

# Mountain View VOICE

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Official program guide inside



MICHELLE LE

**After helping students** build a giant ramp at Mountain View Parent Nursery School, teacher Marie Faust Evitt watches Steven Head, 5 (center), and James Thomas, 6, experiment with weighted toy cars. Evitt is the author of "Thinking Big, Learning Big," which shows parents and teachers how to make science experiments for kids, among other tips.

## Nursery school's legacy spans generations

FORTY YEARS OF THINKING BIG AT MVPNS CULMINATES  
IN BOOK ON CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

By Diana Reynolds Roome

Christy Flahavan, whose daughter is just completing two years at Mountain View Parent Nursery School, attended the school herself in the late 1970s.

"I have very strong memories from the program," said Flahavan, "One of my fondest memories was spending time there with my mom, and all of my friends' moms. Our parents had a strong involvement in our lives, and I wanted my daughter to have the same experience."

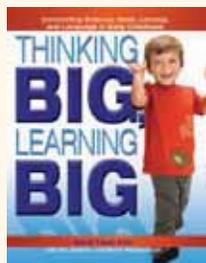
Over four decades, more than 1,000 families have benefited from the early childhood program at Mountain View Parent Nursery School (MVPNS), which serves children between the ages of 2 and 5 while

providing parent education through Mountain View-Los Altos Adult Education. Last Sunday, May 3, several of those alumni came together to celebrate the school's 40th anniversary. Flahavan was the organizer of the event.

To cap off the anniversary, the school's philosophy is reflected in a new book, written by MVPNS teacher Marie Faust Evitt: "Thinking Big, Learning Big: Connecting Science, Math, Literacy and Language in Early Childhood" (Gryphon House).

"The book is a celebration of the school's curriculum," Evitt said. "Young children

love doing things in a big way. They want to be big, and they love enormous numbers and long words. Helping children explore concepts in a variety of ways widens the scope of what's possible for them. And learning is a joy because the children are so excited about what they're doing."



Designed for early childhood teachers and parents, the book is organized by science topics, ranging from tiny things like seeds and worms to enormous ones such as rainbows and outer space. Over 300 projects were tried and tested by the staff and parent helpers, with

► See **NURSERY**, page 7

## State complicates city's budget woes

SACRAMENTO MAY TAKE \$2 MILLION FROM MOUNTAIN VIEW IF MEASURES DON'T PASS

By Daniel DeBolt

As the City Council struggled to resolve a \$6 million general fund deficit Tuesday night, more bad budget news broke in the middle of the meeting: The state may grab \$2 million from the city's general fund next year.

City manager Kevin Duggan told the council that he had just received an e-mail from the League of California Cities with some bad news: State officials were considering taking 10 percent of property taxes away from cities throughout the state if legislators' six propositions, designed to help balance the state budget, are rejected by voters on May 19.

Duggan said that would mean a \$2 million bite from the city's \$88.4 million general fund, plus unknown amounts from the downtown and Shoreline tax districts.

"If they can find a way to spread the pain, you can guarantee they will do it," Duggan said.

Fortunately, the city is closing the fiscal year with a balanced budget, unlike neighboring cities, Duggan said. But "unusual economic times" mean a deficit of \$6 million next year and no revenue growth for several years, even as personnel costs increase by \$4 million every year.

**Give and take**

After months of discussions with department heads, Duggan says he has proposed his "least conservative" budget ever by using \$2 million in city reserves to temporarily fill some of the deficit. About \$3.5 million in proposed cuts to the general fund include the elimination of 17 positions in various departments that are unfilled (except for one librarian position which will be funded with "transition funds" until a librarian leaves voluntarily).

Another \$240,000 would be raised through fee increases for preschool programs, Center for the Performing Arts tickets and ball field use, among other things.

"We would prefer not to recommend any of these actions," Duggan said on Monday. "Unfortunately we can't make a serious dent in the problem without consequences. You can't pretend things are better than they are."

On Tuesday, in a chamber packed with city employees, the council discussed the proposals with the help of an Excel spreadsheet projected on a large screen.

► See **COUNCIL**, page 11

## MVLA considers new bond measure

HIGH SCHOOLS ALSO FACE OVERCROWDING IN YEARS AHEAD, ADMINISTRATORS SAY

By Casey Weiss

It isn't just the elementary schools that are running out of room. The high school district, too, is considering its own bond measure — possibly for the June 2010 ballot — to increase classroom space and make environmentally friendly renovations.

► See **BOND**, page 8

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# Voices

A R O U N D T O W N

Asked in Downtown Mountain View. Pictures and interviews by Ed Pereira.

## How did you react to the swine flu scare?



*"I'm not a doctor but it's not that big a deal. It's not a concern for me."*

**Tony Noto, San Jose**



*"It's hard to gauge what you get in the news, the truth may be somewhere in between. Everyone is being overcautious."*

**David Fissel, Gilroy**



*"I was skeptical that it was spreading around. I work in a restaurant so I tried to stay away from people that were coughing or sneezing. Now I'm not worried about it here, but in more crowded cities like San Francisco."*

**Derek Wong, Mountain View**



*"Everyone is overreacting. I'm not scared of it."*

**Timothy Hopkins, Cupertino**



*"Swine flu isn't as contagious as SARS from what I've heard. I think it's fine, there is medicine available that can cure it."*

**Jody Chen, Fremont**

Have a question for **Voices Around Town**? E-mail it to [editor@mv-voice.com](mailto:editor@mv-voice.com)

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## Community Health Education Programs

May 2009

### Events and Lectures

**Living Well with Osteoarthritis**  
Tuesday, May 12, 7 to 8:30 p.m.  
Andrew Rozelle, M.D., Ph.D., *PAMF Rheumatology*

Join us to learn about the characteristics and symptoms of this common form of arthritis, what you may expect of your joints over time, and how to manage symptoms through lifestyle changes and medications.

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Hearst Center for Health Education, Level 3, Jamplis Building, Palo Alto Medical Foundation, 795 El Camino Real, Palo Alto. *RSVP to 650-853-4873.*

### Classes

**Preparing for Birth, May 7 – June 11, 7 – 9:15 p.m.**  
A six-week program designed to help prepare expectant parents for the practical, physical and emotional challenges of childbirth.

**Learning About Heart Failure, Thursday, May 28, 2 – 3:30 p.m.**  
A class that covers diet, medications and other topics to manage congestive heart failure.

**What You Need to Know About Warfarin**  
Wednesday, May 20, 6 – 8 p.m.  
A PAMF pharmacist will discuss what warfarin is, why you are taking it and how you can help yourself.

**Moving Through Pregnancy, Mondays, June 1 – 15, 7 – 9 p.m.**  
This class covers a wide variety of topics relating to pregnancy, infant care and safety.

**Managing Your High Blood Pressure**  
Thursday, May 21, 3 – 5 p.m.  
A class on understanding and managing high blood pressure.

**Preparing for Birth: A Refresher**  
Sunday, June 14, 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
A class offering unique strategies, topics and techniques for those preparing for their second or subsequent birth.

