Palo Alto Weekly

Vol. XLIII, Number 2  October 15, 2021

Survey says:
Bay Area exit on
the minds of many
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The Meaning of Michelin

WHAT IT TAKES FOR LOCAL RESTAURANTS TO BE NAMED TO THE EXCLUSIVE LIST
PAGE 27

Read up-to-the-minute news on PaloAltoOnline.com

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Right now, in this moment of uncertainty, there’s a promise we can count on: together, we’ll continue to rise to the challenge and find a way forward.

Stanford Medicine, made up of Stanford Children’s Health, Stanford School of Medicine, and Stanford Health Care, is working to end this pandemic.

We’re answering the uncertainty with an unwavering commitment to our community, and meeting this moment with courage, compassion, and innovation.

Thank You, Bay Area, for standing with us, together.

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Poll: 71% say quality of life has declined

Most respondents to Joint Venture poll think region is on the 'wrong track'

By Kevin Forestieri

Bay Area residents grappling with the high cost of living, growing homelessness and high taxes say the quality of life has sunk in recent years, with a record number looking to leave the region altogether.

The grim appraisal, captured in a survey by Joint Venture Silicon Valley in partnership with Bay Area News Group, shows a stark decline in public perception of the Bay Area since the COVID-19 pandemic began last year. Polling enhanced and reconfigured to monitor residents across five counties, including Santa Clara and San Mateo, found 56% of respondents are likely to leave in the next few years, up from 47% in 2020 prior to the pandemic.

The results show residents are frustrated with the perennial problems of Silicon Valley — high housing costs, more people living on the street and consternation over droughts and wildfires — but that COVID-19 may have tipped people over the edge, according to Russell Hancock, Joint Venture’s president and CEO.

“When you toss a highly infectious disease into the mix you get a smothering amount of anxiety,” Hancock said. The survey, which was conducted late last month, found that 71% of those who responded felt the quality of life in the Bay Area is worse now than it was five years ago. The opinion was felt strongest among people ages 50 to 64 and those making a household income between $100,000 and $250,000. The perception also changes based on political affiliation, with 92% of those leaning Republican believing that quality (continued on page 34)

A death at the Opportunity Center raises questions about security and care

A mother grieves her mentally ill son, who died after drugs were supplied by a dealer at the facility

By Sue Dremann

Jeffrey Cutter’s life came to an end in the place where he seemed to finally be protected. Cutter, 37, of Palo Alto, was found dead by his parents in his apartment at Palo Alto’s Opportunity Center on June 12. His death has raised questions for his mother, who feels that her mentally ill son didn’t receive the kind of care that could’ve prevented the tragedy.

Deborah Baldwin spoke recently about her grief and of the inadequately funded and monitored “safety net” system that she believes failed her son. “We planned to bring him home for dinner,” Baldwin said, recalling the day they showed up at his door. “We tried and tried, but we couldn’t reach him, or his phone was dead.”

On the way up the elevator, at about 5:30 p.m., she didn’t have a good feeling. “I turned to my husband and said, ‘We have to understand that one of these times when we go to see him, he’ll be dead.’” When they opened his door, Cutter was lying face down on the floor. Palo Alto police later told her they found a packet that seemed to contain fentanyl, some methamphetamine and syringes. Cutter lived at the Opportunity Center, a transitional and permanent supportive housing complex in Palo Alto serving those who are homeless or have very low incomes.

In the weeks before his death, her son, who had gotten sober, had told his mother about a persistent drug dealer, a woman, whom he tried to rebuff. “I keep on telling her to go away,” he’d told Baldwin.

The Santa Clara County Medical Examiner said Cutter died from mixed-drug toxicity: a combination of fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid; 4-ANPP, a precursor to fentanyl; and methamphetamine, a powerful stimulant. His death was ruled an accident. (continued on page 32)

OPEN SPACE

Boulware Park to expand

City's new plan includes new dog park, bocce court, picnic areas

By Gennady Sheyner

When Ventura residents talk about their vision for the neighborhood’s future, parks usually top their wish list.

Despite its central location in the city, outsized role in Palo Alto’s housing plans and its status as the fastest growing neighborhood over the past decade, the neighborhood only has one park: the 1.5-acre Boulware Park. Residents haven’t been shy in requesting more open space, particularly if the city moves ahead with its current plan of adding about 500 new residences.

“Where are these people going to play? Where will these families go? Will they be getting in their car and driving some place?” Becky Sanders, moderator of the Ventura Neighborhood Association, asked last month during a Parks and Recreation Commission hearing.

Now, help is at last on the way. Next year, Boulware Park is set to see a major expansion and renovation — a project made possible by the city’s purchase of a 0.64-acre site from AT&T for $2.75 million in 2019. Once the project is completed, the undeveloped site at 3350 Birch St. will be furnished with basketball and bocce courts, a tree-lined picnic area and a dog park.

The existing park also will be enhanced and reconfigured to (continued on page 33)
QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“We don’t acquire parkland very much.”

— Peter Jensen, city landscape architect, on Bowlware Park expansion. See story on page 5.
**B U S I N E S S**

**Tesla to move headquarters from Palo Alto to Austin**

CEO Elon Musk cites housing costs, long commutes and growth limitations

By Lloyd Lee

Tesla Inc., the electric vehicle and energy storage company, is moving its Palo Alto-based headquarters to Austin, Texas, the company’s CEO Elon Musk said on Oct. 7. The announcement came during an annual shareholder meeting hosted from inside one of Tesla’s Gigafactories also located in Austin.

Musk gave vague explanations for the move, but cited high housing costs and long commutes for workers as well as growth limitations imposed by being in the Bay Area. “It’s tough for people to afford houses, and a lot of people have to come in from far away. ... There’s a limit to how big you can scale in the Bay Area,” he said.

A day after Musk’s announcement, The Registry reported that Tesla will be leasing 325,000-square-foot office space from Hewlett Packard at 1501 Page Mill Road in Stanford Research Park. According to the publication, Tesla will be leasing 325,000 square feet of office space from HP. Douglas Sharpe, executive vice president at NAI Northern California represented Tesla. Sharpe declined the Weekly’s request for comment due to a non-disclosure agreement.

Propping up the benefits of the new Texas location, Musk said the headquarters will be five minutes from the airport and 15 minutes from downtown. And while the company will continue to grow in California, Tesla will expand “even more so” in Texas, he said.

Tesla, a company that has grown exponentially since it was founded in 2003 and set the standard for electric vehicles, first arrived to Palo Alto in 2009, moving from San Carlos into a 350,000-square-foot building in Stanford Research Park.

The company’s former chief technical officer and co-founder J.B. Straubel said one large incentive to come to Palo Alto was the city’s proximity to Stanford University. (Straubel is also a Stanford alumnus.)

Palo Alto City Manager Ed Shikada expressed disappointment in the news, noting, “Tesla has been a member of the Palo Alto community for over a decade.”

But, he said in an email to the Weekly, “This change reflects the innovative cycle and nature of Silicon Valley, where we are seeing highly mobile companies in our region evolve. We look forward to continuing to adapt to the economic forces at play.”

Tesla is not the first company to make an exit out of Palo Alto during the pandemic. In August, Palantir Technologies quietly moved out of its Palo Alto headquarters at 100 Hamilton Ave. to Denver, Colorado. The company’s CEO Alex Karp previously expressed frustrations with Silicon Valley’s “increasing intolerance and monoculture.”

Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HP), a Palo Alto-based IT services company, also announced in December that it was not the first company to move out of its Palo Alto headquarters at 100 Hamilton Ave. to Denver, Colorado. HP declined to comment beyond saying it was moving employees out of the city due to the pandemic.

The announcement came during the company’s annual shareholder meeting. The company is one of the major employers in the Bay Area and has a significant presence in the city. HP is known for its technology products and services, including servers, storage devices, and IT consulting.

HP has had a long history in Palo Alto, first arriving to Palo Alto in 2009, moving from San Carlos into a 350,000-square-foot building in Stanford Research Park. HP's move to Denver is part of a larger trend of companies leaving the Bay Area due to the high cost of living and long commutes.

In addition to HP, other major companies have also announced plans to move out of the Bay Area, including Tesla, which is moving its headquarters to Austin, Texas. These announcements have raised concerns about the long-term impact on the local economy and the loss of talent and innovation.

For more information, visit www.PaloAltoOnline.com.
**EDUCATION**

**With return of in-person education, schools grapple with staffing shortages**

**Districts scramble to find substitute teachers, other school workers as pandemic wears on**

By Zoe Morgan and Angela Swartz

The shortage has meant that in some instances, principals have been asked to cover classes, said Erin Green, the district’s director of student and staff services.

“arly three decades after Peninsula cities began implementing bans on gas-powered leaf blowers, the effort has found a foothold at the state level, with Gov. Gavin Newsom signing a bill on Oct. 9 that will phase out their sales.

