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East Palo Alto Today



Providing news that is relevant, informative and critical

www.epatoday.org

East Palo Alto and Belle Haven

September - October 2008

Vol. 2 No.15

EPA policy a model for cities

By **Henrietta J. Burroughs**
EPA Today

In recognizing that "development as usual" is not enough to improve conditions for residents, the East Bay

Alliance for a Sustainable Economy honored the city of East Palo Alto for its responsible development efforts.

The recognition came at a luncheon held in Oakland on September 24 to mark the

release of the East Bay Alliance's special report titled "Building a Better Bay Area: Community Benefit Tools and Case Studies to Achieve Responsible Development." During the luncheon the

alliance recognized East Palo Alto's First Source Hiring program as a model for other communities. The report said that the First Source Hiring program was indicative of a positive trend by a municipal-

ity to set community standards and policies that benefit its workforce, housing and livability.

In representing East Palo Alto as a speaker at the continued on page 14

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Lady Wilma

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Stealing a nation vote by vote

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Rapper makes a Deal

Page 11



Inch Scholarship Winners

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East Palo Alto resident Lorraine Holmes stands beside a cardboard cutout of Democratic presidential nominee Senator Barack Obama in the smallest Obama Campaign Headquarters in Northern California. The informational center is located on the grounds of the Whole House Building Supply at 1955 Pulgas Avenue in East Palo Alto.

The rent crisis continues

By **Dana Tom**
East Palo Alto Intern

East Palo Alto resident and Santa Clara University history teacher Eric Oberle has not been able to do his laundry in the building of his Page Mill Properties apartment since December 2007. Despite six letters to his landowner and similar complaints from his neighbors about other main-

tenance problems on the property, Oberle has not received any response.

"Page Mill has an interest in annoying tenants out of living on their property," he said. "They intentionally do not respond. They think that if they intimidate us out of their buildings, maybe people will leave."

In addition to his complaints

of poor maintenance, Oberle filed a class action lawsuit against Page Mill Properties on July 15 in the San Mateo Superior Court. He claims that the company has illegally avoided registering its property with the EPA Rent Stabilization Board in order to evade state rules on rent increases.

Page Mill Properties is the

largest apartment owner in East Palo Alto. Representatives for the firm say Page Mill Properties can legally organize its 1,700 units into groups of four; thus setting up Limited Liability Companies. Rent Stabilization Board member William Webster claims that the creation of the Limited Liability Companies is continued on page 5

Voting rights for jail inmates

By **Jennifer Rae Taylor**
EPA Today Contributor

On a cloudy Saturday morning in August, the sidewalk outside the Glenn E. Dyer Jail in Oakland seems an odd site for a voter registration drive -- but organizers are targeting an atypical audience: inmates and those visiting them.



Elder Freeman holding voting rights materials.

"You've got the right and reason to register to vote in

this election and so do the people you're coming to visit," said Linda Evans to two women who were approaching the jail entrance. Evans is co-director of the San Francisco-based non-profit All of Us or None, which organized the August 16th Day of Action to raise awareness of voting eligibility. Evans and

the group's members want to counter what they call "widespread confusion about inmates' legal voting rights." Chapters throughout the state held drives in Alameda, Sacramento, Orange, San Mateo, Los Angeles and San Diego counties.

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Inside

- Editorial
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- TV Listings
- Youth News

Fire Prevention Week

Sacramento - A pot holder too close to a lit burner or a space heater left on overnight could be all it takes to start a home fire. In fact, cooking and heating are among the leading causes of home fires in California and that is why CAL FIRE, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, is asking for homeowner's help in "Preventing Home Fires".

CAL FIRE responds to over 300,000 emergencies and calls for service each year. Over 5,000 of these emergencies are fires inside homes and other buildings. "In the past three years hundreds of people have died in home fires in California," said Chief Ruben Grijalva, director of CAL FIRE. "What

is so tragic is that many of these fires are easily preventable when residents take simple steps."

It is because of these startling figures that this year's theme of Fire Prevention Week 2008 is "Prevent Home Fires!" From October 5-11, 2008, CAL FIRE and fire departments across the country will be encouraging their communities to check their homes for fire hazards. With a little extra caution, preventing the leading causes of home fires – cooking, heating, electrical and smoking – is within their power.

Here are some simple steps to help prevent home fires:

Cooking: Stay in the kitchen when you are frying, grilling, or broiling food. If you leave the kitchen for even a short period time,

turn off the stove.

Heating: Keep all things that can burn, such as paper, bedding or furniture, at least 3 feet away from heating equipment.

Electrical: Replace cracked and damaged electrical cords; use extension cords for temporary wiring only. Consider having additional circuits or receptacles added by a qualified electrician.

Smoking: If you smoke, smoke outside; wherever you smoke, use deep, sturdy ashtrays.

Each year, the week surrounding the date of October 9th is celebrated as

National Fire Prevention Week. Why October 9th? The date commemorates the infamous "Great Chicago Fire" of 1871 that killed 250 people and destroyed over 17,000

homes. Fire Prevention Week is organized each year by the National Fire Protection Association.

For more fire safety tips visit the CAL FIRE Web site at www.fire.ca.gov.

