side of Casamiento and sauteed vegetables.

KARNA KURATA

LA RIOJA

► Continued from page 23

Fiestaware-looking dishes, the pollo Madeira (\$14.75) a large serving of very tender, well-seasoned glazed chicken. The chicken enchilada (\$9.75) was even larger — smothered in cheese, but not as exciting as the Madeira.

Our waitress enticed us into

ordering one of La Rioja's sparkling fruity lemonades (\$4.50) which was an excellent recommendation. The raspberry and peach lemonades tasted of fresh fruit and were satisfyingly large — perfect for a hot day at one of La Rioja's sidewalk tables, where you might escape the perhaps-too-exuberant music in the front dining room. (On Mondays and Tuesdays, you can also dine in an



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<p>Hobee's Restaurants 2312 Central Expwy. Mtn. View. 650/968-6050 Voted Best Breakfast/Brunch 9 years in a row!</p>	<p>Chef TJ 938 Villa Street, Mtn. View. 650/964-7466 "Outrageously good" New French-American fare "in a charming little Victorian house" — Zagat 2003.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 2px;">pizza</p> <p>Kapp's Pizza Bar & Grill 191 Castro Street Mtn. View, 650/961-1491 Happy Hours Mon-Fri 4pm-6pm and 11pm-2am.</p>
<p>Marie Callendar's 4710 El Camino Real (just south of San Antonio) 650/941-6989</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 2px;">french</p> <p>Le Petit Bistro 1405 W. El Camino Real, Mtn. View. 650/964-3321 Casual and cozy French restaurant. 15 tables.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 2px;">tex-mex</p> <p>El Paso Cafe 1407 El Camino Real, Mtn. View. 650/961-8858 Fax: 650/961-3439 (Between Rengstorff and Shoreline) Happy Hour 2:30pm - 6:30pm.</p>
<p>Sports Page 1431 Plymouth Street (exit at Shoreline off 101) Mtn. View. 650/961-1992</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 2px;">chinese food</p> <p>Chef Chu's 1067 N. San Antonio Road, on the corner of El Camino, Los Altos. 650/948-2696 Zagat Review: "Gold Standard in Fresh Chinese Cuisine."</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0056b3; color: white; padding: 2px;">ice cream</p> <p>Gelato Classico 241 B Castro Street Mtn. View. 650/969-2900</p>
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The upstairs dining area at La Rioja Latin Bistro is lit by skylights.

KARNA KURATA

upstairs room where the buffet lunch (\$8.50) is offered.)

On another day, I tried the camarones la Valencia (\$16.50), an unusual fruity shrimp plate. Though I've eaten plenty of fruit shrimp dishes, including fruit-glazed and otherwise, this one was a little different. Maybe a tad sweeter. The shrimp weren't jumbo but tasted good and had a nice texture. I don't need jumbo if the seafood is good, though there was a little grumbling from my husband about it.

He should have ordered the pork loin in rioja sauce (\$14.25), which was quite large. It was tender and went especially well with the house sauce brought separately, a hot cream sauce with cayenne and onions. The same sauce complemented the chicharrones (\$13.50), a deep-fried pork dish. La Rioja's version was flavorful, if a bit dry, and that evening did not arrive on the bed of pickled cabbage as the menu stated.

La Rioja seems to be looking for its focus, trying to be many things at once: a restaurant offering upscale cuisine, an affordable lunch-buffet place, a night spot with bar, and a breakfast place on weekends. The search for its niche extends to the sides that come with the entrees. My Nicaraguan friend found it odd that the Hispanic-inspired entrees had sides of cauliflower and broccoli, which were nicely cooked to tender-crisp texture, but aren't what comes to mind when you think "Latin bistro food." The other side served with the entrees is refried rice and beans mixed together — tasty, but a little boring.

Dessert menus are usually easy to get through, but when a giant tray looms over your table, laden

with all the options to tempt you — well, that's another matter entirely. We fell for the chocolate mousse, which is on the slightly bitter side, a pleasing surprise for dark chocolate adherents. We also fell for the tiramisu, which was less taste bud-ravishing, as well as the coconut ice in a coconut shell.