**California pulls the plug on gas-powered leaf blowers under new law**

**Legislation targets sales of new ‘small off-road engine’ equipment**

By Gennady Sheyner

The bill's passage makes California the first state to phase out gas-powered leaf blowers.

For some, particularly in the commercial sector, the shift could pose significant challenges, according to an analysis of AB 1346 by state Assembly staff. The analysis notes that for residential uses, rechargeable electric lawn-mowers, leaf blowers and string trimmers have been "available for years and have significant market share." For commercial users, however, "there is very little market for zero-emission equipment as today's technology is relatively expensive and requires multiple batteries and/or frequent recharging and replacement."

Supporters of the bill hope to address the slow adoption of zero-emissions equipment in the commercial sector by both adopting the new restrictions and by appropriating $30 million in the budget to help small businesses make the switch. Minutes before the Senate voted 21-9 to approve the bill on Sept. 8, Sen. Ben Allen, D-Santa Monica, argued that the law is necessary to foster the state's transition to cleaner equipment.

"[U]nless we put pressure on the industry, they're not going to take the steps necessary to meet these better lower-emission or zero-emission generators onto the market and widely available for folks," Allen said.

Not everyone agrees. Opponents of the bill argued that the legislation will impose unreasonable restrictions on landscapers while doing very little to address climate change. Sen. Brian Dahle, R-Bieber, suggested at a Sept. 8 hearing on the bill that a switch to electric equipment would make generators less reliable.

"When the power is out, how are you going to charge your bat-tery so that you can supposedly keep your refrigerator on?" Dahle asked during a Sept. 8 hearing on AB 1346. "We're converting everything to power because, for some reason, this Legislature hates fuel, which is very sustainable, easy to access and, when the power is off, you can still use it.”

Assembly member Devon Mathis, R-Visalia, similarly argued that the bill would cause more harm than good. He characterized the bill at a Sept. 9 hearing as one that would create "severe regulations for the businesses that use this equipment without providing anywhere close to adequate funding to support...

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**ENVIRONMENT**

**Substitute teacher Dana Torok helps a second grader complete a math assignment at Oak Avenue Elementary School in Los Altos on Oct. 13.**

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**A gardener uses a gasoline powered leaf blower to blow dead leaves and debris out of a front yard and into the street for sweeping and removal.**

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**Upfront**

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**Identifying possible reasons for staffing crunch**

Substitute teacher shortages have been a recurring issue over the years, but the pandemic has made the problem more acute, school leaders say.

"It’s already been hard to find subs, but the hardest problem about this now is that we’re asking people to go into rooms where kids are unvaccinated," Mountain View Whisman School District Superintendent Ayinde Rudolph said.

As a TK-8 school district, many Mountain View Whisman students are currently too young to be vaccinated. Rudolph said he believes finding substitutes may be easier once children under 12 can get their shots.

Another part of the challenge, Rudolph said, is that the credentialing process for substitutes got disrupted by the pandemic. According to Green, some substitutes also retired, moved out of the area or are helping to care for family members.

“All these things have a compounding impact on availability to have subs,” Rudolph said.

The broader trend of open staff shortages extends beyond education. As COVID-19 continues to spread, districts are grappling with a lack of staff to fill open positions from attendance clerks to classroom assistants.

According to the EdWeek Research Center, school districts nationwide have seen a 42% decline in the number of classroom assistants.

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#5 Agent California
#21 Agent Nationwide
After exploring and then rejecting the idea of constructing a new downtown garage, Palo Alto is now embroiled in litigation with a downtown property owner who believes the city has been misusing the fees that it collects from developers.

At the heart of the dispute between the city and developer Charles “Chop” Keenan is the question: Is the city actually required to build parking with the “parking in-lieu fees” that it collects from developers?

Keenan’s development at 135 Hamilton Ave., near High Street, is one such project. In 2013, as part of the project’s approval, he paid $906,900 in in-lieu parking fees.

Now, he wants his money back. A lawsuit that was filed in May on behalf of his company, Hamilton & High LLC, maintains that the city has not been spending the in-lieu funds in accordance with law.

The six-story structure that was planned for the city-owned lot at 375 Hamilton Ave., across from the downtown post office, was one of two garages that the City Council had included on its list of infrastructure priorities. The other garage, a 636-space structure at 350 Sherman Ave. in the California Avenue business district, was completed last year.

Though the council spent years exploring sites for a new garage and proceeding with design work on a new 325-space parking garage on Hamilton, council members unanimously agreed in February 2019 not to move ahead with the project, which at the time had a price tag of about $30 million. Instead, council members generally agreed that downtown’s parking landscape had changed since the project was conceived — notably, with the creation of a Residential Preferential Parking program — and that the city should forgo the new garage and instead consider a more comprehensive strategy for dealing with parking.

Today, the downtown garage remains very much in limbo. Though it’s still officially listed in the city’s budget documents, the council has removed all funding from the garage except for the in-lieu fees because of the council’s direction to “postpone the project until downtown parking initiatives are determined.”

The council has already encountered some pushback for its decision to indefinitely postpone — if not formally cancel — the downtown garage from property owners and business leaders, including the Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce, which argued in 2020 that by aborting the project the city is reneging on a promise it had made to the business community. Keenan’s lawsuit, which the City Council is scheduled to discuss in a closed session on Monday night, makes a similar case and suggests that by not constructing the garage, the city is failing to use the parking-in-lieu fees in a way for which they are intended.

“The city repeatedly represented to the public that the fees would be timely used to construct a new downtown parking garage,” the lawsuit states. “However, the city has failed for the past seven years to actually use the funds to construct a new parking garage.”

So far, the argument has found little traction. Last month, a Santa Clara County Superior Court judge upheld the city’s argument that the in-lieu fees are not refundable, as they are part of a deal with property owners to pay for added sign and environmental costs for the city-owned lot at 375 Hamilton Ave.

The ruling also leaves open, however, the possibility that the city will be ordered to issue a refund at some point in the future if it fails to move ahead with a new parking structure — given the strict legal limitations on how in-lieu parking fees can be used. Sheyner at gsheyner@paweekly.com.
**POLICE CALLS**

**Palo Alto**

Oct. 7-Oct. 13

Violence related

University Avenue, 9/8, 8:30 p.m.; simple battery.

El Camino Real, 10/5, 12:49 a.m.; arson.

Bryant Street, 10/5, 12:49 a.m.; arson.

Symposium Drive, 10/6, 6:09 p.m.; family violence.

**El Camino Real**

10/7, 7:50 p.m.; strong armed robbery.

San Antonio Road

Arm robbery.

**Mills Street**

Oct. 6-Oct. 10

**University Avenue/Waverley Street**

Simple battery.

**Violence related**

1300 block Willow Road

Unattended death ................................1

Noise or ordinance violation ...........1

Misc. penal code violation ..........1

Warrant arrest ...........................3

Mental evaluation .................1

Miscellaneous

Possession of paraphernalia ........2

Alcohol or drug related

Possession of drugs ..................1

Vehicle related

Theft from auto .......................2

Theft from vehicle ..................2

Theft from vehicle ..................2

Vehicle tow ..........................4

Alcohol or drug related

Driving under influence .............3

Possession of drugs ........................1

Possession of paraphernalia ........1

Miscellaneous

Animal call ..........................1

Found property ........................5

Hate incident ..........................1

Misd. parole code violation .......1

Noise ordinance violation .........1

Psychiatric subject .................5

Suspicious circumstances ..........2

Unattended death ....................1

Warrant/other agency .................5

Menlo Park

Oct. 8-Oct. 10

Violence related

Mills Street, 10/6, 3 a.m.; domestic battery ........................1.300 block Willow Road, 6/17, 6:07 p.m.; battery

**Thrift related**

Fraud ..................................1

Petty theft ..............................1

**Vehicle related**

Auto recovery ........................1

Auto theft ..............................1

Bicycle theft ..........................3

Hit and run .............................2

Stolen catalytic converter ..........1

Theft from auto ........................2

Vehicle accident/incident injury ....1

Vehicle tow ............................2

Alcohol or drug related

Possession of paraphernalia ........2

Miscellaneous

Found property ........................1

Lost property ..........................1

Mental evaluation .................1

Vandalism ............................2

Warrant arrest ........................3

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Mental evaluation .................1

Miscellaneous

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Alcohol or drug related

Possession of drugs ..................1

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Theft from vehicle ..................2

Theft from vehicle ..................2

Vehicle tow ..........................4

Alcohol or drug related

Driving under influence .............3

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Possession of paraphernalia ........1

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Theft from auto ........................2

Vehicle accident/incident injury ....1

Vehicle tow ............................2

Alcohol or drug related

Possession of drugs ........................1

Possession of paraphernalia ........1

Miscellaneous

Found property ........................1

Lost property ..........................1

Mental evaluation .................1

Vandalism ............................2

Warrant arrest ........................3

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**PAID OBITUARY**

**Sara Ann (Sally) Thompson**

October 19, 1938 – September 19, 2021

Saratoga

Sara Ann (Sally) Thompson passed away peacefully at home on September 19, 2021, after a long battle with dementia. Sally was born in 1938 to Leonard and Elizabeth Cunningham in Schenectady, New York. In 1946, the family moved to Menlo Park, CA, where Sally attended Willow School and Menlo Atherton High School, graduating in 1955. After attending San Mateo Community College, Sally worked in various business positions and became an Office Manager at Moore Business Forms. Sally is survived by her dearly loved family: her husband Dick Thompson, daughter Brooke Knoble (Keven), son Jon Thompson (Ahn Lien), son Dale Thompson (Piyawan); and four grandchildren: Ryan Knoble, Lauren Knoble, Dana Knoble, and Sydney Thompson; and her blended family, Kevin Bovero, Kristi Snow, Stacey Price, and Brett Bovero.