Elegant Tea Party

DATE: Saturday, October 4, 2008
 TIME: 12:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
 DONATION: \$25.00 per person

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The San Mateo County Democratic Party, Menlo Park and East Palo Alto City Council members, current and former RCSD Trustees, teachers, and many others have endorsed my candidacy. We've been patient for too long. Let's raise expectations and make this district the best in Silicon Valley.



Court Skinner

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Community News Briefs

Police Foundation

The East Palo Alto Police Department is in the process of forming the East Palo Alto Police Foundation. The Police Foundation will be a not-for-profit organization whose primary goal is to establish public-private partnerships to enhance public safety in East Palo Alto.

By partnering with private corporations, institutions, and donors, the Police Foundation will enable the East Palo Alto Police Department to strengthen its outreach programs and enhance its inter-

nal capacity, training, technology, infrastructure, and its ability to engage in progressive crime-fighting techniques without increasing its General Fund expenditures.

Chief Davis and the police captains have met with several major private corporations and institutions that have agreed to provide support to this endeavor. Over the next couple of months, the Police Foundation will be formalized and an independent governing board selected. The governing board will be responsible for fund raising and will decide what type of grants

and/or in-kind services (like equipment and technology) the Police Foundation will provide to the police department. However, as with any grant or donation offered to the City, the East Palo Alto Police Department must obtain the approval of the East Palo Alto City Council prior to receiving any grants and/or donations.

Impact on EPA

Citigroup's acquisition of Wachovia Bank could affect Wachovia's office in East Palo Alto at 1950 University

Avenue. Wachovia has 14,000 square feet of office space at that location.

Simitian Bill signed into law

The elderly and those living on the margin economically now have additional protection against those who would prey upon them.

Senator Joe Simitian's bill SB 1400 sets new restrictions and requirements to prevent deceptive sweepstakes solicitations.

"The public is particularly susceptible to this kind of

thing in a difficult economy," Simitian said. "When folks are worried or desperate, they're easy targets."

SB 1400, which was just signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, came out of Sen. Simitian's annual "There Oughta Be A Law" contest, which invites state residents to submit ideas for new state legislation.

The bill was the idea of Menlo Park resident Lisa Conrad and it has the support of many senior advocacy groups and consumer groups.

City, County & State Government Meetings & Contacts

East Palo Alto City Council

The City of Council meets the first and third Tuesday of each month at 7:30 pm in the Council Chambers, East Palo Alto City Hall, 2415 University Avenue; (650) 853-3100 or Fax: (650) 853-3115. Website: www.ci.east-palo-alto.ca.us

East Palo Alto City Council Members

Patricia Foster- Mayor
(650) 328-3944

Donna Rutherford
Vice Mayor
(650) 327-7926

Ruben Abrica
(650) 321-4001

A. Peter Evans -
(650) 321-1009

David E. Woods
(650) 853-1907

East Palo Alto Boards, Commissions, Committees

Planning Commission
Second and Fourth Monday

Rent Stabilization Board
Second and Fourth
Wednesday

Public Works &
Transportation Commission
First and Third Wednesday

Youth Advisory Committee
First Thursday of each
month

Senior Advisory Committee
Meets the 1st Wednesday
of each month - 6:30p.m. -
City Hall.

Menlo Park City Council
The Menlo Park City
Council holds meetings
every Tuesday at 7:00 p.m.
at the City Council
Chambers located at 801
Laurel Street. You can sub-

scribe to receive the agendas and minutes by e-mail when they are published. An agenda is posted in advance of the weekly meeting, and past agendas and minutes are filed by the date they were held. If you have questions about an agenda please call the City Clerk at 650.330.6620.

Menlo Park City Council Members

Andrew M. Cohen - Mayor
(650)327-5332

Heyward Robinson
Vice Mayor
(650) 330-6631

John C. Boyle
(650)330-6630

Richard Cline
(650) 228-5166

Kelly J. Fergusson
(650) 327-4533

Menlo Park Boards, Commissions, Committees

Arts Commission
Bicycle Commission
Environmental Quality
Commission
Housing Commission
Las Pulgas Committee
Library Commission
Parks and Recreation
Commission
Planning Commission
Transportation Commission

San Mateo County Bd. of Supervisors

Supervisor Rose Jacobs Gibson, Fourth District

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors meets on February 7, 28, March 7, 14, 28, 2006 in the County Government Center: Hall of Justice & Records 400 County Center, Redwood City, CA 94063. Roll call at 8 a.m. 9 a.m.

Regular & Consent Agenda Items.

State Officials

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: 916-445-2841
Fax: 916-445-4633
Email: governor@governor.ca.gov

Assembly Member Ira Ruskin

District Address
5050 El Camino Real
Ste.117
Los Altos, CA 94022
650 691-2121

Senator Joseph S. Simitian

District Address
160 Town & Country Village
Palo Alto, CA 94301
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City Council



Bernardo Huerta

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\$900K for sidewalks by Federal SRTS funds, proposal sent.
\$447K paid annually for pavement repairs by County Measure A.
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Will work to increase these funds from inside and outside the City.

This will increase home values.