*For information on class fees and to register, call the Education Division at 650-853-2960 or visit [pamf.org/health](http://pamf.org/health).*

### Support Groups

**Alcohol and Drug Education** (Every Tuesday) • **Cancer** (1st & 3rd Tuesdays) • **Diabetes** (1st Wednesday)  
**Healing Imagery for Cancer Patients** (May 6 & 20) • **Kidney** (Quarterly) • **Multiple Sclerosis** (2nd & 4th Mondays)

*Support groups are free. For information, call the Education Division at 650-853-2960 or visit [pamf.org/classes/support](http://pamf.org/classes/support).*



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- A parent or sibling who has had skin cancer

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<http://stanfordhospital.org/cancerscreen>

**LocalNews**

**■ POLICE LOG**

**ATTEMPTED SUICIDE**  
0 block Sierra Vista Blvd., 4/29  
770 block W. Middlefield Road, 5/01  
1500 block W. El Camino Real, 4/29  
600 block Leong Dr., 4/30  
720 block Independence Ave., 5/01  
190 block California St., 5/02  
600 block Willowgate St., 5/03

**AUTO BURGLARY**  
800 block E. El Camino Real, 4/28  
100 block Oak Haven Pl., 4/28  
100 block N. Rengstorff Ave., 4/28  
500 block W. Middlefield Rd., 4/28  
1400 block Lloyd Way, 4/28  
W. El Camino Real/El Monte Ave., 4/28

**RECOVERED STOLEN VEHICLE**  
N. Shoreline Blvd./Terra Bella Ave., 5/02

0 block Showers Dr., 4/28  
700 block W. Middlefield Rd., 4/29  
1500 block Alison Ave., 4/30  
2200 Rock St., 4/30  
760 block N. Rengstorff Ave., 5/01  
150 block W. Middlefield Road, 5/01  
160 block Villa St., 5/02

**VANDALISM**  
100 block Villa St., 5/01  
City Lot 3, 5/02

**RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY**  
800 block Donovan Way, 4/28  
1600 block Villa St., 4/29  
570 block Chiquita Ave., 5/03

**SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES/ PERSONS**  
Michael's Art Supply, 4/29

**DISORDERLY CONDUCT**  
200 block Moffett Blvd., 5/03  
1500 block California St., 5/03

**PETTY THEFT**  
100 block Space Park Way, 4/30  
Library, 5/01

**BATTERY**  
Mountain View Ave./Villa St., 4/29

**GRAND THEFT**  
100 block Calderon Ave., 4/28  
100 block N. Rengstorff Ave., 4/28  
200 block Higdon Ave., 4/28  
700 block W. Middlefield Rd., 4/29  
700 block San Pierre Way, 4/29  
240 block Bush St., 5/01  
100 block E. Middlefield Rd., 5/02  
700 block Mariposa Ave., 5/03  
2200 block Showers Dr., 5/03

**DISTURBANCE**  
110 block N. Rengstorff Ave., 5/03

**SALE OF MARIJUANA**  
San Lucas Ave./San Lucas Ct., 4/28

**STOLEN VEHICLE**  
1900 block Latham St., 4/29  
200 block S. Rengstorff Ave., 4/29

**NARCOTICS POSSESSION**  
0 block W. El Camino Real, 4/28

**ASSAULT WITH A DEADLY WEAPON**  
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## Flu away

By Don Frances

**A**S NOTED in Google-Watch, a new blog on the Voice's Web site, the number of people googling the words "swine flu" dropped off precipitously this past week.

"According to Google's Insights for Search tool (google.com/insights/search), search volume for the keywords 'swine flu' peaked on April 30 and has been declining ever since."

It seems the average citizen has figured out that the swine flu scare was just that — a scare. It took the CDC somewhat longer to catch on.

From the start some of us have been wondering, how is this flu different? Aside from leading the news every night for two weeks, isn't it doing what all influenzas do, i.e. making people sick?

It's been my personal theory that there's nothing very interesting about this flu — it's a new strain, but they're all new strains. The difference this time is technological, in that we're now able to identify and track an influenza strain, map its progress daily and then freak out via the Internet as we watch it jump around.

On Monday a *New York Times* health columnist tried to address some of these issues in Q&A format:

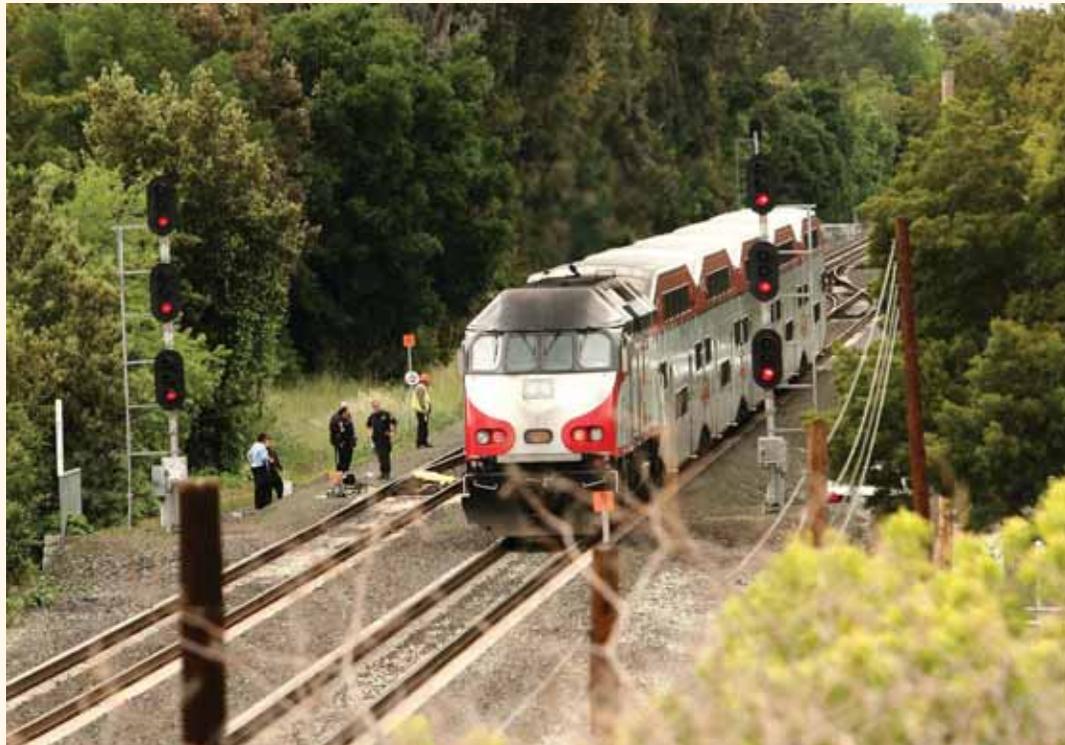
**Q:** Regular flu kills 150 people a day during flu season. Why is everyone so concerned about this one?

**A:** This is a new and unusual virus. Most flu viruses have two genetic elements, but H1N1 has four: two types of swine flu, a bird flu and some human flu genes ..."

So, it's a hybrid germ-monster. Which is scary, but I wonder if all such viruses aren't equally bizarre in one way or another. What's scariest here, I think, is the flush of recognition.

The writer went on to note that "it is a historical precedent that

► See **EDITOR'S DESK**, page 7



VERONICA WEBER.

Members of the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office work on the investigation of a Caltrain fatality while a northbound train passes close to the San Antonio station in Mountain View on Monday.

## Two train fatalities in two days

Staff Reports

**T**wo people were killed by trains in as many days after the victims lingered on the tracks north of Mountain View. Authorities believe both incidents were suicides.

The first occurred on Monday at 11:30 a.m., when a woman reportedly sat down on the tracks just north of the San Antonio train station.

The woman, later identified as 29-year-old Heather Russell of Palo Alto, entered the southbound tracks behind an apartment complex on Del Medio Avenue at the Mountain View/Palo Alto border, according to officials.

The area, which is surrounded by shrubbery and not easily seen, is one of the few access points not barricaded by a tall chain-link fence.

"She sat down between the

gauge of the tracks. The engineer went into emergency braking and honked the horn, then the train struck her," said Detective Victor Lopez of the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office Transit Police Bureau.

The second possible suicide happened Tuesday at about 8:30 a.m., after a train hit a Gunn High School student on the tracks near East Meadow

► See **TRAIN**, page 6

## Google's green gardeners: goats

By Daniel DeBolt

**O**ver the last week one of the world's biggest high tech companies used some very low tech weed control methods.

A herd of 200 goats were let loose in a field near the Googleplex to munch on some weeds that were originally so high the goats were lost in them, said Google spokesperson Niki Fenwick. By Sunday, the hungry goats had left behind an all but barren field.

"It was kind of amazing to

watch — the grass was really tall," Fenwick said. "It was really cute."

The "self propelled weed



eaters" came from California Grazing, a grazing company which used a border collie and

an electric fence to keep the goats contained during their stay.

Fenwick said the goats were an effective "low carbon" alternative to gas powered lawn mowing. It cost about the same, too, and fertilized the ground at the same time.