Sally was a friend to many and exuded a fun, warm, and caring personality in everything she did. Family was very important, and she found great joy in their time together. Beyond family, Sally liked bowling, skiing, biking, and golf, but tennis was truly her game. She was an avid player who enjoyed the friendships built during competitive play under USTA. As captain of her team, she loved to analyze the competition; and her focus was balanced by her fun sense of humor. Once, her favorite sayings was “I don’t mind losing, as long as I look good doing it!” Sally also enjoyed travel adventures with her husband and friends and documented the memories through poetry. Sally was deeply loved and will be dearly missed. Private services will be held. The family extends gratitude to Hospice of the Valley for the caring support received by their compassionate nurses.

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**PAID OBITUARY**

**Susie Mader**

1943-2021

Susie was born in Burlington VT and moved with her family shortly thereafter to Vischer Ferry, NY where she spent her toddler years. Her family moved to Schenectady after the War where Susie attended primary and junior high school. She graduated from Scarsdale High School and enjoyed a brief career in modeling before she married her husband, Tom Mader and had three children: Charles, Evelyn & Joshua.

In the 1970s, Susie moved with her family to Palo Alto, California where she lived in College Terrace for many years before retiring to Sonoma.

Susie was a Mother, Peace Activist and Landscape Designer in later life. She will always be remembered for her uncompromising commitment to social justice. She leaves behind her former husband, three children and four granddaughters: McKella, Janina, Maise & Grace.

Susie’s ashes will be interred at Vischer Ferry, NY. In lieu of flowers, her family is requesting donations to your local community garden.
William Augustus Fenwick
August 1, 1938 – October 4, 2021

William Augustus (“Bill”) Fenwick of Palo Alto, California died October 4, 2021, at age 83. The arc of his life was sweeping, and his influence on his family, friends, colleagues and profession will be enduring. Born into poverty in rural Kentucky, to a sharecropper father who never attended school and a mother with just a third-grade education, he went on to be a founder and innovative leader of Fenwick & West, one of the world’s premier law firms focused on the needs of the technology industry. His improbable journey was made possible by remarkable personal fortitude and timely interventions of generous individuals and institutions that recognized his potential.

For many years he made efforts to pay these interventions forward a hallmark of his own professional life. Bill was born into a tumultuous household near Curdsville, Kentucky, the youngest of five siblings who survived infancy. From a young age, he spent many summers and weekends working alongside a much older brother-in-law, a farmer named Anthony Cain who modeled integrity, hard work, and curiosity.

Following brief service in the Navy cut short by a medical issue, Bill graduated in 1957 from Owensboro Technical High School. He attributed his decision to return to complete high school principally to his love of basketball, which he played on the Varsity team and for years afterward.

After high school, Bill moved to Chicago in search of work that would pay more than his many prior part-time jobs. Over the next three years he worked his way up from mailroom clerk to advertising copywriter, then took a higher paying job in a steel mill to save for college. He also worked on the side as a plumber’s assistant handling nighttime and weekend jobs. And he undertook self-improvement initiatives, joining a “classics” book club, creating a “reverse dictionary” to expand his vocabulary, and taking some night school classes at a local college.

In the Fall of 1960 Bill began attending Southern Illinois University, a school known for educating first-generation college students. Upon his arrival he was invited to join a new honors program offering liberal arts classes to supplement his coursework in the undergraduate business school. In September 1961 he married Elwanda Decker, a Kentucky woman who joined him that Fall as a student at SIU.

He served as the firm’s managing partner in its early phases of growth, litigated major cases, innovated methods of protecting intellectual property and structuring technology transactions, spoke and wrote extensively regarding privacy and technology issues, and counseled multiple generations of technology companies and entrepreneurs (including the young founders of Apple Computer, which became a longtime client). He was especially gratified that even when the law firm’s trajectory no longer depended on his own efforts, it held on to the egalitarian and respectful values that he had sought to instill.

Throughout, he was uncannily prescient about the future impact of developing technologies. In 2001 he received the Bernard E. Witkin Award from the California Judicial Council for his service in advising the Council and the courts on the use of information technology. In 2015 he was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award by The American Lawyer magazine.

Through all his success, Bill was never far from his past as a poor kid confronting overwhelming odds. He maintained an aversion to the trappings of hierarchy in the workplace and a commitment to giving opportunities to talented individuals who were early in their careers, lacked conventional credentials, or were themselves trying to overcome humble beginnings.

These characteristics and his profound commitment to mentorship endeared him to scores of young lawyers and non-lawyer staff who worked with him, and to many others who came across his path.

As a young man who had confronted more than his share of hardship, Bill found himself attracted to the philosophy of stoicism. Those close to Bill appreciated that his stoic aspirations could not constrain his dry sense of humor, the mischievous spark that sometimes flashed in his eyes, and the way he melted in the presence of babies and toddlers.

The last couple decades of Bill’s life revolved largely around his five grandchildren, Christopher Bene (Daria) and Zachary Bene (children of Tammy and Stephen Bene), and Grace, Francis and Eleanor Fenwick (children of Anthony and Dana Fenwick). He was a constant presence in their lives, providing an extra set of hands to corral them as toddlers, conjuring adventures with them around the neighborhood, transforming his home into a playground, and enthusiastically attending hundreds of youth sports events (even coaching a few teams). He had a gift for nurturing a unique relationship with each of them, and each of them will remember him adoringly for the rest of their days.

The family requests that any gifts made in Bill’s honor be directed to Pursuit of Excellence (https://www.psofchina.org), a college scholarship program that provides financial support and mentoring to first generation, low-income, local high school students.

A list of local residents who died recently:

Eric Strauss, 90, a urologist for the VA Palo Alto Health Care System and a Palo Alto resident, died on Sept. 8; Susie Mader, 77, a former Palo Alto resident, died on Sept. 18; William “Bill” Augustus Fenwick, 83, founder of Fenwick & West law firm and a Palo Alto resident, died on Oct 4; and Linda Louise “Lou” Heath, 80, a Palo Alto High School alumna and a former speech therapist for the San Mateo Union High School District, died on Oct 5.

To read full obituaries, leave remembrances and post photos, go to Lasting Memories at PaloAltoOnline.com/obituaries.
To support local schools, Dana Carmel will donate $5,000 to your local Education Foundation when you buy or sell a home with her by May 31, 2022.

Dana Carmel is a long-time, active Foundation member. She knows just how much our school districts rely on Foundation support to provide quality education. Funds raised provide additional teachers, specialists, programs, and tools that make our schools extraordinary places for learning.

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In response to ‘Plan for lifting mask mandate announced by Bay Area health officers’
Posted Oct. 11 at 12:08 p.m. by Ray Fiers, a resident of Downtown North:

“I have no issue or problem either restricting or excluding the unvaxxed from everyday American life.

They are the ones acting irresponsibly and prolonging any large-scale immunities to the coronavirus, which is still raging via its variants and mutations.

Like some others have mentioned, I have absolutely no sympathy whatsoever for the stubbornly unvaxxed who perish from this dreadful disease.

They had a choice and an opportunity to avoid serious hospitalizations and instead thumbed their noses at the opportunity to get two simple shots.

As for the continued wearing of face masks, this remains an individual choice based upon where one circulates along an assessment of the people congregating at those gatherings.

Common sense is not scientific.”

In response to ‘Ex-restaurant employee allegedly embezzled $200K’
Posted Oct. 6 at 4:23 p.m. by Julian Gutierrez, a resident of another community:

“Mr. Colvin held an executive position and thus she was easily able to embezzle this large amount of money for personal raises and a Porsche.