Information to ensure a safe dwelling

By Frank Rainone
EPA Today Contributor

The information illegal dwellings in the May/June edition concerning illegal dwellings was very helpful and timely. The purpose of this article is to provide information to help residents and property owners to understand what is required, from the City of East Palo Alto's perspective, and what they can do to ensure provision of a safe, habitable dwelling. Also, information is provided in the article regarding how the violation abatement process works.

CODE CONSIDERATIONS

The housing code establishes minimum requirements for a habitable dwelling unit. It mandates such things as a fully complying kitchen with working cooking appliances. The code requires at least one bathroom, which would contain a bathtub, shower, sink and toilet. The electrical system should be completely safe; covers on all boxes, all lighting, fans, motors, and receptacles should be in working order. The building or unit should have a fully running hot and cold water system. The emergency egress system from all sleeping rooms should be in working order and bars on windows are prohibited. Another major part of a habit-

able unit is proper light and ventilation for all rooms. An occupancy inspection can be made at the owner's request and expense to insure the unit meets the general provisions for a habitable dwelling unit.

DO RESEARCH

A prospective tenant likewise can take precautions before entering into a rental agreement. For instance, if a person is contemplating on renting a portion of a building such as a garage that was converted, the prospective tenant can always visit the Building Services Division under the Community Development Department at 1960 Tate St and review the building file to see if a permit was obtained for the garage conversion. If no permit exists, then the conversion is illegal and in most cases will not allow proper human habitation. In some cases, if the tenant has to move out of the property because of an illegal issue, the owner may be liable for relocation fees.

On the other hand, it is not recommended for a tenant to try and lower monthly rent payments in exchange for allowing existing nuisances or code violations to go unrepaired. In most cases the tenant is unknowing about the seriousness of the existing violations. It is better to have

the property owner make the needed repairs to bring his or her building or property back into compliance then allow violations to exist that may cause harm to life, property or even death.

INSURANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Property owners may want to review their home owner's insurance policy. In most cases, illegal construction may not be covered under the policy thus any damages incurred may be out of pocket cost to the owner.

EXISTING VIOLATIONS

The City has a process in place through its Municipal Code that deals with nuisances or code violations caused either by the property owner or tenant. In either case, there is a process for the City to eradicate such nuisances as outlined in Chapter 8 of the City's Municipal Code. The process usually is started, by giving the owner of the property written notice based on an inspection by either the building inspector, or the code enforcement officer, to abate a nuisance or code violation within an appointed time period. If the nuisance is not abated by the time given, an abatement hearing will then be scheduled and held. If, before the abatement hear-

ing is commenced, the owner takes action to rid the property of the nuisance, the hearing can be canceled, after a site inspection is done by either the building inspector, or the code enforcement officer to verify the nuisance has indeed been removed. This information that the nuisance was removed will be placed in the building file and this case closed. If the owner does not take care of the abatement, and has gone through the abatement process including the hearing and appeals and still ignores the Cities' abatement orders, then the City may take steps to abate the problem with its own resources, completely at the property owner's expense. In some cases, further action such as civil or criminal penalties may be charged against the property owner or other actions taken. There is also an emergency provision built into the Code that allows the City to take

immediate action to remove or contain any nuisance if the situation threatens life limb or property.

In a nutshell, the forgoing is the process the owner of a property is taken through in order to handle issues as they relate to abating nuisances or code violations on their property.

Again, I sincerely hope this information provides some useful guidelines in helping people to understand what is required in providing a habitable dwelling and how the abatement process works. Please feel free to stop by the city's Building Division, located at its One-Stop Center at 1960 Tate Street or call (650) 853-3189 and we will try to answer any questions you may have about these subjects or questions dealing with building codes in general.

Frank Rainone is the Chief Building Official for the City of East Palo Alto

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<p>Endorsed by (partial list):</p> <table border="0"> <tr><td>Bob Hoover</td><td>Hon. Pat Foster</td></tr> <tr><td>Larry Moody</td><td>Steve Teu</td></tr> <tr><td>Hon. Marcelino Lopez</td><td>Dr. Omo Sattewhite</td></tr> <tr><td>Dr. Faye McNair-Knox</td><td>Rev. Paul Bains</td></tr> <tr><td>Stewart Hyland</td><td>J.T. Turner</td></tr> <tr><td>Julio Garcia</td><td>Patrick Brock</td></tr> <tr><td>Rev. John Liotti</td><td>Douglas Fort</td></tr> <tr><td>Dee Uhila</td><td>Dr. William Webster</td></tr> <tr><td>Hon. David Woods</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Cruz Montes-Hyland</td><td></td></tr> </table>	Bob Hoover	Hon. Pat Foster	Larry Moody	Steve Teu	Hon. Marcelino Lopez	Dr. Omo Sattewhite	Dr. Faye McNair-Knox	Rev. Paul Bains	Stewart Hyland	J.T. Turner	Julio Garcia	Patrick Brock	Rev. John Liotti	Douglas Fort	Dee Uhila	Dr. William Webster	Hon. David Woods		Cruz Montes-Hyland		<p>Qualifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Son of Elbert and Dorothy Mitchell (50 year residents) Masters Degrees in City Planning and Political Science Elected Trustee, EPA Sanitary District San Mateo County Commission on Aging EPA Planning Commission Metropolitan Transportation Commission, Advisory Committee EPA, Community-based Transportation Planning Committee Mapped crime hot spots for EPA Police Department for effective crime reduction 	<p>Focus Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe streets Accessible housing Community cultural and recreational spaces Jobs from development and redevelopment Full service supermarket Community owned business Youth development Real community input into public decision-making
Bob Hoover	Hon. Pat Foster																					
Larry Moody	Steve Teu																					
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Rev. John Liotti	Douglas Fort																					
Dee Uhila	Dr. William Webster																					
Hon. David Woods																						
Cruz Montes-Hyland																						