The weed abatement occurred on the open field at Garcia Avenue and Amphitheatre Parkway, just north of the former Alza buildings that are now part of the Googleplex. The goats will return once a year, Fenwick said. ▣

► See **SPACE**, page 6

## Top space geeks flock to city

STUDENTS AT ROVING UNIVERSITY HAVE MAJOR IMPACT ON SCIENTIFIC EFFORTS WORLDWIDE

By Daniel DeBolt

**T**he world's next generation of leaders in space exploration will assemble at NASA Ames this summer for, among other things, discussions about whether humans should settle in caves on Mars.

The International Space University, or ISU, is based in France and has set up shop in a different location around the world every summer for the last 23 years. Last summer classes were held in Barcelona and before that, Beijing.

Since 1987 the university's influence has spread worldwide, and Arthur C. Clarke, author of "2001: A Space Odyssey," was chancellor until 2004. In 2000, the ISU came to Chile, and the Chilean government would later create a space program patterned after students' recommendations.

"It can have quite an impact," said Donald James, a longtime Ames education director who is now the ISU project manager. "We're very excited about what's going to come out of it." NASA Ames will be the ISU's first non-university host.

"We're not a university but we felt we had the facilities to host this," James said.

On June 29, opening ceremonies will be held at the Center for the Performing Arts on Castro Street. About 130 students from around the world will attend, many of whom already have graduate degrees or work for space organizations.

"There will be international press coverage," said Nadine Levin, assistant city manager. "Apparently they do some real forward thinking about lots of issues."

City officials, believing the university and its guests will generate plenty of sales tax, have decided to spend \$1,200 hanging event banners from light poles up and down Castro Street during the nine-week program. The city will also contribute use of the Center for the Performing Arts for the opening

COMMUNITY BRIEFS

DAY WORKER CENTER PRESENTS DOCUMENTARY

This Saturday, the Day Worker Center of Mountain View is showing "Letters from the Other Side," a documentary about day workers from the perspective of the women left behind in Mexico.

A question-and-answer session with filmmaker Heather Courtney, along with live music, will follow the 70-minute film, which has been shown on dozens of PBS television stations.

The event starts at 7 p.m. at the Community School of Music and Arts at 230 San Antonio Circle in Mountain View.

— Daniel DeBolt

SPACE

Continued from page 5

ceremonies.

Throughout the summer at NASA Ames, classes and projects will be aimed at students from around the world and are multidisciplinary.

"You don't come here to learn more about mechanical engineering if you're a mechanical engineer," James explained.

Ames has selected as a main topic of discussion whether humans could live in caves on Mars, James said. The caves are considered an alternative to building new structures on the cold, windy and sun-scorched planet.

"It's not science fiction," James said. "Some researchers believe if we ever settle on Mars we might want to settle in caves rather than build habitats in which to live. Mars is fairly cold, with cosmic rays and high winds. In caves you have natural protection."

James said sending human explorers to Mars won't happen for many years, "but we get the benefit of having very bright people look at this."

TRAIN

Continued from page 5

Drive in Palo Alto. Investigators said the victim, described as an Asian male and a junior at the high school, walked around the crossing arms just before a northbound commute train hit him.

Both victims died at the scenes. Caltrain was delayed both Monday and Tuesday morning as trains were single-tracked around the accidents. The Santa Clara County coroner is investigating the incidents.

The Caltrain-related deaths are the first and second for 2009. Last year there were 16 Caltrain-related deaths, 13 of which were categorized as suicides.

Bay City News contributed to this report.



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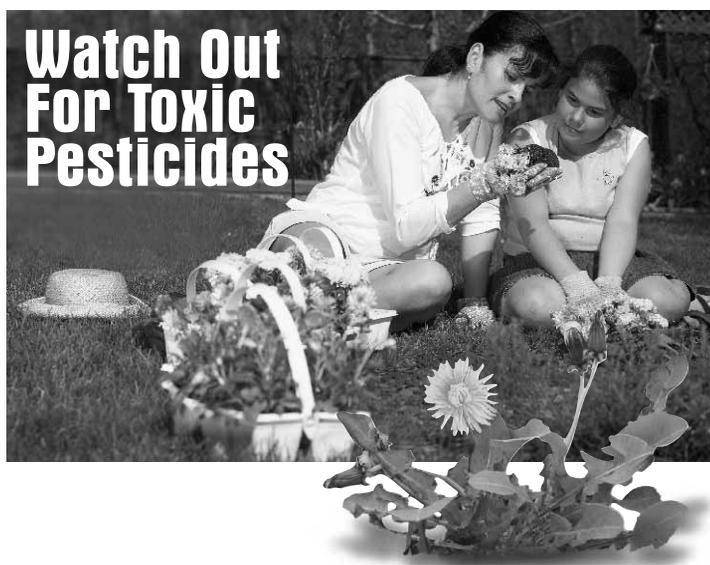
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**NURSERY**

► Continued from page 1

children providing vital instant feedback on how well the activities worked in a real classroom and play yard.

The book is illustrated with many photographs of the children. Writing and organizing the book took more than three years, said Evitt, who is known to the children as “Teacher Marie” but who worked for many years as a journalist, writing articles and essays on education, parenting and child psychology in major national magazines.

Another MVPNS teacher, Tim Dobbins, contributed original poems and songs as well as a wealth of ideas, arising from his creative projects with the children over 20 years (his own children also attended the school). Children’s librarian Bobbi Weesen-Baer shared her extensive experience teaching story time and reading readiness programs at the Mountain View Public Library, and compiled an annotated list of book suggestions for further reading on each topic.

The cooperative spirit which helped the book come into being is typical of MVPNS.

“We have the most supportive, dedicated parents,” said Claire Koukoutsakis, who has taught at MVPNS for 18 years and been director since 2007. “They’re really committed to every child being successful. They also develop leadership skills that follow them throughout the community and through their

children’s educational years. Many go on to become PTA leaders, coaches, volunteers, city council and school board members.”

“MVPNS made us much better, stronger parents,” agreed Colleen Anderson, whose two children spent a total of five years at the school. “The monthly classes were hugely valuable to us.”

Nancy Brown, who accompanied Flahavan at MVPNS when it was still on El Monte Avenue — it has since moved to Bryant Avenue — recently retired as director of Parent Observation, a local educational program for parents of very young children where she taught for 28 years.

Both were happy to get together with Flahavan’s first teacher, Helen Cone, at the celebration last Sunday, and Betsy Nikolchev, who was director for 18 years, also enjoyed many reunions. Children’s activities were provided by parents, live band Papa Hug played music, and state Assembly member Paul Fong presented a resolution.

The joyful event seemed to bear out Koukoutsakis’ observation that “The experiences you have here you carry throughout your life.”

**■ INFORMATION**

For more on Mountain View Parent Nursery School, visit [www.mvpns.org](http://www.mvpns.org) or call (650) 969-9506. For more on the book “Thinking Big, Learning Big,” or to order a copy, go the publisher’s Web site at [www.gryphonhouse.com](http://www.gryphonhouse.com) and find it under “featured titles.”

**Parents see big role for sustainability in school upgrades**

By Casey Weiss

Parents of local elementary school children want greener, more energy-efficient schools, prettier campuses and more space for their children to eat and learn, they said during a community discussion Monday on possible school district renovations.

As Mountain View Whisman School District trustees prepare to approve a 10-year master plan of facilities, they invited parents to a

public forum to talk about construction and expansion ideas. A dozen parents came to the meeting with long wish lists of changes they would like to see.

The district board passes a master plan each decade, and this year’s plans could range from upgrading the fire alarm system to adding classrooms to alleviate overcrowding. School officials said they could build a second story on some campus buildings or take back leased land.

“Everything is on the table,” said architect Bill Gould, whose firm, Bill Gould Design, is helping the district with its 10-year plan.

The renovations could cost up to \$192 million, according to Bill Gould Design, and trustees said they want parent feedback before they make any decisions. After that, the next step is to place a bond issue on the ballot, probably in 2010.

The parents spent about half of

► See **WHISMAN**, page 8

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**EDITOR’S DESK**

► Continued from page 1

fuels most of the present concern,” and that’s the best point to make about the recent flu scare. The Spanish Influenza of 1918 killed tens of millions of people, and epidemiologists haven’t forgotten. In the end I’d prefer that, with all our modern apparatus, we overreact rather than underreact.

But it sure was satisfying, this past week, to turn off the TV whenever the news came on.