When it comes to investigating restaurant thefts, it is always advisable to scrutinize the management and executive sectors first as humble food servers, bussers and line cooks do not have immediate access to such large quantities of incoming revenue.

While collar criminals tend to get light sentences because most of the individuals involved in these activities are white and judged by a predominantly white judicial system.”

In response to ‘As workers return to offices, city plans parking shake-up’
Posted Oct. 6 at 10:56 a.m. by Carol Scott, a resident of Evergreen Park:

“The title of this article suggests that great, and perhaps unpleasant, changes for employ-ees will occur due to the acceptance of the city staff’s proposals to the Finance Committee. This is hardly the case. Instead, it should be viewed as an opportunity for residents and employees.

First, the residents of Evergreen Park and Mayfield finally will be treated the same as residents of the two other neighborhoods that are adjacent to the Cal Ave. commercial area — College Terrace and Old Palo Alto. Neither Evergreen Park nor Mayfield have commercial businesses within the residential areas except for those businesses that are located along the El Camino Real commercial corridor. The only reason for selling employee permits in (Ever-green Park and Mayfield) is to use the residential areas as an overflow parking lot. I am surprised that Vice Mayor Pat Burt continues to think that is appropriate. That viewpoint ignores the health and safety risks of the daily traffic, pollution and accident risk that accompanies 250 cars into the neighborhood. Garages and lots are parking lots. Residential streets are not.

I am happy to provide photos if further proof of that is needed.

Office and retail workers that work along California Avenue will find parking closer to their work. What waiter in a restaurant on California Avenue really wants to park six blocks away on Stanford or Park boulevards, where they were required to park previously because no discount permits were sold in the garages and lots? Lower-wage workers will be able to purchase discounted price permits. High-tech office workers will surely not be terribly affected by the small price increase. If they are, then perhaps they will begin to use some of the transit options.”

Letters
Path to electrification
Editor,
This September, the 350 Palo Alto Climate Action Team had the pleasure of hosting a discussion between 70 plus community members and Vice Mayor Pat Burt and Councilman Ali-son Cormack, the leaders of Palo Alto’s Sustainability and Climate Action Plan Ad Hoc Committee.

Moderated by two Gunn High School students, Saman de Silva and me, the council members emphasized the importance of meeting the city’s 80% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030 through aggressive climate action — especially through electrification.

The process of residential electrification is a key aspect in climate mitigation, particularly here in Palo Alto where energy accounts for 32% of our carbon emissions. Electrification will not only minimize our carbon emissions, a necessary step toward fighting climate change, but it also will eliminate many natural gas-related health risks.

During the Q&A, both council members were asked to kick-start a program with many essential elements that would accelerate electrification. While neither member explicitly agreed to the time frame, both were very receptive to the spirit of the asks. Cormack said, “There’s nothing on this list I disagree with,” while Burt stated, “It is possible to get much, if not all, of this done in a year.”

“We have to embrace getting it vs. getting it perfect,” they noted, emphasizing their determin-ation to drive change in Palo Alto.

I, on behalf of the 350 Palo Alto Team, would like to thank both council members one last time for sitting down with us and addressing our concerns.

As a young member of our city, I couldn’t be more hopeful and excited to see decisive action in the near future from them. Until then, however, it is essential that we all do our part to drive this change by switching our appliances to electric and joining campaigns like 350.

Katie Rueff
Loma Verde Avenue, Palo Alto

Wrong place
Editor,
This letter refers to the proposal to demolish two dental buildings at the heart of University Avenue’s commercial district and replace them with a four-story mixed-use development. From what I have read, it proposes to provide 11 below-market units out of 73. Big whoop for our needy population!

Once again Lund Smith wants the city to put aside many build-ing restrictions to do this. Such a building would overshadow those around it, contribute to traffic, and in no way ameliorate affordable housing in this community.

If anything should replace those buildings, it must be consistent with the senior residences around it. Let me suggest that there be a building for disabled and elderly people on limited incomes.

Previous councils created the prob-lem for these residents when they sanctioned the following conver-sions: the Palo Alto Hotel became the Keen Hotel; Casa Olga be-came the Nobu; the President Ho-tel’s current conversion to another luxury hotel. And you know what? The first floor should be dental offices that will rent at no more than those they are replacing. If the Council cares about housing affordability, affordability, and the pre-dominant use of the building is not the project and you will have other opportunities to do the right thing for this population.

Carol Gilbert
Byron Street, Palo Alto

WHAT DO YOU THINK?
The Palo Alto Weekly encourages comments on our coverage or on issues of local interest.

Submit letters to the editor of up to 300 words to letters@paweekly.com. Submit guest opinions of 750 to 950 words to editor@paweekly.com. Include your name, address and daytime phone number so we can reach you.

We reserve the right to edit contributions for length, objectionable content, libel and factual errors known to us. Anonymous letters will generally not be accepted. Submit a letter to the editor, sign your name, and include a grant of permission to the Palo Alto Weekly and Examiner/MediaOne to publish it online, including in our online archives and as a post on Town Square.

For more information, contact Editorial Assistant Lilyai Lee at llee@paweekly.com or 650-223-6526 or Editor Jocelyn Dong at editor@paweekly.com

Page 16 • October 15, 2021 • Palo Alto Weekly • www.PaloAltoOnline.com
This mid-century modern Joseph Eichler home has been fully renovated while still preserving and enhancing what Eichler called “boldness, change, and optimism through indoor/outdoor living.” The clean-lined and flowing floor plan begins with a signature atrium which serves as an outdoor living room beneath a vast glass ceiling. Inside, details of the original Eichler design include gently vaulted, paneled ceilings and an entire rear wall of glass. New floors in wood-like high-end luxury vinyl are as practical as they are beautiful, all complemented by crisp white walls and ceilings.

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UPDATED EICHLER WITH A MODERN FLOORPLAN

Timeless mid-century design along with an updated floorplan perfect for a modern lifestyle make this 4-bedroom, 3-bathroom Eichler home an outstanding choice for Silicon Valley living. A paver pathway through the landscaped front yard leads inside, where over 2,200 square feet of living space enjoys Eichler details including paneled ceilings, globe light fixtures, heated floors, and walls of glass craft an inviting ambiance. The expansive living room features a fireplace, the remodeled kitchen offers top appliances from Bosch and Sub-Zero, and the family room provides outstanding space for a relaxing evening at home. The primary suite with access to the backyard highlights comfortable accommodations for family and guests alike. And for true indoor/outdoor living, multiple points throughout the home open to the private, peaceful backyard with a large patio, fire pit, lawn, and planter boxes. This outstanding location is moments from the Greenmeadow Pool Community Center, Cubberley Community Center, The Village at San Antonio Center, and provides easy access to US 101. Plus, children may attend top-ranked Palo Alto schools (buyer to verify eligibility).

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A graceful floorplan filled with luxurious appointments highlights this spacious 4-bedroom, 3.5-bathroom home that personifies the timeless elegance of its sought-after Old Palo Alto location. Custom-built from plans by renowned architect Roger Kohler, this beautiful American Colonial presents outstanding curb appeal enhanced by a brick pathway through a newly planted lawn. Inside, rich hardwood floors extend throughout nearly 3,100 square feet of living space accented by fine millwork, divided light windows, and high ceilings. Highlights include the living room with fireplace, the chef’s kitchen with appliances from Thermador and Sub-Zero, downstairs-level flexible space catered from a wet bar, and a comfortable office to meet all work-from-home needs. Stunning Carrara marble floors adorn the primary suite bathroom that also includes a clawfoot tub and step-in shower, while the home’s additional bedrooms provide comfort and convenience for friends and family alike. Plus, this home also includes relaxing backyard space, an extended driveway, and a garage. Moments to multiple parks, public transportation, and great shops and restaurants along California Avenue, this home is also served by top-ranked schools (buyer to verify eligibility).

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The Playbook gives you an in-depth look at what’s going on in prep sports.

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By Heather Zimmerman

It’s probably not a surprise that there are scales in a show called “Lizard Boy,” but not just the green, reptilian kind that cover the titular hero head to toe. This comic book-inspired story can’t be told without a whole lot of musical scales — and a menagerie of instruments, from guitars to glockenspiels. Music is the superpower that the show’s trio of cast members share.

In fact, from the show’s soundtrack, which has found popularity online, to the small but mighty cast, to the longtime collaborations that underpin “Lizard Boy,” the hero’s reptilian scales might be one of the least striking things about this indie-folk rock musical.

“Lizard Boy” is now playing in person and streaming at TheatreWorks Silicon Valley through Oct. 31.

The original “Lizard Boy” cast, made up of the show’s writer/creator Justin Huertas, actors Kirsten “Kiki” deLohr Helland and William A. Williams, along with director Brandon Ivie, has developed the show off and on for the better part of a decade.