Endorsed by:



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please save saturday, october 4, 2008 for womenade, a luncheon celebration of the wonderful work done by ravenwood family health center.

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Rent crisis continues

continued from page 1

an attempt by Page Mill Properties to evade registering its apartments with the Rent Stabilization Board.

"That's the kind of game they play," said Oberle. "Page Mill has acted so illegally in the past year that every tenant is thinking of a lawsuit. It's that bad. They are banking on the idea that they can break the law and no one will call them on it. The citizens of EPA need to call them on it."

Heller-Ehrman, a private law firm from San Francisco, is representing Oberle and other residents in court.

Lawsuits Filed

Webster said Page Mill Properties filed a lawsuit in July, which challenges the board's claim that the company fails to properly register its property, Webster said.

Stanford University law professor Juliet Brodie, who is Director of Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto, said that Page Mill Properties filed another lawsuit against the Rent Stabilization Board that challenges the board's July 9 modifications to the regulations of the city's rent-stabilization ordinance.

The modifications updated and clarified the language of the regulations, which detail the board's ability to enforce the rent-stabilization ordinance rules, Webster said.

Maximum rent increases

According to the city's rent-stabilization ordinance, the maximum rent increases cannot exceed the Consumer Price Index, set by the federal government at 3.2 percent this year.

However, Page Mill Properties' claims that their average rent increase of 32 percent, although higher than ordinance regulations, is an accumulative increase of past years when tenants experienced no increases, according to the company's spokesman Lance Igon.

Brodie said that the recent modifications made by the East Palo Alto Rent Stabilization Board make it clear that Page Mill Properties' system of "banking rent increases" is illegal.

In discussing the back and forth lawsuits taking place, Webster said that Page Mill Properties filed yet another lawsuit against the city in July. He said that the latest one claimed that the registration fee increases that landlords are required to pay to the Rent Stabilization Board are too high. The fees recently increased from \$135 to \$240.

Igon declined to comment on the company's July lawsuits and Page Mill

A Chronology of Recent Events

Since this article was filed: Page Mill has filed several motions in San Mateo municipal court trying to block the city from obtaining the information on rent levels which it has requested and is under the ordinance entitled.

On September 1st, members of the Fair Rent Now Coalition and EPA YUCA marched on Page Mill Properties' Headquarters in East Palo Alto, presenting Mr. Taran with hundreds of demand letters from aggrieved tenants. Hearing of the March, Page Mill closed their office. YUCA and The Fair Rent Now Coalition have promised monthly marches on Page Mill Properties and its investors, until they follow the law.

In early September, the Fair Rent Now Coalition presented over 140 formal petitions to the Rent Stabilization Board. Residents made detailed complaints concerning the rent increases they have experienced under Page Mill, provided extensive documentation and asked for legal relief.

On September 3rd, Superior Court Judge Quentin Kopp ruled that the Rent Stabilization Board had made a procedural error in imposing an increased fee for the next fiscal year past the deadline for doing so.

On September 5th, Superior Court Judge Marie S. Weiner ruled against Page Mill Properties's refusal to provide information regarding the actual rents charged in Page Mill Units. The city prevailed in asserting its right to know the amounts that were being charged so that it could prevent increases from exceeding the annual percentage. Page Mill's claims that this information was withheld in order to "protect tenant privacy" were rebuffed by the Judge Weiner.

Properties' lawyer Christine Griffiths was unavailable for comment.

Webster said Page Mill Properties also increased its tenants' rents twice this year, this past February and this August. The ordinance passed by East Palo Alto's Rent Stabilization Board only permits rent increases annually.

The city filed a Temporary Restraining Order against Page Mill Properties July 31, in order to stop all rent increases during the upcoming court hearings, Brodie said. The city was denied the injunction this week, but the city attorney will probably try again in the future, she added.

"The decent thing for Page Mill to do would be to not impose new rent increases and accept the standing rent rates while these lawsuits play out," Brodie added. "That would be a gesture of good faith."

Brodie suspects that Page Mill Properties will raise the rents this month and repay tenants if they eventually lose in court. She said that many low income families do not possess enough money to wait for repayment after a court decision, which may take years.

It was in December 2007 when the struggle over rent increases between Page Mill Properties and the city escalated.

Igon said that when Page Mill Properties tried to raise rents in December 2007, the board changed the rules of

legal maximum rent increases, "clarifying" that landlords cannot raise rents beyond the Consumer Price Index value of that year. Igon said the board did not notify Page Mill Properties of this rule until after their December 2007 increases.