Don Frances can be reached at [dfrances@mv-voice.com](mailto:dfrances@mv-voice.com).

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## WHISMAN

► Continued from page 7

the two-hour forum discussing ways that the schools could go green, and many liked the idea of adding solar panels to the roofs. Other ideas included placing systems in the classrooms that could automatically turn off the heat if a door was open and making the water faucets automatic, so kids don't leave them running.

"There is no reason for not working with green buildings," said one Castro parent, who is employed in the sustainability sector. "We should [try] to be one of the most sustainable schools."

Several parents suggested that the students be involved in making the campuses green by growing the food eaten in the cafeteria or building their own solar panels to go on the roof.

Parents were also interested in improving the schools' appearance. They said many campuses were not exciting places to learn; instead, students just saw long, traditional rows of classrooms when they arrived to school each morning.

Looking around the Castro multipurpose room, Alison Hicks, a Castro parent, said the gray color of the walls made it look like a "Kleenex box." Other public buildings, she

said, such as the public library, had been renovated and were now more appealing to local residents.

"We've redone our library and it tells the kids that books are important," Hicks said.

She added that the schools should "give kids the signal that learning is important."

One dad suggested that the schools should reflect the different "ethnic mix" of families in the district, so everyone "feels more welcome."

Parents also had suggestions on how the district should expand to accommodate growing enrollment. Larger cafeterias were needed, they said, since some children don't get to eat lunch due to limited space. Additional office space for all teachers was another suggestion.

"Our poor art teacher takes things in and out of her car," Hicks said.

As part of the master plan process, the trustees also heard a demographic analysis.

A political consultant will discuss bond measures and polling with the board during its meeting on Thursday, May 7 at 7 p.m. in the district office, located at 750-A San Pierre Way, Mountain View. ▀

E-mail Casey Weiss at [cweiss@mv-voice.com](mailto:cweiss@mv-voice.com)

## BOND

► Continued from page 1

The Mountain View-Los Altos High School District student body is expected to grow by 25 percent over the next 10 years, according to a recent demographic study, and trustees are discussing the possibility of placing a bond measure on an upcoming ballot to fund these costs. The district, which currently has 3,695 students, could reach an enrollment of 4,570 students by 2019, demographer Jeanne Gobalet said during a presentation to the board on April 27.

"Eventually we need to look at our facilities and see how we can house all these students," Superintendent Barry Groves told the *Voice* this week.

Currently the district is collecting polling data to see if a general obligation bond would receive the 55 percent approval needed to pass. If there is enough local support for the bond, Groves said, it could be put on the June 2010 California gubernatorial primary ballot.

Administrators noted they will not need to change the high school district's boundaries to alleviate overcrowding, but do need to add more classrooms for the growing

student population.

"We have no empty classrooms," Groves said. "Every classroom is being used."

There is a complication, however, as the Mountain View Whisman Elementary School District is also planning to place a bond measure on an upcoming ballot to pay for upgrades to its facilities — including expanding to alleviate over-

In her demographics study, Gobalet looked at enrollment rates at Mountain View and Los Altos high schools and predicted the campuses would grow on average by 70 students each year. The campuses' facilities already meet all state standards, and the bond would not go toward upgrades.

Although the district has already begun seeing an increase in students, Gobalet and administrators said it is hard to predict enrollment numbers during an economic recession. Due to this, numbers may not increase as much as expected.

"There is no history on the effects on enrollment of such a severe economic downturn," high school administrators said in a

***"There is no history on the effects on enrollment of such a severe economic downturn," high school administrators said in a press release.***

press release. District trustees started discussing a potential bond measure last year to fund "green renovations" such as solar panels and new boilers. The current idea proposed for a bond measure would include funding for these renovations and for new classrooms.

Trustees and administrators will be discussing the possibility of a bond over the next nine months, and will form a special committee to oversee bond preparations. ▀

press release. District trustees started discussing a potential bond measure last year to fund "green renovations" such as solar panels and new boilers. The current idea proposed for a bond measure would include funding for these renovations and for new classrooms.

Trustees and administrators will be discussing the possibility of a bond over the next nine months, and will form a special committee to oversee bond preparations. ▀



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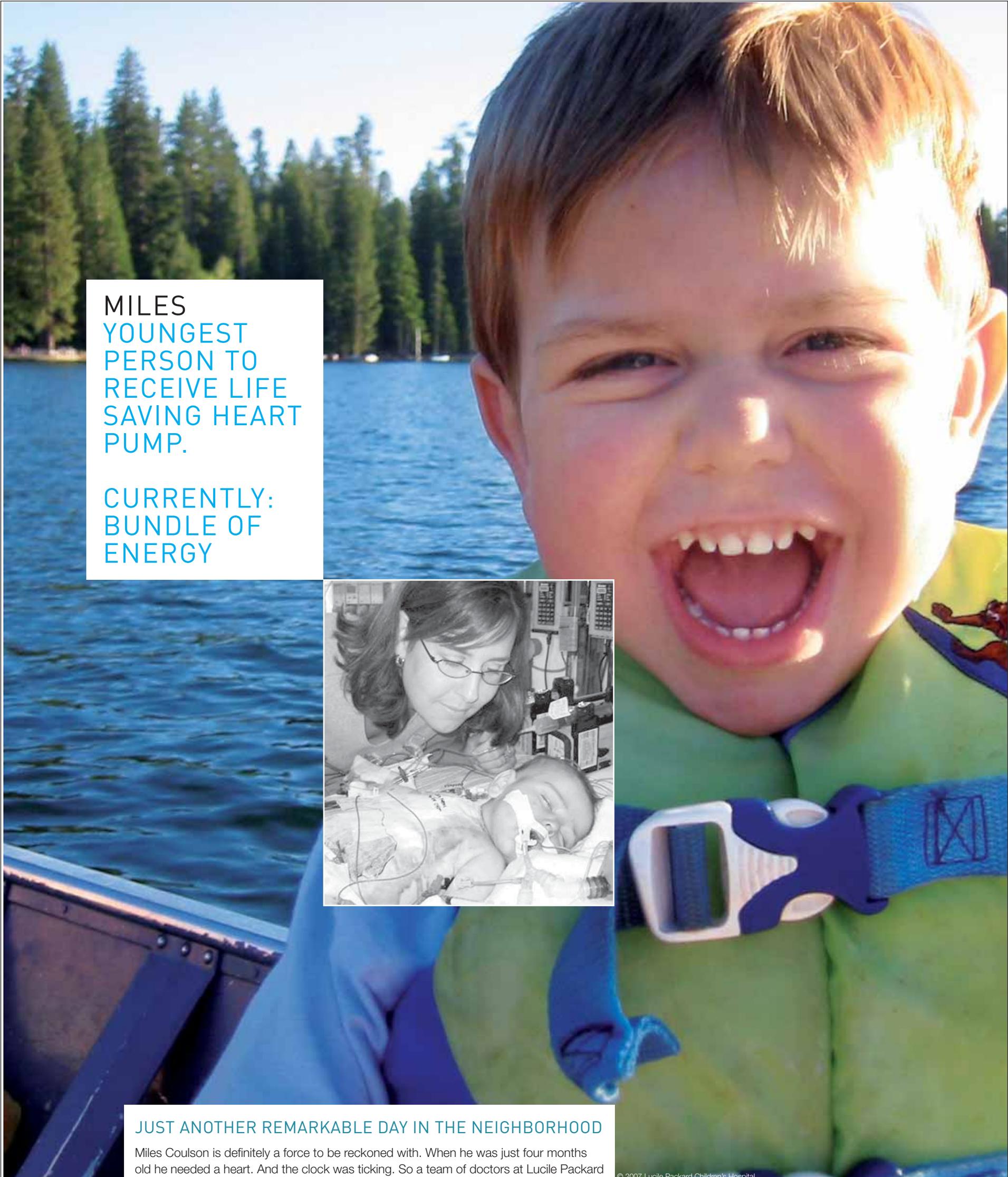
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NEWS BRIEFS

**POLICE MAKE TWO ARRESTS AT PACIFIC INN**

Mountain View police arrested two wanted suspects on Monday morning after the officers discovered one of the suspects getting into a vehicle he had allegedly stolen from Campbell.