Castro is a busy street with many dining options, and La Rioja is trying very hard to catch diners' attention, with an attractive sidewalk dining area out front, and a colorful, cozy front dining room you can glimpse from the street. The staff is very helpful and friendly, but still the place feels a

little understaffed. During one lunch, for example, I saw two separate parties get up to track down waiters to ask for their checks.

La Rioja offers a few menu favorites you'll find many other places (keeping less adventurous diners happy) but what's exciting are the foods you practically have to travel to find, or at least ask someone's mom to cook for you. In this arena, La Rioja has lots of potential. Right now, if you have time and are a little flexible, you'll find enough to enjoy — but with a little smoothing out of the operations, this should soon be an all-around terrific place to eat. ▀

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MOVIE TIMES

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

BABEL (R) ★★★★★1/2 Century 20: 6:50 & 9:50 p.m.

BLOOD DIAMOND (R) ★★★★★ Century 16: 11:20 a.m.; 2:40, 6, 7:20, 9:20 & 10:30 p.m. Century 20: 11:25 a.m.; 12:25, 1:25, 2:30, 3:25, 4:35, 5:45, 6:45, 7:55, 9 & 9:55 p.m.

BOBBY (R) ★★ Century 20: 11:45 a.m.; 2:20, 4:55, 7:40 & 10:05 p.m.

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

CASINO ROYALE (PG-13) ★★★★★1/2 Century 16: 11:05 a.m.; 12:30, 2:20, 3:45, 5:40, 7:05, 9 & 10:15 p.m. Century 12: 11:50 a.m.; 12:30, 3:15, 4:20, 6:45, 7:50 & 10 p.m.

CHARLOTTE'S WEB (G) ★★1/2 Century 16: 11 a.m.; 1:30, 4:10, 7 & 9:30 p.m. Century 12: 11:40 a.m.; 1:20, 2:20, 4, 5:10, 7, 8, 9:40 & 10:35 p.m.

DECK THE HALLS (PG) (NOT REVIEWED)
 Century 20: 11:25 a.m.; 1:45, 4:20, 6:45 & 9 p.m.

DEJA VU (PG-13) ★★★★★ Century 16: 1:05, 3:55, 6:50 & 9:45 p.m. Century 12: 12:20, 3:20, 7:30 & 10:20 p.m.

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

FLUSHED AWAY (PG) ★★★★★ Century 12: 11:25 a.m.; 1:40 & 3:50 p.m.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION (PG-13) ★★1/2
 Aquarius: 2:55, 5:05, 7:35 & 9:50 p.m.; Sun. also at 12:50 p.m.

HAPPY FEET (PG) (NOT REVIEWED) Century 16: 11:15 a.m.; 2 & 4:40 p.m. Century 20: 11:20 a.m.; 12:35, 2, 3:05, 4:30, 7:05, 9:40 & 10:30 p.m.; Fri., Sun. & Tue. also at 5:35 & 8:10 p.m.

THE HISTORY BOYS (R) (NOT REVIEWED)
 Palo Alto Square: 2:15, 4:45, 7:30 & 10 p.m.; Sat. & Sun. also at 11:35 a.m.

THE HOLIDAY (PG-13) ★★★★★ Century 16: 11 a.m.; 12:25, 2:15, 3:40, 5:20, 6:55, 8:30 & 10:10 p.m. Century 12: Noon, 1:05, 1:55, 3:10, 4:10, 5, 6:20, 7:20, 8:20, 9:30 & 10:30 p.m.

LITTLE CHILDREN (R) ★★★★★ Guild: 1, 3:40, 6:30 & 9:10 p.m.

THE NATIVITY STORY (PG) ★★ Century 20: 11:30 a.m.; 2, 4:30, 6:55 & 9:25 p.m.

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPYNESS (PG-13) (NOT REVIEWED)
 Century 16: 11:10 a.m.; 12:10, 1:10, 1:55, 2:55, 4:05, 4:55, 5:55, 6:55, 7:55, 8:55, 9:55 & 10:35 p.m. Century 20: 11:30 a.m.; 12:10, 12:50, 1:30, 2:15, 2:55, 3:35, 4:15, 5, 5:40, 6:20, 7:10, 7:45, 8:25, 9:05, 9:50 & 10:30 p.m.