Page Mill sues

Page Mill Properties sued the city in January after the East Palo Alto City Council declared an "emergency rent freeze," in response to the December 2007 raises. Brodie said the city declared the six-month moratorium on rent increases because the company's rent increase exceeded the maximum rates of the rent-stabilization ordinance.

Page Mill Properties made similar arguments about their further rent increases in their July lawsuit against the Rent Stabilization Board.

Webster added that the company only gave tenants a 30 day advance notice for their December 2007 increases, despite the required 60 day advance notice for a rent increase greater than 10 percent.

Igon said Page Mill Properties tried to negotiate with the city before the company filed the lawsuit, but the city council refused "a sit down."

"The city took an adversarial stance against the company early on," Igon said. "We're trying to improve the quality of life for EPA residents, so we should have been welcomed to the city with open arms."

The court declared that the city had no legal right to declare an "emergency rent freeze," Igon said. But, Page Mill Properties did eventually modify its notifications to tenants, allowing a 60 day advance notice.

Also, as a part of the January lawsuit, Page Mill Properties asked the court to approve a declaration that established its rent increases as legal. That court decision is still pending.

Igon said that although the city thought that the December 2007 rent increases would force "hundreds to thousands" of tenants to leave, only 13 of the 1,650 tenants explicitly notified the company of financial strain after the rent increases were implemented.

"There was no emergency," Igon said. "Page Mill isn't interested in moving tenants, and we're doing all that we can to ensure that tenants are living in a safe and secure environment."

Despite Page Mill Properties December 2007 rent increases, which were only implemented in February due to a legal battle the previous month between the company and the city, Igon said the property rents are still either below or at market value.

The Community Legal Services and Heller-Ehrman motioned to join the lawsuit on August 7, but the court denied their motion and suggested they try again the following week, Brodie said. She said that by joining the case, the Law Community Legal Services and Heller-Ehrman will provide the city with more legal resources.

Motion denied

The judge also denied the Community Legal Services' motion Thursday to involve Page Mill Properties tenant Arnold Hart in the case. Brodie said involving an individual tenant would enable him to share his experiences. Oberle experienced a 32 percent rent increase in May. Other residents dealt with an average 10 percent increase in February after the January court decision. They also can expect an average 7.7 percent increase on August 15, Igon said.

"You get upset coming home because there's always a new notice on your door, which is confusing and vaguely intimidating," Oberle said. "Page Mill is a big, powerful and rich bully, and I just don't like bullies. They make glib statements that 'we've received no complaints' and 'we tried to negotiate,' and that they 'are improving the properties.'"

These are the worst kinds of smirking misrepresentations. Page Mill has received many complaints. Their desire to "negotiate" away the law is understandable, but would have been illegal. So they are pretending like they want to help, when their apparent goal is to harass. They are cackling over the fact that have driven many residents from their homes through a vast misinformation campaign. Every one of their claims can be read two ways. Shame on them."

Improvement to properties

Igon said Page Mill Properties made an \$11 million investment "commitment" to improve the property, including new roofs and increased security. Oberle, however, said he and his neighbors see no improvements except for external landscaping changes.

Brodie said her offices received 150 complaints from tenants, all of which encourage the Rent Stabilization Board to solve the Page Mill Properties' rent issue in local EPA system instead of in the state courts. She added that these complaints will be addressed in the coming weeks.

"Dealing with Page Mill Properties is like dealing with the Wizard of Oz," Oberle said. "David Taran, [Page Mill Properties' CEO], sits in his palace and looks down on EPA in more ways than one." The local Fair Rent Now Coalition, a group of "concerned" EPA residents, including Oberle and his wife, gathered signatures and held an event on July 26 and August 2. Tenants shared their experiences with the recent rent increases at these events.

The Fair Rent Now Coalition encourages tenants to not be afraid of Page Mill Properties, and it helps residents under.

"The main thing I teach my students is that democracy is a combination of people's will and the law," Oberle said. "It has become obvious that the big bully on the block is breaking the law, and someone has to do something. It us up to the people to demand that the law be enforced, and that everyone know the truth. It is a shameful truth. Shame on Mr. Taran, Shame on Mr. Igon. Shame on CalPERS (the California Public Employees Retirement System) for investing in people who would behave this way. The truth will come out to the people."

Dana Tom is a student at Menlo School in Atherton, CA.

From the Editor's Desk

Crossing paths and paying tribute

On Sunday, September 22, I heard a radio report that almost took my breath away. The reporter said that Nancy Hicks Maynard had died in Southern California of complete organ failure. What a shock.

When I met Nancy Hicks Maynard in New York City several decades ago, she was a reporter for the New York Times. I had just received a masters degree in International Affairs and had worked a few months as a reporter for the New York Post. At the time, I was thinking of applying for a position at the New York Times. One of my colleagues suggested that I speak to Nancy Hicks. So, I called Nancy and introduced myself. She invited me to the New York Times for lunch.

When the appointed day came, Nancy and I met at her job and during our lunch, Nancy was open about her current employment and was very encouraging. In the end, I decided not to pursue the job and focused, instead on another position. I had an opportunity to work at a television station in New York if I attended a summer program at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University.