Police often look for stolen vehicles when they are not responding to calls, according to spokesperson Liz Wylie, and were running the license plates of cars at the Pacific Inn on El Camino Real on May 4. They discovered one stolen car parked there, a black 2005 Chevy Tahoe, and were waiting for the county's Regional Auto Theft Task Force to arrive when a man started to get into the vehicle.

Police arrested Cinque Erin, 34, who was wanted for stealing the car and considered armed and dangerous. He was taken into custody without incident on charges of auto theft and possession of stolen property, Wylie said.

They also arrested a 17-year-old female who was with Erin and wanted by the San Mateo County Juvenile Prohibition Department on a probation violation.

residence on the 1900 block of Latham Street. The same resident called police later that evening to say he had seen four boys driving his car on Toft Street near Castro Elementary School.

Police arrived on the scene to find the stolen vehicle along with another car, a 1991 Camry, which had also been reported missing.

Three of the four suspects ran into the schoolyard, police spokesperson Liz Wylie said, and the fourth stayed with the stolen vehicles. Police arrest him and set up a perimeter around the school, and soon detained the three other suspects. All four were charged with two counts each of vehicle theft.

The boys were released to their parents that evening, Wylie said, "because it was not a violent felony."

— Casey Weiss

**MAN ARRESTED FOR ROBBING PROSTITUTES**

A 37-year-old San Ramon man was arrested last week following a month-long investigation into a series of robberies targeting suspected prostitutes in the South Bay, including in Mountain View, the Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety announced.

Dean Clayton Rish was arrested at his residence, where officers allegedly found several firearms, cash and other items linking him to the robberies, officials said.

Anyone with information regarding the case is asked to call Det. Jim Choi at (408) 730-7120.

— Bay City News

**FOUR TEENS ARRESTED ON CAR THEFT CHARGES**

Police arrested four 14-year-old boys on charges of stealing two vehicles after the boys were allegedly seen driving one of the stolen cars around town.

A Mountain View resident called police on April 29 around 6:30 a.m. to report that his car, a 1989 Toyota Camry, had been stolen from his

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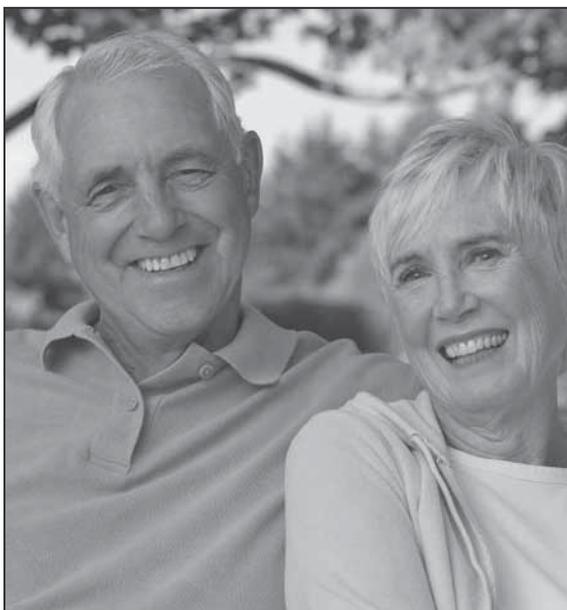


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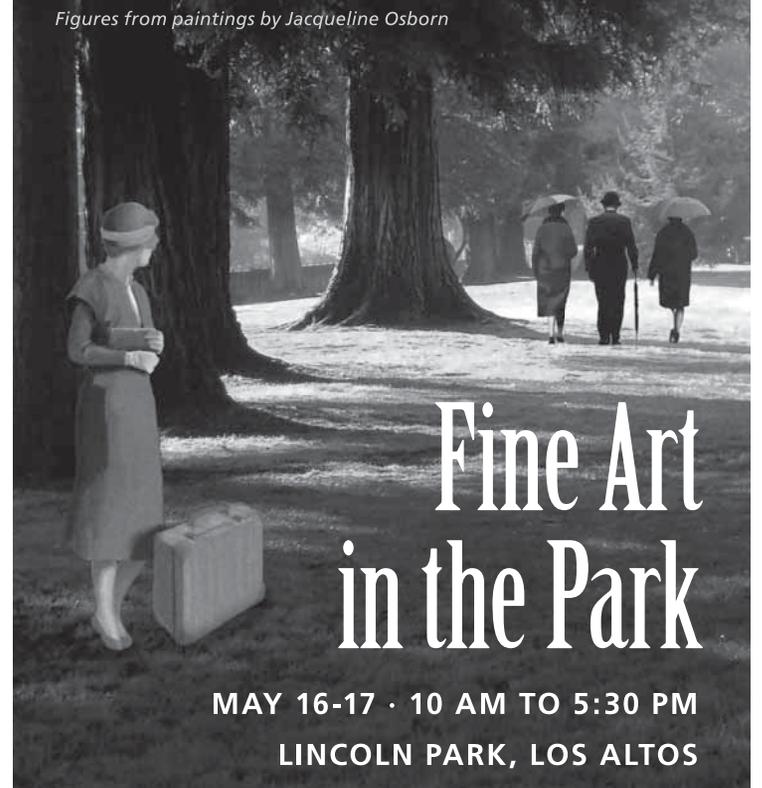
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**COUNCIL**

► Continued from page 1

Council member Laura Macias started things off by removing about \$260,000 worth of “tier one” proposals by the city manager, including the elimination of a parks maintenance position and increased recreation fees, and replacing them with a roughly equal set of cuts taken from a list of “tier two” proposals, including staff cuts to the finance department, city wide employee training, cuts to library collection costs and complete elimination of the city’s “commuter check” transit pass program.

Macias said her priorities were with residents “being able to enjoy living in the city.” The rest of the council seemed to support her recommendations.

Mayor Margaret Abe-Koga disagreed with Macias on one point, saying she actually supported new fees for three city preschool programs, at another \$2 an hour per child, because they were not the type to be used by low-income parents.

Council member Mike Kasperzak was critical of the city’s increasingly expensive union contracts, which are the major cause of a recurring \$4 million deficit projected over the next few years.

Residents “are losing their jobs, their wages are being cut,” Kasperzak said. “We’re asking them to pay more for less. What it comes down to is we have to do all these cuts so we can do wage increases” for city employees. He added that he may not be able to support the budget in June if the labor groups do not share the pain.

Abe-Koga said she thought Kasperzak’s remarks were “premature,” and pointed out that the some of the labor contracts were agreed upon only six months ago.

“To take back what we negotiated, I have an issue with that,” she said.

**Not over yet**

On Wednesday morning, Mayor Abe-Koga announced that the city clerk and the city attorney have followed Duggan’s lead in forgoing pay increases this year to set an example for other city employees considering whether to forgo pay increases.

Duggan said Mountain View will have a tough time compared to other cities in raising revenues under Proposition 13, which restricts tax increases. In a built-out city like Mountain View, there is very little room for new tax-generating real estate development.

Earlier in the decade the city had to make \$7 million in cuts after the dot-com bust, only \$2 million of which was restored.

Duggan has said the city government is actually shrinking over time, while the city is taking more measures than most to increase revenues. At some point, he said, the city will have to ask voters to approve a tax increase, such as a bond measure, to maintain services. A voter-approved tax increase for the city hasn’t been attempted since a library bond failed 15 years ago.

The council is expected to consider more cuts in the latter half of the year. By then a deal may be made for a hotel in the Shoreline area that could bring \$2 million

in general fund revenue every year. Without new revenue, possible future cuts could include reducing firefighter overtime pay and cutting about a dozen police department positions, including eight of the city’s officers. The public safety cuts could mean slower emergency response times.

Without more cuts, Duggan said, the increasing expenses could compound and quickly diminish the city’s reserves.

“It’s a short road to Vallejo,” said council member Jac Siegel, referring to the bankrupt city.

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Debbie Groth, director, Maternal Child Health;  
Lotta Cayabyab, RN, emergency department;  
Cheryl Reinking, RN, vice chief, clinical  
operations; Kass Melesse, RN, 3 West*

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## ■ EDITORIAL THE OPINION OF THE VOICE

# Adult School cuts will hurt

The gaping holes left in the Adult School curriculum by the recently announced \$1.3 million in cutbacks pulls the rug out from under some of the city's most vulnerable populations.