“Lizard Boy” made its world premiere in 2015 at the Seattle Repertory Theatre, but the musical’s foundations go back farther, to 2011 when the Seattle Rep commissioned the show and Huertas called on his friends Helland and Williams — who had also previously worked with him on other projects — to join the cast.

Helland recalled that, at that time, she didn’t really play any instruments, but that’s no longer the case.

“As the show developed, and we started learning more about what the style of the piece was going to be and how we wanted to score the piece, it became clear that there were going to be an endless number of instruments that were played,” she said with a laugh.

Over the course of about eight years, both Helland and Williams learned a host of instruments, some more expected on a musical theater stage than others.

“I play the guitar and piano, I play ukulele, glockenspiel — this is my first time playing the glockenspiel. We have a kazoo chorus,” Williams said.

One of the first things Helland learned was flute, at Huertas’ behest, for another show he had created. That laid the foundation to eventually learn how to play many more instruments for “Lizard Boy,” she said, crediting Huertas’ support and encouragement.

“That’s really how I did it. I mean, honestly, I just have so much faith in his friends and he believes in our talents and our ability to learn. He just said, ‘I believe you can, and we have time.’ And it’s true, once I put my brain in that place, I discovered that I was able to learn new things,” she said.

“Lizard Boy” starts with a first date but quickly turns into an epic journey to save the world. Trevor (Huertas), the Lizard Boy of the title, is a young gay man who lives in Seattle, used to keeping to himself due to a strange childhood accident that caused him to be covered in green scales.

But, as the pandemic perhaps has taught us all, daily isolation is tough, so as Trevor hops on the dating app Grindr in the hopes of finding his ex, he instead encounters the charming, new-in-town Cary (Williams). Cary convinces Trevor to meet, but they soon find themselves confronting the villainous Siren (Helland), who has big plans and a magnetic voice that Trevor recognizes — it haunts his dreams.

“Cary is new in town, to Seattle. And he’s a fun guy but he’s really lost at the moment — he’s lonely. He’s reaching out and trying to meet some people, but having a little bit of a difficult time doing that. The interaction he has with Trevor, it’s a little more honest and real than the stuff that he’s experienced before,” Williams said.

‘Over time, our characters have really been fleshed out and had a chance to become more complex’

— William A. Williams, actor

Over time, our characters have really been fleshed out and had a chance to become more complex —”
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Lizard Boy (continued from page 21)

Williams, who is now based in New York City, is not new in town when it comes to the Bay Area: He grew up in Los Altos and attended Mountain View High School. He said he took the opportunity of being in town with “Lizard Boy” to show his castmates around where he used to live, and take them to San Francisco.

The show has been performed in various venues, from its Seattle debut to San Diego’s Diversionary Theatre, staged readings at Playwrights Horizons in New York and an online performance for the 2020 National Alliance for Musical Theatre Festival, and the longtime collaboration of the show’s original cast members has allowed for deeper development of the characters.

Helland said that although the easiest way to describe Siren is as the supervillain of the piece, the character has grown to be much more than that.

“In early versions of the piece she was pure evil — just wanted to be queen of the world, and would do anything she wanted in order to make that happen,” Helland said, noting it quickly became apparent that the character needed more dimension.

“She’s a complicated woman who is very lonely, partially because of the choices she’s made and partially just because of the world that she lives in. She really seeks companionship and friendship and a connection to someone who understands her, and is also driven by that,” she said.

“Over time, both of our characters have really been fleshed out and had a chance to become more complex,” Williams said. “It’s really great, because I know every time I come back to it, there’s just going to be a little more for me to take out of the character.”

And it’s between meeting a new love and a possible new foe, and an eventual battle to save the world, that Trevor begins to see his scales differently. As much as superheroes seem to be larger than life, the best superhero stories look at the inner emotions of its characters — and explore what their “superpowers” actually are.

“The thing that I love the most about ‘Lizard Boy’ is that no matter who you are, anyone could look at Trevor, and see his scales and immediately understand and connect to your own personal scales, and how that affects your journey in life,” Helland said. “The biggest theme for me in the show is that no matter what your scales are, whatever is the thing that you think is negative about you is actually the thing that makes you the most positive, and the strongest, the most independent and the most special person.”

“Lizard Boy” plays through Oct. 31 at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts, 500 Castro St., Mountain View. Also available livestreaming. For more information, visit theatreworks.org.

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Eating Out

Seeing Stars

By Sara Hayden

As a food writer, I feel like I’m expected to cover the Michelin Guide, a longstanding publication that rates dining experiences, originating from a French tire company. And I must admit, I’ve been wrestling with why I feel this pressure, and if I do cover the guide to what degree to do so.

I’m puzzled as more and more media outlets ditch their own rating systems, but also continue to dedicate quite a bit of coverage to this particular one. In the U.S., Google searches for “Michelin Guide” outpace searches for “Yelp,” so it (doesn’t) really change anything for me — just still the same thing, every day.” Bruno Chemel said of his restaurant he runs with his wife, Christie. “But I reach a stage of my life, a stage of my business, when I need to evolve the business ... I need to pay the bills, I need to have my life, because owning a two-Michelin star restaurant in COVID in Palo Alto is not easy.”

Removing the restaurant from the guide now alleviates the pressure to adhere to what’s demanded of a Michelin-starred restaurant, Chemel said.

“To me, we’re just a mom and pop restaurant. It’s just me and my wife,” Chemel said. “I’m just a cook, and I want to please my guests. That’s what’s very important to me. I feel very happy. I have no stress for guidelines I need to follow. I just follow what I want to do, and we see if it works.”

Meanwhile, Manresa returned with three stars in Los Gatos.

The Bacchus Group has added another Michelin star to its portfolio with Selby’s, its newest property on the border of Redwood City and Atherton. The group’s San Francisco outpost, Spruce, also holds a Michelin star. And The Village Pub in Woodside has been recognized with a Michelin star for 12 consecutive years.

“Three restaurants, three stars ... It means a lot to us, just the effort everyone undertook ... the hard work that everyone undertook ... to be recognized.”

So while the Bacchus Group has seen plenty of stars, this year’s held special meaning. Selby’s opened in 2019, but then closed when COVID-19 shelter-in-place ordinances were announced in March 2020. After briefly reopening to offer takeout and delivery, they closed again in October. They remained completely shuttered nearly a year, and just reopened last month.

Selby’s team, all together when they heard the news about their Michelin recognition, popped a magnum of champagne and shed tears.

“It is for us like the Oscars, the World Series, the NBA Finals and the Super Bowl all wrapped up into one,” Stannard said. “It means a lot to us, just from a business perspective. And more than that it just feels great — especially after the last 18 months — to see the hard work that everyone undertook to shine in the 2021 Michelin Guide.

LOCAL STARS

In any case, I’d like to congratulate the restaurants and the teams behind them that received Michelin recognition this year, achieved in difficult circumstances that have included navigating COVID-19 safety measures, physical and mental health needs for themselves and their loved ones, staffing challenges and rising costs.

Out of more than 500 listees, the Michelin Guide included dozens of restaurants on the Peninsula and surrounding area in its 2021 California edition, the first since 2019 after it took a break in 2020.

The list includes some extraordinary local restaurants, rated with symbols, like stars and plates that denote things like whether a restaurant is “worth a stop,” how good the cooking quality is and how “comfortable” a restaurant is.

One of the newcomers to the list was Sushi Shin in Redwood City. This year, the restaurant’s second since opening, it earned one star. However, chef Jason Zhan is not new to this recognition. Zhan trained in his craft under Hideo Kuribara at Ushiwakamaru in New York, which received a Michelin star while Zhan was there.

Now at his own Michelin-starred restaurant, Zhan gets to work at 8:30 a.m. and leaves at midnight as he prepares 20- to 22-course meals with a lean team that includes his wife, a dishwasher and a part-time assistant. Zhan said, “I don’t work just to earn a star, or to get a good review from Yelp, so it (doesn’t) really change anything to me — just still the same thing, every day.”

Zhan paused, and laughed. “I feel, ‘Just — oh! — one star!’” Because I’ve been working 20 years,” he said. “But it’s good. This is the second year, and we got one star. Hopefully we can improve, and get two stars, three stars in the future. That means to me, I work hard, and people like it, so (I’ll) have more energy to do and to create more unique dishes so people can enjoy.”

A restaurant that maintained two stars between 2011 and 2019 has been removed from the Michelin Guide at the proprietor’s request. You’ll no longer find Baumé in the guide’s proverbial pages.

“I care about my stars, it’s not that I don’t care,” Bruno Chemel said of the restaurant he runs with his wife, Christie. “But I reach a stage of my life, a stage of my business, when I need to evolve the business ... I need to pay the bills, I need to have my life, because owning a two-Michelin star restaurant in COVID in Palo Alto is not easy.”