In the summer program which was funded by the Ford Foundation and major television stations, I met other minority students from all over the country. For five days a week for nearly three months, I attended sessions to learn the fundamentals of television reporting with Geraldo Rivera, Isabel Duron, Maureen Bunyan, Michelle Clarke, Roger Sims, Gail Christian, Christopher Chow and others who would later launch outstanding media careers throughout the country.

It was a who's who of future media stars and superstars.

But at the time we were all simply students with no idea of what the future would hold. We had all been admitted into the program in the aftermath of the racial disturbances that swept the U.S. following Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's assassination. The government investigation of the disturbances,



Henrietta J. Burroughs

known as the Kerner report recommended, among other things, that America needed to counter the racial divisions in the country, by having a more honest portrayal of what was happening in minority communities rather than the persistent articles and reports that focused on the negative events in those communities. Who was better equipped to give those reports than minority journalists?

At the end of the summer, we all dispersed to serve as reporters at various television stations and newspapers throughout the country. In a few years, the summer program for minority journalists ended. But the concept for the program didn't die. It lived on on the West Coast because of the dedication and commitment of two people - Nancy Hicks and Robert Maynard, a couple who enlisted others to work with them to refine the concept of the program. Bob Maynard, who was a successful journalist in his own right, became the publisher of the Oakland Tribune, a position which made him the first and only African American to own a major American newspaper. This talented couple started the Maynard Institute, to train minority journalists. Bob and Nancy are now dead. But the institute that bears their name continues to train journalists

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Photo courtesy of HJ Burroughs

The demolition of the shopping area on University Avenue and Donohoe Street started at the end of September. The building of University Plaza is about to begin.

Letters in East Palo Alto Today

Knowing can help defeat Proposition 6

Dear Editor

As if being from one of the many low-income communities of color in California isn't tough enough. Everyday we as a people are labeled as "criminals" and "gang affiliated." For more than 20 years, there has been a mass incarceration of Black and Latino people. Even with the reported decrease in violent crime, the state stands motionless with a clairvoyant opportunity to do a sweeping revamp both of the criminal justice system and the fatally flawed "robo-budget". Yet here comes Proposition 6. Like the state of our economy, it gets worst for us. It was authored by two state legislators, George and Sharon Runner. This pair obviously knows nothing about the urban areas that surround their suburbia lives. They put this initiative on the November ballot, aiming to lengthen sentences by a decade on gang members, to expand 40 new crimes and penalties, and to

increase funding to prisons, jails, probation and police. Sadly enough this initiative would also expand circumstances under which juveniles (our kids) as young as 14 could be tried as adults.

This initiative is so reminiscent of the March 2000 Prop 21 "Juvenile Justice Initiative", which also targeted youth. Like Prop 21 there would be less funding for schools. The education of our future leaders will be cut and prison funding once again will increase. In addition, it adds \$500 million to build jails for all the prisoners snared under the new provisions, according to Legislative Analyst Office.

-Proposition 6 targets Black and Brown youth by requiring anyone 14 years or older charged with a "gang-related" felony, including nonviolent felonies to be tried, as adults!

-Targets low-income people by providing money to local housing authorities (Section 8) to conduct intensive background checks of Section 8 recipients, that may result in a loss of housing assistance.

- Targets immigrants by denying bail to undocumented immigrants charged with "violent" or "gang-related crimes." Prop 6 also requires an immediate report of documentation status.

Prop 6 would also remove drug/alcohol treatment groups from participating in local juvenile justice policy making. Our prisons are severely overcrowded and not up to constitutional standard. Lack of full knowledge hurts too many people. Voters make it worst by passing tough-on-crime laws that fill up the prisons--- or would, if the prisons weren't already bursting with the disease that fills the hallways of our California State Prisons.

Residents of East Palo Alto, this proposition directly affects all of us. We must rise up and defeat Prop 6! The time is now. This matter is urgent! VOTE NO on Proposition 6!

Eliza Smith
East Palo Alto resident
YUCA member

EPA Today's Policies & Principles

In order to better serve the communities of East Palo Alto and Belle Haven, East Palo Alto Today has made the commitment to operate with high professional standards and to adhere to a strict code of ethical conduct.

The principles and policies stated herein serve as an agreement with our readers, advertisers and all others

within our service area.

East Palo Alto Today is dedicated to conscientious journalism. We maintain this commitment by seeking and reporting the truth, acting with integrity, and serving the public interest. We will report the news thoroughly and accurately and include multiple perspectives without favoring one over the other.

We will hold ourselves accountable to common standards of decency, treating our colleagues, news sources, and the public with respect.

We are committed to maintaining our independence by avoiding partnerships, investments or business relationships that would compromise the integrity of our news reports

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Opinion

The ideas expressed on this page are solely the views of the individual authors who do not represent East Palo Alto Today's Board or staff.

Breathe Deep East Palo Alto

In memory of Friolan Chan-Liongco, a man who cleaned the air with his courage

by Raj Jayadev

Breathe deep East Palo Alto. For Froilan Chan-Liongco, breathe deep.