The school is managed by the Mountain View-Los Altos High School District, but most of its funding comes directly from the state. And in February the state announced that 20 percent of that support will be abruptly turned off July 1, which precipitated the district's public hearing last week to explain the cuts and get feedback from some of the students who will be affected.

Around 100 students, family members and disabled adults who use the school turned out last week to tell school board members how Adult School classes have helped them in the past and how much they will be missed if they are closed down.

Given the state's present financial situation (which the governor and Legislature hope will be shored up by passage of six propositions in the May 19 election), it is not likely that funding will be restored to the Adult School, at least this budget year.

That leaves the difficult choices up to the school district's

board members, who must feel they are between the proverbial rock and hard place. At the hearing, Adult School coordinator Laura Stefanski presented her expense reduction plan, which she said focused on saving core programs such as career training, community integration and basic education. But even these classes could lose much of their current budget.

Two other very popular offerings — classes for people with disabilities and English as a Second Language — will be cut by about 45 percent. Some 3,000 students were enrolled in the ESL program during the 2007-08 academic year, and although fewer than 300 disabled adults attended the school that same year, they spent most of their day in the program, and rely on the services offered there.

Classes for older adults, which also attracted some 3,000 students in 2007-08, will be converted to fee-based tuition, which will save the school nearly \$30,000, the district said.

No one can estimate how important the Adult School is for ESL students and older adults. But there can be no question about the value of these classes to local disabled residents, who will have nowhere else to go if their classes are shut down.

A good case could be made for saving virtually all the Adult School classes. But at a minimum, we urge the school board to find a way to continue the classes for disabled adults. Many of these people will be lost without their classes, which undoubtedly served as the anchor of their week.

There are no easy solutions to this pending crisis, but there are choices. We hope the school board makes the right ones. ■

## ■ LETTERS

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

### VOTE NO ON PROPOSITION 1C

Editor:

In the April 24 issue of the *Voice*, it was reported that the local chapter of the League of Women Voters is against Proposition 1C on the May 19 special statewide ballot ("Election looms large for schools").

Proposition 1C would allow the state to borrow money against future income from the state lottery. It would also eliminate the requirement that money from the lottery go to support public education. Currently, half of the lottery money goes to players, and a third goes to public education.

If and when lottery proceeds are no longer earmarked for education, the excuse for this government-run gambling largely disappears. At that point, the lottery would just be another form of gambling that produces nothing (except entertainment) and is devastating to gambling addicts and their dependents.

Moreover, once the state borrows money against future income from the lottery, it would be difficult, if

not impossible, to end the lottery. I intend to vote no.

Gary Wesley  
Continental Circle

### VOTE NO ON PROPOSITION 1D

Editor:

Your article about the upcoming May 19 election references the bigger cuts that some say are inevitable in education if the propositions don't pass. Voters must see each independent proposition as just that, independent. Proposition 1D allows legislators to raid a fund dedicated to young children and generates only 2 percent of the budget shortfall.

There is no guarantee that this redirected money will be spent on early childhood education. The only cuts that are sure to happen are to the children's programs currently supported by the money that will disappear if 1D passes. If voters care about early education, they should vote no on Proposition 1D.

John D. Peoples, M.D.  
Waverley Street



■ GUEST OPINION

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## Seniors need an advocate

TASK FORCE POINTED THE WAY; NOW COUNCIL NEEDS TO ACT

By Elna Tymes

Your father has been taking care of your mother, who's mostly housebound with several disabling conditions. In the past year you've noticed his driving is getting worse — he's had a couple of small accidents and he seems to be not as good at judging where other cars are. What kinds of transportation options are there for him?

You realize your mother has been losing weight lately, but she says she's fine. While visiting her one day, you open the refrigerator to find her some juice and discover it contains only three eggs, a lemon, and jam. You open some cupboards and find about half of what you expected. She explains that her rent and utilities have gone up, and now her Social Security and retirement fund checks don't quite

cover her expenses. Besides buying her groceries, which is difficult for you, what else can be done so that she has enough food?

Mountain View's population includes about 9,000 seniors, with most living in their own homes. The Baby Boomers are likely to increase that number by 40 percent, to 12,600, by 2020, and to 18,000 by 2030, which will amount to 21 percent of the city's population.

Seniors usually spend at least the last decade of their working lives amassing enough retirement assets to supplement what they're likely to get from Social Security. However, in the last year, the AARP says 51 percent of the nation's seniors have lost between 20 and 50 percent of their retirement assets through losses in pension funds, IRAs and 401(k)s, other private funds, and real estate. Further, most of those over 55 have pushed back their projected retirement age to 70 or older, and many others have gone back to work.

Follow-up calls to people who have recently been discharged from the hospital have turned up too many cases of caregiver funds being cut, or of patients returning home to find their homes in fore-

closure, or of their income from government funds being cut.

At the end of our first year, the task force identified senior needs, transportation alternatives (particularly shuttle services) and the need for outreach. Those three reports should be considered pointers for work plans to be generated by whatever group succeeds the task force.

However, in our first meeting in 2008, we identified 80 or so possible topics on which the task force could work, and the above three topics were the only survivors of that first cut. The other 77 topics remain viable research and advocacy issues. To allow that work to be done, the City Council should make the task force into a city commission or committee.

Mountain View needs an advocate for seniors, especially in these trying times. The Senior Advisory Task Force has done its best to paint an accurate picture of our city's seniors and to identify local needs and problems. But there is much more work to be done. ■

*Elna Tymes served as chair of the city's Senior Advisory Task Force. She lives on Adele Avenue.*

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<p><b>Duck, parts missing</b> <b>\$1.59</b> lb</p> <p><b>Chicken Wing (middle joint)</b> <small>Previously Frozen</small> <b>\$1.89</b> lb</p> <p><b>Pork Button Bone</b> <small>Previously Frozen</small> <b>\$1.19</b> lb</p>	<p><b>California Navel Orange</b> <b>49¢</b> lb</p>	<p><b>Yellow Asian Pear</b> <b>\$1.49</b> lb</p> <p><b>Carrot (Jumbo)</b> <b>39¢</b> lb</p>	<p><b>TTG Barbeque Sticks</b> Chicken/ pork 20-30 oz <b>\$9.99</b> ea</p> <p><small>Offer only good while supplies last. Not responsible for typographical or pictorial errors. We reserve the right to correct all printed errors.</small></p>

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# Weekend

MOUNTAIN VIEW VOICE

■ RESTAURANT REVIEW

■ MOVIE TIMES

■ BEST BETS FOR ENTERTAINMENT

■ RESTAURANT REVIEW

## How sweet it is

GOLDEN SWEET POTATO FRITTERS HIT THE SPOT AT TAMARINE IN PALO ALTO

By Dale F. Bentson

When the platter of sweet potato fritters (\$9) arrived at Palo Alto's Tamarine, my eyes widened. Not only were they approaching the size of Smart Car tires, there were four of them.

Golden, crisp, hot from the fryer but not at all greasy, the fritters were stuffed with rock shrimp and green onions. The pile of butter lettuce was meant as a wrap, then to be dipped into the mint and chili lime fish sauce. Instant bliss.

We ordered the taro root rolls (\$8) as well. The half-dozen hot

roll-ups were crisp as C notes just delivered from the Federal Reserve. Besides taro root (a starchy tuber inwardly similar in texture to a potato but outwardly more like a coconut), the rolls were filled with wood-ear mushrooms and carrots. The chili-plum dipping sauce added an ingenious layer of flavor that enveloped the ingredients.

There was more food than the two of us could possibly eat, and that was just the first course.

Tamarine is the creation of owner/chef Tammy Huynh and owner/manager Anne Le, aunt



VERONICA WEBER

The Sweet potato fritters at Tamarine feature fried sweet potatoes, shrimp, green onions and are served with lettuce, mint and a side of chili-lime fish sauce.

► See **TAMARINE**, page 16



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VERONICA WEBER

The Onion caramelized prawns at Tamarine are prepared with onions, garlic, butter, fish sauce, pork lardons and served with crispy rice noodles.