Is it more noteworthy than a restaurant simply surviving? When bandwidth is limited, does our greater community? Does it serve the interest to the million or so readers across the country, especially in California and New York.

For my part, much of my musing boils down to these questions: Is this coverage of interest to the million or so readers across our greater community? Does it serve the Peninsula? When bandwidth is limited, does this accolade warrant coverage over another? Is it more noteworthy than a restaurant simply surviving?

I haven’t settled on answers to all these questions. And I’m curious to hear what you think — as readers, as people who work in the industry, as diners — what does the Michelin Guide mean to you? Dear reader, do tell me know: peninsulafoodist@embarcaderoishpublishing.com.

Top: Members from the team at Selby’s include, from left: chef de cuisine Jason Pringle, owner Tim Stannard, executive pastry chef Junius O’Leary and executive chef and partner Mark Sullivan. Embarcadero Media file photo by Sinead Chang.
Above right: Edalyn Garcia, executive sous chef at The Village Pub, tosses roasted beets in some olive oil. Photo by Magali Nazarova.
Right: Protégé serves up a soft poached hen egg with porcini, braised bacon and parmesan foudue. Photo by Natalia Nazarova.
Here’s the complete list of local restaurants included in the 2021 Michelin Guide:

**Atherton**
- Selby’s: 1 Michelin star; 3 comfort and quality

**Belmont**
- Shalizaar: Michelin Plate; 2 comfort and quality

**Burlingame**
- Rasa: 1 Michelin star; 2 comfort and quality
- New England Lobster Eatery: Michelin Plate; 1 comfort and quality

**Half Moon Bay**
- Pasta Moon: Michelin Plate; 2 comfort and quality

**Los Altos**
- Aurum: Michelin Plate; 2 comfort and quality

**Menlo Park**
- Flea Street Cafe: Michelin Plate; 2 comfort and quality
- Madera: 1 Michelin star; 2 comfort and quality
- Camper: Michelin Plate; 2 comfort and quality

**Millbrae**
- Tasty Place: Michelin Plate; 1 comfort and quality

**Palo Alto**
- Bird Dog: Michelin Plate; 3 comfort and quality
- Ettan: Michelin Plate; 2 comfort and quality
- Evvia: Michelin Plate; 2 comfort and quality
- iTalico: Michelin Bib Gourmand; 2 comfort and quality
- Protège: 1 Michelin star; 2 comfort and quality
- Tamarine: Michelin Plate; 1 comfort and quality
- Vina Enoteca: Michelin Plate; 2 comfort and quality
- Zola: Michelin Plate; 2 comfort and quality

**Redwood City**
- La Viga Seafood & Cocina: Michelin Plate; 1 comfort and quality
- Sushi Shin: 1 Michelin star; 2 comfort and quality
- Warung Siska: Michelin Plate; 1 comfort and quality
- Camper: Michelin Plate; 2 comfort and quality
- Protégé: 1 Michelin star; 2 comfort and quality
- Noi: 1 Michelin star; 2 comfort and quality
- Tamarine: Michelin Plate; 1 comfort and quality
- Zola: Michelin Plate; 2 comfort and quality

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**Michelin Guide rating system**

Michelin restaurant recognition is awarded according to a rating system that includes icons and accompanying descriptions. This is how Michelin breaks down some of its ratings:

**Star**
- One: High-quality cooking, worth a stop
- Two: Excellent cooking, worth a detour
- Three: Exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey

**Comfort and quality**
- Represented by a fork and spoon icon
- One: Quite comfortable (according to one Michelin Guide article; it’s described as "simple restaurant" according to some of their restaurant listings)
- Two: Comfortable
- Three: Very comfortable
- Four: Top class comfort
- Five: Luxury in the traditional style

**Michelin Bib Gourmand**
Represented by an icon of Bibendum, the formal name of the "Michelin Man"
- Good quality, good value cooking

**Michelin Plate**
Represented by an icon featuring a plate, fork and knife
- Fresh ingredients, carefully prepared; a good meal

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City prepares to switch to ‘smart meters’  

Council to consider approving more than $18M in contracts for advanced metering infrastructure

By Gennady Sheyner

Seeking to advance its conservation goals and improve reliability of its municipal utilities, Palo Alto is preparing to approve more than $18 million in contracts on Monday to transition all electricity, gas and water customers to “smart meters.”

The technology will obviate the need for meter readers and allow the city to introduce new programs aimed at encouraging conservation. The biggest of the contracts is for up to $16.6 million with Sensus USA, the company that will be installing advanced metering infrastructure in Palo Alto starting next year, with the goal of completing all installations by the end of 2024.

For Palo Alto, the quest to adopt smart meters began in 2013, when the city launched a pilot system for about 300 homes. After considering feedback from the program and an economic analysis, the council approved in November 2018 a plan for investing in the new system, which is a new report from the Utilities Department calls a “foundational technology that is becoming a standard in the utilities industry.”

The new infrastructure, the report states, will improve customers’ experience, improve system reliability and make it easier for the city to meet its environmental sustainability and resiliency goals. The technology will be able to identify water leaks and nudge customers to charge their vehicles during off-peak times. But while the council has already endorsed the switch to smart meters, it balked on approving the contracts on the council’s “consent calendar,” a list of items that get approved without discussion. Instead, council members Lydia Kou, Greer Stone and Greg Tanaka asked to pull the item from the calendar and to hold a full public hearing on the project. Tanaka pointed to the size of the contract as the reason for holding a full discussion.

“I think it’s important when you have contracts of this magnitude that we really try to make sure we get the best pricing possible,” Tanaka said.

The list of contracts includes $15.3 million with Sensus USA, as (continued on page 10)

Leaf blowers (continued from page 8)

the rebate programs necessary to support this transition.

“Many of these businesses are small and minority-owned and are predominant professions for Latino, female and Asian- and Pacific-American workers,” Mathis said, before the Assembly approved the bill by a 49-21 vote.

Supporters of AB 1346 counter that the bill does not regulate use of existing gas-powered equipment but only phases out of new equipment. They also note that the bill includes exceptions for farmers and emergency responders. Assembly member Lorena Gonzalez, D-San Diego, who worked with Berman to advance the bill and secure the funding, argued in a statement Monday that the bill would help address both the environmental and health impacts of small gas engines.

“It’s time we phase out these super polluters and help small landscaping businesses transition to cleaner alternatives,” Gonzalez said in a statement Monday.

Berman’s bill has also garnered support from organizations such as Sierra Club California, Union of Concerned Scientists and Coalition of Clean Air. Bill Magavern, policy director for Coalition for Clean Air, said in a statement Monday that AB 1346 will “protect Californians’ health by cleaning up the shockingly high pollution from small off-road engines like leaf blowers and lawn mowers.”

Daniel Barad, policy advocate with Sierra Club California, said the bill would “curb toxic pollution in California neighborhoods by addressing emissions from leaf blowers, lawn mowers and other small off-road engines.

“This bill is another important step toward breathable air and a livable climate in California,” Barad said in a statement.

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the city’s 20,798 water meters and 24,208 gas meters to allow them to transmit data. If the council approves the staff’s plan, the city and Sensus will start installing the network along with some initial meters early next year and then hold a “soft launch” for a limited number of customers in mid-2023. Mass deployment would stretch from June 2023 until December 2024. Once they are installed, the city will proceed with designing programs that utilize the technology to reward customer conservation and efficiency.

An analysis commissioned by the Utilities Department concluded that the new system would be close to break-even financially, with little to no impact to utility costs to customers over the 18-year life of the project. Staff also pointed to non-quantifiable benefits such as enhanced customer experience and improved system reliability to support its conclusion that the new system would be a “net benefit to all utility customers, particularly for the electricity and water utility customers.”

The Utilities Advisory Commission, which reviewed the proposal in July, concurred with this assessment and voted 5-1 to support staff’s plan for converting utility meters. The only dissenting vote came from Commissioner Phil Metz, who urged staff to develop a strategy for how the system will be used before advancing the project.

“I think there are good reasons to do (advanced metering infrastructure) but we should have a concrete plan ... in order to justify this program,” Metz said. ■

Email Staff Writer Gennady Sheyner at gsheyner@paweekly.com.
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Overdose

(continued from page 5)

Palo Alto police told Baldwin they had been trying to bust the dealers for at least a year, and the Opportunity Center for more than two years.

There were “people of interest,” but they remained elusive, police had said.

Baldwin believes the Opportunity Center should do a better job of keeping the environment safe for massive numbers of people such as her son and keeping drug dealers out of the housing. “The management should bring each person in and talk to them.

Why has the Opportunity Center allowed this to happen and to continue? There are a whole host of things that there’s no answer to,” she said. “The OC has good people that try to help, but there’s not enough staff. They don’t have the programs that could possibly help.”