The toxics that may have once filled your lungs -- the pollutants from the chemical waste plant that threatened cancer, asthma and birth defects -- are no longer. Froilan Chan-Liongco, who passed away last week due to a heart attack, cleaned the air for you.

A former employee of the high tech toxic waste plant named Romic, Chan-Liongco stood up to the company who had for decades sacrificed East Palo Alto community members health in its pursuit

of profit. Two years ago, at the age of 64, he was burned, literally, at Romic in a chemical explosion that led to an 11-day hospital stay, chronic pain and unemployment. But Froilan refused to be bought, silent, or defeated and filed grievances with the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration. His filing, as it turned out, was the tipping point that led to the demise of Romic. There had been decades of community organizing against Romic, imploring public health and safety agencies to hold the renegade company to standard. Froilan's case made the chorus of calls by the community

to shut down Romic undeniable, his was the voice they needed all along.

They have since shut down Romic, and East Palo Alto is cleaning the land of whatever contaminants lay hidden its soil. From now on, there is generations that may grow up not knowing what dangers once seeped, leaked and exploded there. They may never know of Froilan, a Filipino immigrant who was a David to a modern day Goliath, a multi-million dollar company backed by the most powerful industry known in the history of the world. And the old orthodoxy of organizing that once existed in utter isolation, if not opposition of

each other -- worker organizing inside the plant gates, community organizing outside -- was debunked by Froilan's gesture by reaching out to East Palo Alto, and the residents receiving him as one of their own.

That relationship, that synergy that shut down Romic, was not just strategic, it was caring, personal, sincere. It is why at Froilan Chan-Liongco's viewing last week, amongst his immediate family and friends, three rows were filled with East Palo Alto youth from Youth United for Community Action (YUCA). They came because their common cause also made them family. And sleeping

peacefully through the viewing ceremony was baby

Breathe Deep

Kierce, hardly a month old, in her mother Annie's arms. Annie, the 24-year-old director of YUCA, fought Romic since she was a fourteen-year-old.

Baby Keirce will have never met Froilan, but his life protected hers, saved her from perils that previous generations had to bare

Take a deep breath East Palo Alto, and honor Froilan Chan-Liong

Raj Jayadev is the editor of Silicon Valley Debug. The magazine's website is:

<http://www.siliconvalleydebug.com>

Point, click, get healthy

By Supervisor Rose Jacobs Gibson
EPA Today Contributor

A quiet house is unusual when you have children or grandchildren. Yet, adults in our County and Country roam the house to an awkward silence. The reason? Children and grandchildren are found sitting at the computer surfing the internet.

Unfortunately, all that clicking burns few calories and contributes to America's childhood obesity epidemic. I'm not going to counsel you to take away that computer, but San Mateo County unveiled a new tool that may prove the old saying, "if you can't beat them, join them."

Last week, San Mateo County unveiled a web site dedicated to engaging youth

in an effort to combat childhood obesity.

www.yspacesmc.com provides kids of all ages with tools and information to build healthier bodies, homes, and communities. Specifically, the web site provides great information and links that show our youth how to eat healthy, exercise, deal with stress, and get involved in our communities. Also, there

are great videos made for youth by youth.

Overall, the site is a great lifetime learning tool, and I urge everyone to visit www.yspacesmc.com with the entire family. Once you get the kids outside exercising, adults should visit www.getthehealthysmc.org.

www.getthehealthysmc.org contains useful information for parents, healthcare pro-

fessionals, educators, activity directors and others. The site gives advice on ways to work with schools to provide healthy alternatives and enhance opportunities for physical activity. Most importantly, parents will find great recipes, information on healthy eating and active living in Spanish, Tongan, Samoan and other lan

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Community Viewpoints

Opiniones de la Comunidad

Have you decided who you are voting for? Why?

As decidido por quien vas aj votar? y porque?



Stephanie Velednitsky

Barack Obama

"Im voting for him because he seems to have a better understanding of people. McCain seems to be too wealthy to understand the average citizen and Obama seems like a better guy."



Joe and Audrey Guillory

Barack Obama

"I like his views. I think America is ready for a change and I think he'll be a good spokesperson for America."



Navi Kaur

Barack Obama

"I'm voting for Obama because I want a Democrat and he seems OK. He'll do better than a Republican in the office."



Two Palo Alto Residents

Barack Obama

"We're voting for Barack Obama because he has better economic policies and wants to unify people. He chose a good vice president, and gives the country hope. He's smart and is against the Iraq war."



Sharon Kelly

Barack Obama

"I think he's a better communicator and gives better support for our foreign relations."

"voy aj votar por él porque él parece tener una mejor comprensión de la gente. McCain parece ser demasiado rico para entender el ciudadano medio y Obama me parece una buena persona."

"Me gusta sus ideas. Y creo que los Estados Unidos esta listo para un cambio, y pienso que va a ser un buen presidente."

"Estoy votando por Obama porque quiero un demócrata. Y creo que va aj ser mejor que un republicano el la officina."

"Estamos votando a favor de Barrack Obama porque él tiene una mejor política económica y quiere unificar aj la jente. Aj escojido un buen vicepresidente, y le da el país esperanza. Es inteligente y está en contra de la guerra de Irak."