## TAMARINE

► Continued from page 15

and niece, whose family hails from Vietnam and has deep roots in the South Bay restaurant business. Opened in 2002, Tamarine has remained one of the top restaurants in the area.

Le attributes the success to her clientele. "Our customers are cultured and well-traveled. They appreciate new and different foods." Of course, having a talented, passion-

ate chef helps too, as do the chic ambiance, the attentive waitstaff and an ever-evolving menu.

The interior geography is understated in soft greens and wood tones, with energetic wall art showcasing Vietnamese artists. Windows oversee University Avenue and the muted music is jazzy. Starched white table linens cap an elegance that is apparent upon entering the restaurant. The well-orchestrated staff incessantly shuttles plates brimming with vibrant, aromatic

► Continued on next page

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---	--

Lunch: Tues-Fri. 11am -2:30pm • Dinner: Tues-Sat. 5pm -10:30pm

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## DINING NOTES

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THE VOICE best of MOUNTAIN VIEW 2008

► Continued from previous page

selections. Summoning all our will power, we didn't finish all the taro rolls and fritters. Good thing. The caramelized onion prawns (\$22) were out of this world. Eight large prawns were wok-tossed with fish sauce, onions, garlic, butter and lardons. The prawns were enmeshed with the sweet onions and the plate was a complex tapestry of delight.

We also ordered the kumquat-glazed chicken (\$20), which were equally dazzling. The plump, juicy half-chicken had been oven roasted then tossed with a glaze of kumquats, lemon grass, garlic and chilies. Roasted cauliflower was a genius touch to the dish that harmonized with the chicken and the citrusy glaze.

Gasping for air, we decided to share a dessert. The goat milk panna cotta (\$8) was light as air, faintly tart, and held in place with a glistening strawberry rhubarb compote. The fat globules in goat's milk are smaller than cow's milk, which allows for a nearly weightless custard.

Additional meals didn't disappoint. The salt and pepper calamari (\$12) were wok-tossed rather than deep fried. This allowed for crisp but not crunchy squid. Garlic and spring onions were added to the wok and the cilantro emulsion dipping sauce was flavorful without masking the brininess.

Papaya salad (\$11) was refreshing as ever, with shreds of green papaya that were mixed with basil and layered with dried shredded beef. It was a chewy, flavor-packed salad.

Clay pot cod (\$20) featured Alaskan black cod with caramelized onions, garlic, black pepper, molasses and lardons. The fish was firm and fresh tasting, while the molasses and lardons added a sweet and salty element. The garlic, onions and pepper added depth.

The honey and miso pan-roasted duck (\$25) was succulent, with the

duck melt-in-the-mouth tender. The miso paste was earthy and savory while the honey provided a touch of sweetness that offset the richness of the duck. The duck was

My one criticism of Tamarine is the price of wines. Ouch. No question that it is a first-class wine list. Magnificent Burgundies from hal- lowed producers are represented, with beefy Barolos and Brunellos and lush Sauvignon Blancs from three continents. The restaurant is happy to answer questions and make recommendations, and Le said she is trying to bring in some less-costly wines. (There's a \$20 corkage fee, should you want to bring your own.)

**Summoning all our will power, we didn't finish all the taro rolls and fritters. Good thing.**

served atop a shovelful of nutty-tasting "forbidden rice" bound with a citrus-butter sauce.

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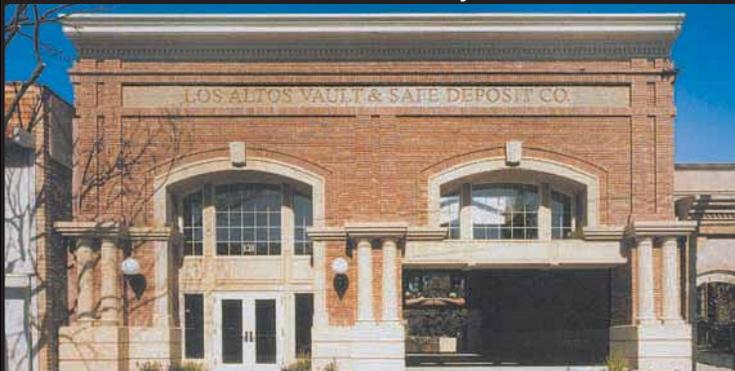
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City of Mountain View

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**Weekend**

**MOVIE TIMES**

**17 AGAIN (PG-13) ★1/2** Century 16: Fri.-Tue. & Thu. at 11:25 a.m.; 2:30, 5:10, 7:55 & 10:25 p.m. Century 20: 11:30 a.m.; 2:25, 4:55, 7:35 & 10:15 p.m.

**ANGELS & DEMONS (PG-13)** Century 20: Thu. at midnight.

**ANVIL! THE STORY OF ANVIL** Aquarius: 4 & 9:30 p.m.

**DCI 2009 THE COUNTDOWN** Century 16: Wed. at 7:30 p.m.

**DUPLICITY (PG-13) ★★1/2** Century 20: Tue. & Wed. at 1 & 6:55 p.m.

**EARTH (G) ★★★** Century 16: Fri.-Tue. & Thu. at 11:50 a.m.; 2:15, 4:45, 7:15 & 9:40 p.m. Century 20: 12:25, 2:50, 5:05, 7:40 & 10 p.m. Fri.-Sun. also at 10:15 a.m.

**EVERY LITTLE STEP (PG-13) ★★★1/2** Aquarius: 1:30, 4, 6:30 & 9 p.m.

**FIGHTING (PG-13)** Century 20: 10:25 p.m.

**GHOSTS OF GIRLFRIENDS PAST (PG-13) ★1/2** Century 16: Fri.-Tue. & Thu. at 11:10 a.m.; 1:45, 4:20, 7:20 & 10 p.m. Century 20: 11:45 a.m.; 1:05, 2:15, 3:30, 4:45, 5:55, 7:10, 8:20 & 9:40 p.m. Fri.-Sun. also at 10:40 a.m.

**HANNAH MONTANA: THE MOVIE (G)** Century 20: 2:55, 5:30 & 8 p.m. Fri. & Sun.-Thu. also at 12:15 p.m.

**IS ANYBODY THERE? (PG-13) ★★1/2** Century 20: 11:40 a.m.; 1:55, 4:15, 6:50 & 9:20 p.m. Palo Alto Square: 4:50 p.m. Fri. & Sat. also at 9:40 p.m.

**THE MERRY GENTLEMAN (R)** Palo Alto Square: 2:20, 4:45 & 7:20 p.m. Fri.-Sat. also at 9:45 p.m.

**METROPOLITAN OPERA: LA CENERENTOLA** Century 16: Sat. at 9:30 a.m. Century 20: Sat. at 9:30 a.m.

**MONSTERS VS. ALIENS (PG) ★★1/2** Century 16: Fri.-Tue. & Thu. at 11:40 a.m.; 2, & 4:30 p.m. Century 20: 11:50 a.m.; 2:20 & 4:40 p.m.

**NEXT DAY AIR (R)** Century 20: 11:20 a.m.; 1:30, 3:40, 5:50, 8:10 & 10:35 p.m.

**OBSESSED (PG-13)** Century 16: 4:35, 7:35 & 10:10 p.m. Fri. & Sun.-Thu. also at 11 a.m.; and 1:45 p.m. Century 20: 12:05, 2:40, 5:20, 7:55 & 10:30 p.m.

**SHALL WE KISS? Aquarius: 2 & 7 p.m.**

**THE SOLOIST (PG-13) ★★** Century 16: 1, 3:55, 6:50 & 9:45 p.m. Sat. & Sun. also at 10:05 a.m. Century 20: 1:35, 4:20, 7:05 & 9:50 p.m. Fri.-Sun. also at 10:50 a.m.