Louis Chicoine, CEO of Abode Services, which operates the housing at the Opportunity Center, said everyone was hurting after Cutter’s death.

But catching drug transactions is often difficult because they aren’t done in the open and can take place behind the closed doors in people’s apartments, he said.

“Take a look at the safety and welfare of our residents and staff seriously,” Chicoine said.

A promising life hindered by mental illness

Cutter’s death, after years of trying to find the right recent drug use — he started self-medicating with methamphetamine a year before his death — was quite unexpected, she said.

And his parents’ long struggle to help him regain his stability.

Afflicted with bipolar and schizophrenia, he had once been a promising student who won a Governor’s Scholarship Program award for high academic achievement to attend college after Palo Alto High School, his mother said.

Cutter, an intelligent and passionate 19-year-old, knew when his psychiatric problems emerged. Nonetheless, he completed his undergraduate degree in management information systems at California State University, Chico. After that, his condition deteriorated and his delusions increased, Baldwin said.

He bounced in and out of the hospital and often slept outside prior to being housed at the Opportunity Center. Trying to get into county mental health rehabilitation programs proved a difficult and protracted process.

So-called “wrap-around” programs funded by the state did not work for someone as severely ill as Cutter. The programs expected him to answer the phone, schedule and remember appointments and be ready when social workers and other help providers called, Baldwin said.

One example: Cutter was discharged from Stanford Hospital on Sept. 28, 2020. He was given “unacceptable treatment by psychiatrists and cardiologists” — the latter due to heart damage from methamphetamine use. More than a week later, she said, the cardiologist sent her paperwork over to the county and then county Behavioral Health didn’t send the referral to the addiction treatment program.

Baldwin said she had not received any follow-up treatment and no one had called his parents. When he was ready to engage with mental health care, he was no longer ready for him, and the window of opportunity closed, she said.

“Santa Clara Health Department, even though they say they will see him quickly because he’s a ‘high need patient,’ still has not reached out. It seems he has to be homeless to receive mental health services. Without the help, he will be homeless,” she wrote at the time in her journal.

“One county had expected him to make an appointment with a functioning person, which is ironic because the services are supposed to be for severely mentally ill people, who aren’t able to go and manage their lives,” Baldwin said.

Time and again, there seemed to be little continuity to the services, was supposed to receive, she said. Despite his most recent hospitalization in May, in the weeks before he died, his so-called “care coordinators” decided not to come again because he had not answered the phone, Baldwin said.

“So for a week-and-a-half no one checked on my son, even though they had told me, ‘We aren’t going to let him fall through the cracks,’ ” she wrote.

Cutter was admitted to the hospital on psychiatric holds multiple times, but too often he was swiftly released. A few days after a $510 hold, he was released after eight days, as he was coherent on medication the doctor had pre-prescribed. “We, the parents, wanted him to stay longer, but because he was not ‘at that moment’ in psychosis, the hospital couldn’t continue to hold him,” she wrote.

No one took into account that he was severely paranoid, his mother said, and he had a history of stopping medications within hours or days. Baldwin pleaded with the doctor to hold him at least over the weekend, fearing for his life.

“I had kept on asking to have Jeff declared mentally incompetent, but as I was made aware, using drugs was not considered a factor. And because he used drugs, there was the stigma that that was the reason he wasn’t competent, not his mental illness,” she said.

A program that might have saved Cutter’s life

Sadly, Cutter didn’t survive long enough for a new law to take effect that might have made it easier to compel his care.

The Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors voted unan-
imously on May 25 to opt in to a state law that involves mandatory treatment for those suffering from severe mental illness and who have refused outpatient treatment program.”

Called Laura’s Law, proponents say the law helps keep people out of the criminal justice system and psychiatric hospitals. The law allows a judge to issue a court order to compel people with severe mental illness to undergo involuntary health treatment. Laura’s Law also gives families more leverage to ask the court to compel the treatment.

The law is protecting people who are a serious risk to themselves or others and who have a history of rejecting voluntary treatment. Candidates for the mandatory order must have had a serious mental illness that caused them to be hospitalized or incarcerated two times in 36 consecutive months or caused violent behavior or attempts by the patient to harm themselves or others.

With eight hospitalizations in a year and a history of stopping his medications, Jeff Cutter would have been a likely candidate.

Baldwin’s experience with the fragmented mental health system is supported by the stories of other families with severely mentally ill loved ones.

In March, former Mountain View resident Jeffrey Middlebrook told the Mountain View Voice that his son, a veteran suffering from severe post traumatic stress disorder, also struggled with drug addiction and couldn’t stay on treatment regimens. He said the court system failed his son; his son’s loose and voluntary mental health treatment plan was deemed to be in jail. After multiple medical and psychiatric admissions, and his son is now in prison. Middlebrook supported the adoption of Laura’s Law.

More oversight at the OC, but still limited resources

Palo Alto police said they are investigating an investigation into Cutter’s death, including who might have sold him the drugs. While they thought they had a suspect, they were unable to charge her with anything other than possession of drug paraphernalia. The department is beefing up patrols at the Opportunity Center, Acting Lt. Brian Philip said.

Chicoine, of Abode Services, said that if someone is involved in drug dealing at the center, that’s a lease violation and there are procedures to get people out. But catching them is tricky, and the housing center does have security measures.

“Santa Clara behavioral health...well, we should do that program and then get mental health treatment,” Baldwin recalled. “Really? Expect a person hallucinating to talk to others?”

“I had kept on believing in a system that I have come to see is broken,” she said.

Baldwin also learned the drug epidemic affects all classes of people, from the rich and powerful to homeless people, yet “stigma” and shame stops so many from asking for help, with people often characterizing them as “morally weak.”

“I have come to realize that no particular person is ‘to blame.’ Indeed, many really are attempting to help. It’s only when society has come to the point of saying ‘enough’ will we find the money, effort and drive to truly help these people,” she said.

Chicoine agreed with Baldwin that stigma around mental health issues has been the biggest hindrance to getting people the care they need and the funding for services.

“It’s about resources. Why aren’t we valuing this disease? It’s still viewed as a moral failure,” she said. •

Editor’s Note: Sue Dremann at sdremann@pawweekly.com.

A youth soccer portrait of Jeffrey Cutter when he was 9 years old is on display at his mother’s home in Palo Alto on July 1.
Boulware Park
(continued from page 5)

include a looping walkway, an open area with game tables and an upgraded playground with play areas for both tots and older children. The area of the park that runs adjacent to Matadero Creek will be kept as an open grass area, enabling future improvements along — and possible naturalization of — the concrete channel on the park’s western edge.

The block of Ash Street that today divides Boulware Park from the newly acquired parcel will become a tree-lined walkway, effectively merging the two properties into one expanded park. Chestnut Street, which currently crosses Ash, will be turned into a cul-de-sac and drop-off area for park users. Additional parking spaces would be created on Lambert Street, next to the park.

Among the most significant additions to Boulware Park will be a public restroom and a dog park — two amenities that the city’s parks master plan encourages. The 0.25-acre dog park will be located in the newly acquired area, near the basketball and bocce courts.

If things go as planned, construction will begin next summer and the park will reopen to the public in fall 2022. The next step in the process will take place on Monday, when the City Council is scheduled to approve a park improvement ordinance that will enable the project and authorize the city to go out to bid for the work.

For the city, the expansion of Boulware represents a rare achievement. It’s been nearly two decades since Heritage Park opened in Downtown North. The 2003 project was one of the most popular byproducts of the South of Forest Avenue Area Plan, a vision document that guided the transformation of the former Palo Alto Medical Foundation facilities into a new mixed-use neighborhood. That was the last time Palo Alto added neighborhood parkland, although a 7.7-acre parcel was added to Foothills Park in 2014.

Ventura is now in the midst of a similar process, with the city advancing a new vision for a 60-acre area just northwest of Boulware Park. While most city leaders and many residents agree that the area is ripe for redevelopment, consensus has been hard to come by.

Residents have advocated for the addition of affordable housing, parkland and retail. The two biggest property owners — Jay Paul and The Sobrato Organization — have shown little inclination to eliminate commercial spaces, even as Sobrato is also advancing a residential project with 91 townhomes at 200 Portage Ave., next to the location that formerly housed Fry’s Electronics.

Some housing advocates, including the nonprofit Palo Alto Forward, have urged the city to “go big” on housing in Ventura and approve a planning alternative with 1,900 housing units, while the council is favoring a more moderate option with about 500 new dwellings.

Just about everyone, however, agrees that the Ventura area needs more parks. In August, the Parks and Recreation Commission took the unusual step of unanimously approving a public letter urging the council to include more park space in their vision for Ventura’s future. Given that all alternatives call for more and denser housing, “parks will be even more important to the residents, as traditional backyard activities will become park activities,” the memo states.