THE QUEEN (NOT RATED) ★★★★★
 Century 20: 12:15, 2:35, 4:50, 7:15 & 9:35 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) Guild: Sat. at midnight.

THE SANTA CLAUSE 3: THE ESCAPE CLAUSE (G) (NOT REVIEWED) Century 20: 11:35 a.m.; 1:55 & 4:25 p.m.

SHUT UP AND SING (R) ★★★★★1/2
 Aquarius: 2:35, 4:45, 7 & 9:15 p.m.; Sat. & Sun. also at 12:30 p.m.

STRANGER THAN FICTION (PG-13) ★★
 Century 20: 11:55 a.m.; 2:25, 5, 7:30 & 10 p.m.

TURISTAS (R) (NOT REVIEWED)
 Century 20: 12:30, 2:50, 5:10, 7:50 & 10:15 p.m.

UNACCOMPANIED MINORS (PG) (NOT REVIEWED)
 Century 16: Fri., Sun.-Tue. at 11:50 a.m.; 2:25, 4:45, 7:15 & 9:35 p.m.; Sat. at 11:50 a.m.; 2:25, 4:45 & 10:05 p.m. Century 12: 11:30 a.m.; 1:50, 4:30, 6:15, 7:10, 8:40 & 9:50 p.m.

WE ARE MARSHALL (PG) (SNEAK PREVIEW)
 Century 16: Sat. at 7:30 p.m. Century 20: Sat. at 7:30 p.m.

Note: Screenings are for Friday through Tuesday only.

AQUARIUS: 430 Emerson St., Palo Alto (266-9260)
CENTURY CINEMA 16: 1500 N. Shoreline Blvd., Mountain View (960-0970)
CENTURY PARK 12: 557 E. Bayshore Blvd., Redwood City (365-9000)
CENTURY 20 DOWNTOWN: 825 Middlefield Road, Redwood City (369-3456)
CINEARTS AT PALO ALTO SQUARE: 3000 El Camino Real, Palo Alto (493-3456)
GUILD: 949 El Camino Real, Menlo Park (266-9260)
SPANGENBERG THEATRE: 780 Arastradero Road, Palo Alto (354-8263)

For show times, plot synopses and more information about any films playing at the Aquarius, Guild and Park, visit www.LandmarkTheatres.com

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

For show times, plot synopses, trailers and more movie info, visit www.mv-voice.com and click on movies.



MOVIE REVIEWS

APOCALYPTO ★★★★★
 (Century 16, Century 20) Mel Gibson combines his infamously twisted sensibilities and mammoth talents to create a bold and visionary telling of the downfall of the Mayan civilization. The film begins by establishing the Mayans as fun-loving, intimate folk with a deep sense of family and innate spiritual beliefs. Soon enough their idyll is shattered by a vicious attack at the hands of the Holcane warriors, ruthless predators who torch their village, rape their women and take the men captive. The Mayans gather strength from chaos thanks to the fervor of their beliefs. Leading the pack is charismatic tribesman Jaguar Paw (Rudy Youngblood), whose father is brutally murdered before his eyes and who manages to conceal his pregnant wife and young son before setting off on his tortuous death march. The violence is outrageously gory but never gratuitous, perfectly in keeping with the anguish of a disintegrating civilization and the survival of the fittest. Vivid, provocative and utterly breathtaking. *Rated: R for extreme violence, bloodshed and nudity. 2 hours, 16 minutes. In Mayan Yucatec with English subtitles.* — J.A.

BLOOD DIAMOND ★★★★★
 (Century 16, Century 20) As ex-mercenary Danny Archer, Leonardo DiCaprio captures the essence of a conflicted smuggler from Zimbabwe (nee Rhodesia) making a living running stolen diamonds from Sierra Leone to Liberia. Archer chances upon the mention of a rare pink diamond that has been hidden in the mountains (during Sierra Leone's turbulent 1999 civil war) and determines to locate it and get the hell out of Dodge. It sets him on an unlikely collision course with Mende tribesman Solomon Vandy (Djimon Hounsou), a proud husband and father who has been torn from his family to slave in the diamond fields. Vandy unexpectedly discovers the rare pink and hides it, hoping to later retrieve it and re-connect with his family. Enter the third member of the studied triangle: foxy American journalist-cum-action junkie Maddy Bowen (Jennifer Connelly), who doggedly pesters Archer for a story about the truth behind conflict diamonds, thus exposing the corruption of European diamond industry leaders who choose the bottom line over humanity. There's a lot to like about director Edward Zwick's hard-line investigation on principle and profit: attacks of conscience, relentless action and a teary finale. But the film's message — stem the flow of conflict diamonds — is too preachy, brazenly dragging its significance over the finish line with the utmost melodrama. *Rated: R for extreme violence and language. 2 hours, 20 minutes.* — J.A.