**STAR TREK (PG-13) ★★1/2** Century 16: Fri. at 11 & 11:45 a.m.; 12:30, 1:15, 1:55, 2:40, 3:25, 4:10, 4:50, 5:35, 6:15, 7, 8, 8:30, 9:10, 9:55 & 11 p.m. Fri. - Tue. & Thu. at 7:30 & 10:25 p.m. Sat. at 10:15, 11 & 11:45 a.m.; 12:30, 1:15, 1:55, 2:40, 3:25, 4:10, 4:50, 5:35, 6:15, 7, 8, 8:30, 9:10, 9:55, 11 Sun. 10:15, 11, 11:45, 12:30, 1:15, 1:55, 2:40, 3:25, 4:10, 4:50, 5:35, 6:15, 7, 8, 8:30, 9:10 & 9:55 p.m. Mon., Tue. & Thu. at 11 & 11:45 a.m.; 12:30, 1:15, 1:55, 2:40, 3:25, 4:10, 4:50, 5:35, 6:15, 7, 8, 8:30, 9:10 & 9:55 p.m. Century 20: Fri. - Sun. at 9:55, 10:35 & 11:15 a.m.; noon, 12:50, 1:30, 2:15, 3, 3:45, 4:30, 5:15, 6, 6:45, 7:30, 8:15, 9, 9:45 & 10:30 p.m. Fri. - Thu. at 7:05 & 10:05 p.m. Mon. - Wed. at 11:15 a.m.; noon, 12:50, 1:30, 2:15, 3, 3:45, 4:30, 5:15, 6, 6:45, 7:30, 8:15, 9, 9:45, 10:30 Thu. 11:15, 12, 12:50, 1:30, 2:15, 3, 3:45, 4:30, 5:15, 6, 6:45, 7:30, 8:15, 9, 9:45, 10:30 & 11:15 p.m.

**STATE OF PLAY (PG-13) ★★★** Century 16: Fri. - Tue. & Thu. at 12:10, 3:15, 7:10 & 10:15 p.m. Century 20: 4 & 9:55 p.m. Fri.-Sun., Mon. & Thu. also at 1 & 6:55 p.m. Fri.-Sun. also at 10:10 a.m.

**SUNSHINE CLEANING (R) ★★1/2** Palo Alto Square: 2:15 & 7:15 p.m.

**TYSON (R)** Century 16: Fri.-Tue. & Thu. at 11:05 a.m.; 1:20, 3:35, 5:50, 8:05 & 10:20 p.m.

**X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE (PG-13)** Century 16: Fri. at 11:15 & 11:55 a.m.; 12:35, 1:05, 1:50, 2:25, 3:05, 3:45, 4:25, 5:05, 5:45, 6:25, 7:05, 7:45, 8:15, 8:55, 9:35, 10:30 & 10:55 p.m. Sat. at 10:15, 11:15 & 11:55 a.m.; 12:35, 1:05, 1:50, 2:25, 3:05, 3:45, 4:25, 5:05, 5:45, 6:25, 7:05, 7:45, 8:15, 8:55, 9:35 & 10:30 p.m. Mon. Tue. & Thu. at 11:15 & 11:55 a.m.; 12:35, 1:05, 1:50, 2:25, 3:05, 3:45, 4:25, 5:05, 5:45, 6:25, 7:05, 7:45, 8:15, 8:55, 9:35 & 10:30 p.m. Century 20: 11:25 & 11:55 a.m.; 12:30, 1:15, 2, 2:35, 3:05, 3:50, 4:35, 5:10, 5:45, 6:30, 7:15, 7:50, 8:25, 9:10, 9:55 & 10:35 p.m. Fri.-Sun. also at 10 & 10:45

*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)  
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**GUILD:** 949 El Camino Real, Menlo Park (266-9260)  
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For show times, plot synopses and more information about any films playing at the Aquarius, Guild and Park, visit [www.LandmarkTheatres.com](http://www.LandmarkTheatres.com)

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

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**MOVIE REVIEWS**

**EARTH ★★★**

(Century 16, Century 20) Disney teams with the mastermind British documentarians behind the Emmy-winning "Planet Earth" series for this family-friendly look at life on the third planet from the sun. Magnificent landscapes and an array of creatures traverse the big screen with breathtaking beauty. But the footage is primarily pulled from the "Planet Earth" series, so many viewers will get the feeling they've seen it all before. The film focuses on three mothers and their offspring: a polar bear and her two cubs, an elephant and her calf, and a humpback whale and her calf. Although "Earth" comments on the fact that the planet's temperature is rising and habitats such as those of the polar bear are deeply threatened, it doesn't lecture about global warming. Instead, it presents the simple natural beauty of the planet — its forests and deserts, its star-filled skies and deep seas, and its wildlife. This is a film the younger generation should see. *Rated: G. 1 hour, 30 minutes. — T.H.*

**GHOSTS OF GIRLFRIENDS PAST ★1/2**

(Century 16, Century 20) The movie orbits around the narcissistic, philandering and now very famous photographer Connor Mead (Matthew McConaughey). He's a complete jerk, which makes him catnip to all the sex kittens in this male-oriented universe. Connor and childhood sweetheart Jenny (Jennifer Garner) meet again in Newport, Rhode Island, at the wedding rehearsal of his younger brother (Breckin Meyer) and his control-freak fiancée (Lacey Chabert). Sparks fly. And you know these former flames are heading to happily-ever-after land. The title alludes to the movie's narrative conceit: The screenwriting team of "Four Christmases" raided the holiday's library of classics to adapt Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" into a tired tale of redemption. *Rated: PG-13 for sexual content throughout, some language and a drug reference. 1 hour, 55 minutes. — S.T.*

**IS ANYBODY THERE? ★★1/2**

(Cinearts) Michael Caine is Clarence Parkinson, a suicidal ex-magician who refuses to accept the passage of time. Clarence reluctantly takes up residence at ramshackle Lark Hall, a quirky English senior residence center run by a harried young couple (David Morrissey and Anne-Marie Duff) and their resentful 10-year-old son Edward (Bill Miller) who is obsessed with ghosts and the mysteries of the great beyond. In fits and starts Edward and Clarence craft a friendship, a yin and yang that spans decades of differences. At its core "Anything" relies on the chemistry of its enigmatic leads to keep its narrative airy. *Rated: PG-13 for strong language and mature themes. 1 hour, 34 minutes. — J.A.*

**THE SOLOIST ★★**

(Century 16, Century 20) Robert Downey Jr. is Steve Lopez, an intrepid L.A. columnist with fancy digs, a high-profile divorce and an empty soul. That changes — or does it? — when Lopez happens upon a homeless

violin player named Nathaniel Ayers (Jamie Foxx), a musical genius and schizophrenic. A former cello prodigy from Juilliard, Ayers was forced to leave the program because he couldn't turn off the voices in his head. For Lopez this spells story with a capital S. He digs deep into Ayers' life, contacting family and former friends and offering the recluse the kind of exposure he doesn't need or want. On the whole "Soloist" is a staged affair, a glossy awards contender (mysteriously delayed from December to April) that desperately seeks a visceral reaction to its inherent dramas. *Rated: PG-13 for language, intensity and mature themes. 1 hour, 57 minutes.* —J.A.

**STATE OF PLAY** ★★

(Century 16, Century 20) Washington Globe reporter Cal McCaffrey (Russell Crowe) links two seemingly unconnected violent incidents to each other and to his college roommate-turned-congressman Stephen Collins (Ben Affleck). The apparent suicide of Collins' young and pretty aide leads to the revelation that Collins has been cheating on his wife, Anne (Robin Wright Penn), a secret that proves intertwined with the shooting of a thief and a bystander. As a political firestorm blazes, McCaffrey and Collins prowl around each other with mixed feelings of friendship and professional self-preservation. The congressman's burning question: "Am I talking to my friend now, or am I talking to a reporter?" *Rated PG-13 for brief drug content, some violence, sexual references and language. 1 hour, 58 minutes.* —P.C.

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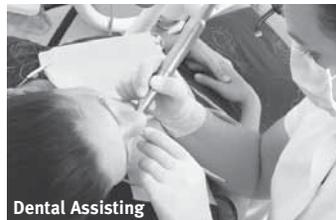
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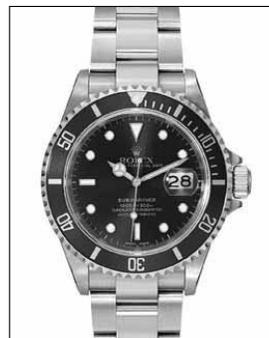


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