Numerous Ventura residents who’ve been involved in the coordinated plan process share that view. Angela Dellaporta, a Ventura resident and member of the working group that helped compile the plan, noted that taken together, the proposals from Jay Paul and Sobrato provide about 1.63 acres of park space per 1,000 new residents, far below the city’s standard of 4 acres per 1,000 residents.

“I wonder if the property owners think the City Council is perfectly willing to throw its park space guidelines away in considering the amenities for residents who will live in these apartments,” Dellaporta said.

While all of the alternatives in the Ventura coordinated plan are conceptual and speculative, the Boulware Park project has all the pieces in place to become reality, including political support and a budget of about $3.8 million, which includes transfers of $1.5 million from funds that are designated for park improvements.

In July, the Parks and Recreation Commission unanimously endorsed the Boulware Park expansion, which commission Chair Anne Cribs called “very exciting.” City landscape architect Peter Jensen, who is spearheading the project, underscored how unusual the park expansion is.

“We don’t acquire parkland very much,” Jensen said. “We’re built out so it’s hard to have a project where you are expanding park space.”
of life has declined, compared with 60% of Democrats and 86% of those who consider themselves “pure independents.”

Top of mind for Bay Area residents is the high cost of housing, which 76% of respondents described as an “extremely serious” problem, followed by general cost of living at 68%, homelessness at 56% and the increasing frequency of wildfires and droughts at 60%.

Among those seeking to leave the Bay Area for a variety of reasons (84%) cited the high overall cost of living as a major reason, followed by housing costs (77%), quality of life (62%) and the amount of taxes (58%).

Though the survey draws a correlation between the pandemic and rising levels of anxiety and discontent, 66% of those polled said they approved of how their employer responded to the pandemic. Among those working from home, nearly all — 95% — say they want to continue working remotely at least some of the time. A majority of one in three respondents (34%) want to continue to work from home all the time and slightly more than a third (36%) want to work from home “most” of the time.

A large number of Silicon Valley employers, including tech giants like Apple, have delayed a full return to the office until this January, leaving many employees to work from home for nearly two years. During the extended hiatus, the survey found 44% of those working remotely felt their work-life balance has improved compared to just 20% among those who had to continue working in person during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The abrupt switch to telecommuting has been a mixed bag. Respondents say they are saving time normally spent sitting in gridlock, and have far more flexibility in taking care of children and other family responsibilities during the day. On the other hand, the report by Joint Venture makes clear that it’s taken a psychological toll, and that the majority of those working from home feel more isolated and alone than prior to the pandemic.

Across income levels and most demographic categories, majorities of residents feel more stressed, say their families are more stressed, feel that it has become harder connected with family and friends, and are more worried and uncertain about the future, according to the report. Only a sliver of respondents (5%) said they wanted to make a full return to in-person work once the COVID-19 public health and occupational restrictions have been lifted.

Poll
(continued from page 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for potential move from Bay Area</th>
<th>55% of 1,610 people surveyed agreed they’re likely to leave in the next few years. Here’s why.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost of living overall</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High housing costs</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of life</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of taxes</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of traffic and congestion</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family concerns</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job prospects</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hope to live outside the Bay Area but work remotely for a Bay Area employer</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Joint Venture Silicon Valley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staffing
(continued from page 5)

positions across the economy may also be having an impact. Austin pointed to the “help wanted” signs in many restaurant windows as an example of the current labor shortage.

Most of the positions school districts are having trouble filling are part-time or hourly. Austin said, as well as jobs that require specialized training, such as bus drivers. Palo Alto’s superintendent currently has enough bus drivers, “but by the skin of our teeth,” Austin said.

Part-time, low-wage jobs like crossing guards (the Los Lomitas district pays $45 to $52 for two hours a day) are often filled by senior citizens, a population now trying to minimize their exposure to COVID-19, Chan explained.

This week, Chan planned to train a crossing guard to replace her — a duty not normally delegated to district administrators — but the candidate bowed out of the position. The district is re-evaluating how it fills its crossing guard positions.

Over in the Mountain View Los Altos Union High School District (MVLA), officials are seeing “very little turnover” among classroom assistants and in some clerical positions, HR director Lylea Benson said. In August and September this year, 17 classified employees resigned, compared with four during the same period in 2020 and seven in 2019, Benson said. Classified employees are those who don’t have a teaching credential.

“It is very atypical that at the start of the school year you have people resigning,” Benson said. She attributed the resignations to a variety of factors, including some who are dealing with the aftermath of illness and family hardship during the pandemic, as well as others who have reset their priorities and want to make changes like staying home with their own children.

Menlo Park City School District staff are also facing staffing shortages. They’ve found it difficult to fill long-term substitute teachers, according to Assistant Superintendent of Talent and Technology Kristian Gracia. The district is having difficulties filling daily positions when teacher or staff are out of the classroom or off work.

Some districts have turned to increasing pay as a way to attract more applicants. For substitutes in particular, many local districts have boosted wages. Palo Alto recently increased pay from $165 to $180 per day for a typical substitute who fills in for teachers on longer absences, earning $300 a day, Austin said.

MVLA boosted daily substitute pay to $225, up from $180. Long-term substitutes make $473 per day, Benson said.

A potential solution: ‘Resident’ substitutes

Another strategy that has been effective for some districts is creating a group of substitutes to show up every day, regardless of the actual need, so that someone is available if a last-minute absence occurs.

MVLA in particular decided to offer the summer to start a “resi- dent” substitute program in anticipation of a likely shortage this fall. The district pays five or six substitutes to consistently staff each of the district’s high schools.

The program has been a “tremendous benefit,” Benson said, adding that the district hasn’t “felt the pain” of the substitute shortage that other districts are experiencing.

“Having the resident subs available to plug in when we’re in a pinch has really assisted,” Benson said. The district is considering expanding the program as the winter flu season approaches.

Some districts have turned to having a pandemic hiring initiative back in the spring, looking for community members who could super- vise classrooms where the teacher was still instructing students over Zoom. Some of those hires ended up completing the required steps to become a regular substitute, rather than a classroom monitor, and stayed on this fall.

In some cases, those were stay-at-home parents who wanted to help the school return to in-person classes.

When they heard that we could get school up and running and we needed these vital positions, they were on board 100%, Benson said.

Alice Tong was among the parents who signed up last spring to supervise classrooms and is now working as a resident substitute at Mountain View High.

With one child who graduated from Mountain View High in the spring and a twin of twins who started their freshmen year at the school this fall, Tong said she saw an opportunity to help support kids who may have had a difficult time during the pandemic.

“I wanted to help out the kids who were coming back, and also the school and the teachers,” she said.

Tong came in with a lot of experience, having first started subbing in the Mountain View Whisman School District roughly eight years ago. She decided to keep working for the high school this fall, in part because being a resident substitute gave her a consistent schedule. Currently, she’s working every Tuesday and Thursday.

“In most school districts when you sub, it’s on an on-call basis,” Tong said. “It’s very difficult to plan because you don’t know if you’re working that day and you don’t know where you’re working.”

Other school districts are also trying out a similar model, where they guarantee certain substitutes regular work.

The Palo Alto district is offering a resident substitute $250 per day and is looking to find four to five each high school, plus three at each middle school. The Los Altos School District currently has one substitute who works every day but moves among schools. The district is looking to hire a second.

“We know we’re going to need them, so we’ve hired them permanently for the year,” Green said. All districts are also running substitute recruitment events. Los Altos is holding a substitute information night next month at which attendees will learn about what’s required to become a substitute.

“We’re not necessarily having a higher number of staff absences, but there is absolutely a substitute shortage,” Los Altos Superintendent Jeff Baier said. “And we’re all grappling for the same pool of people.”

Districts are also in some cases turned to outside companies to help provide substitutes. Both the Los Altos and Mountain View Whisman districts have contract- ed with Swing Education, which recruits substitute teachers and provides them to districts.

In many cases though, Rudolph said, his district’s most reliable substitutes are those who are hired directly by the district.

A rise in staff absences

In some cases, the substitute teacher shortage is being compounded by an increase in staff absences, potentially because of the increased emphasis being placed during the pandemic on staying home if you are ill.

The Mountain View Los Altos Union High School District has seen the number of teachers missing work for personal or family illnesses go up somewhat this fall. Teachers missed 148.33 days of work last month due to illness, compared with 131.6 days in 2019, according to data Benson compiled.

However, most other districts say that teacher attendance has stayed relatively stable and the bulk of the problem is the lack of available substitutes.

“We’re not necessarily having a higher number of staff absences, but there is absolutely a substitute shortage,” Los Altos Superintendent Jeff Baier said. “And we’re all grappling for the same pool of people.”

Email Staff writer Kevin Forestieri at kforestieri@mvvoice.com.
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