THE HOLIDAY ★★★★★
 (Century 16, Century 12) Two very different women on either side of the Atlantic share the urge for a change of scenery. Iris (Kate Winslet) is a British reporter eager to shed the agony of a three-year love affair that's left her an emotional wreck. Amanda (Cameron Diaz) is an uptight L.A. exec who wonders why she can't shed a tear over her broken relationship. Serendipitously the two meet on a home-exchange Web site. Iris's quaint country home seems the perfect

getaway for Amanda, and Amanda's lush Hollywood mansion looks to be the ideal distraction for Iris. The women elect to swap places for two weeks, neither realizing how much can change in a short period of time. Amanda is instantly uncomfortable in the secluded English countryside and is quick to pack her bags — until she meets Iris's handsome older brother (Jude Law as Graham). Meanwhile, Iris befriends a retired L.A. writer (Eli Wallach) and surprisingly bonds with a quirky composer (Jack Black), all the while determined to break ties with her sleazy ex-beau. "The Holiday" is reminiscent of a winter pastry — sugar-coated and sweet, but too much can make you sick. *Rated: PG-13 for sexual content and some strong*

language. 2 hours, 16 minutes. — T.H.

THE NATIVITY STORY ★★

(Century 20) The timeless tale of Jesus, Mary and Joseph comes to cinematic life thanks to sweeping cinematography, exquisite costuming and a fantastic score. Unfortunately, the film is also about as exciting as an afternoon nap. The story is familiar even to atheists. The Virgin Mary (Keisha Castle-Hughes) is betrothed to Joseph (Oscar Isaac), a humble and honorable carpenter. Uneasy about her arranged marriage, Mary finds solitude in a nearby grove where she is visited by an angel (Alexander Siddig as Gabriel) who informs her that she will bear the child of God and name him Jesus. Life is tough for the young

peasant girl. Forced to wed a man she doesn't love, impregnated by a deity and all but ostracized by the suspicious townsfolk. But Joseph's love for Mary runs deep, and a dreamtime visit by Gabriel encourages Joseph to support his wife wholeheartedly. Together Mary and Joseph set out for Bethlehem — Joseph's native land — by order of the vicious King Herod (Ciaran Hinds), who is desperately trying to quash a prophecy that would threaten his power. People curious about the *original* Christmas story or eager for a dramatic re-telling of the birth of Jesus will appreciate this visually impressive feature. But don't buy a ticket if you're prone to dozing. *Rated: PG for some violent content. 1 hour, 41 minutes. — T.H.*

SHUT UP & SING ★★★1/2

(Aquarius) "Just so you know, we're ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas." Barbara Kopple and Cecilia Peck's lively documentary launches into the footage of Natalie Maines, the lead singer of the Dixie Chicks, quietly muttering the line that would rock outraged Americans into a CD-stomping, name-calling frenzy. The cameras catch it all — from Maines' spontaneous remark before a London crowd during the trio's 2003 European tour to the bitter blowback from that incident as the U.S. invaded Iraq. The number-one female band in the country saw their record sales start to slide off the charts. Diane Sawyer grilled them on ABC, Fox News talk show host Bill

O'Reilly and country singer Toby Keith used them for target practice, and country music radio virtually banned their songs. An Academy Award-winning documentarian, Kopple ("American Dream" and "Harlan County U.S.A.") and her co-director place the Chicks squarely in the center of the changing political climate. Not only do the Dixie Chicks refuse to shut up, but also they put their thoughts into lyrics and sing their hearts out. It's downright American. *Rated: R for language. 1 hour, 33 minutes. — S.T.*

■ **MOVIE CRITICS**

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

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