"Pienso que esmejor comunicador y apoya mejor a las relaciones exteriores."

Lifecycles

Welcoming a new executive director

By David Tenisi
EPA Today Intern



Robert Hughes

Before becoming the Executive Director of the Lewis and Joan Platt East Palo Alto Family YMCA, Robert Hughes was the associate executive director at the Palo Alto Family YMCA.

In his new position, Hughes said that he looks forward to leading the East Palo Alto YMCA in fulfilling its role as a vital and important piece of

the fabric of the East Palo Alto community.

This would be done by creat-

ing, enhancing and supporting programs that contribute to the overall wellness of the city's residents.

After receiving his bachelor's degree from San Francisco State and his master's degree from Yale University in Health Science/Education, Hughes worked in the healthcare field for eighteen years before transitioning into the nonprofit, community service realm.

When asked what he thought when he was offered

his current position, Hughes responded, "My thoughts on my new position centered on how to implement the best practices I had learned from my previous experiences to best support the community."

Hughes is, obviously, a man with a vision for the community. When he was asked what advice he would give to someone trying to pursue a dream, without any idea of where to start and without the support of others, he replied, "Realizing worthwhile goals is

a marathon not a sprint and nothing worth having is easily attained.

"Very few people achieve success independently. There is always some sort of support from family members, teachers, mentors or from circles of friends.

"The key is to identify those willing to assist and guide you and demonstrate your commitment to being successful."

David Tenisi was a summer intern for the East Palo Alto Today Newspaper.

Improving student performances

After a successful single-school pilot program last year at Menlo Atherton High School, there are now four schools with the Built To Last Collaborative to improve the drop out rate by tutoring students who need the extra assistance.

Carlmont, Woodside, and Sequoia are working with the Built To Last Collaborative.

At the close of the 2007-2008 school year the Spring Recruitment Committee wrapped up its Academic Coach recruitment effort and expect to



Photo courtesy of Stacey Nitta, BTLC Program Administrator

The above picture is a group picture of the Built To Last C Board Members and 08-09 Academic Coaches that was taken during academic coaches training session which was held at the Sequoia Union high School District offices. First row from left to right Junior Lolohea, Henry Guttenbeil, Valentino Ramirez, Wanda Smith, Ed Vaughan, JoAn Vaughan, Ruth Cossey. Second row: Kathy Hebert, Maria Chipres, Hugo Rodriguez, Cory Ashford, Alberto Navarrete, Kristina Grandlund-Moyer, Gail Ortega, Larry Moody, Sharifa Wilson, Claudine Luckey, Patty Reyna, Debbie Moore Washington and top row: Pastor Bennett, Taylor Quijana, Alex Tucker, Les DeWitt, Miguel Melendez, Kava Tulua, Ellen Wright, Leif Erickson, Eric Agudelo, Kofi Acquah-Arhin, Fernando Barraza, John Wellbrock, Jose Montesinos, and Lauren Tannous.

train and fill its remaining slots for coaches. The Committee included: Debbie Moore Washington, Assistant Superintendent SUHSD, Joni Gordon, Vice Principal Carlmont HS, Fred Kessler, Vice Principal Menlo Atherton HS, Jacqueline Munchiando-Boyd, Teacher Sequoia HS, Ruben Abrica, 07/08, Site Supervisor BTLC and Alisha Fitzhugh, 07/08 Site Supervisor BTLC

Remembering Lady Wilma Johnson

Last May, the City of East Palo Alto issued a proclamation honoring Wilma Johnson as "one of many unsung heroes of East Palo Alto." The city proclamation said, "Her consistent work on behalf of her family, her church and her community stands as an example of the best of the City of East Palo Alto. Her bright smile was her trademark and it always just made each person feel better.

Therefore it is highly resolved that, in that Wilma Marie Johnson was an outstanding member of this community, we commemorate the life of Wilma M. Johnson and recognized her for her hard work, consistent caring and faithful belief in the City of East Palo Alto;

And that Wednesday, May 28, 2008 is declared "Wilma Marie Johnson Day" in the City of East Palo Alto."

Her daughter Natasha Bob,



Lady Wilma Johnson

submitted this letter as an example of the high esteem in which her mother was held. The letter was written October 1, 1988 to the Chief of Dietic Services. and it stated:

Dear Sir:

There seems to be a policy at the VA that members of the staff who exemplify what the VA stands for be recognized for their outstanding service.

The men of the specialized treatment program for P.T.S.D. [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] on the Viet Nam Vets Unit would like to ask that you recognize one such employee.

Mrs. Wilma Johnson of the food service department who serves us our meals most days of the week, has brought to her job a love and kindness to veterans and others that not only is nice to see but is of great importance for personal recovery. Most veterans of our era were treated rudely by our countrymen upon our return. Now, some 20 years later, we are loved and offered help for our service to our country.

It is vividly clear that people like Wilma serve a greater purpose than serve us our meals. She shares with us a love of life and a true compassion for peace and harmony on a sometimes mixed up planet. Some of our hope for happiness is a direct result of having had our lives touched by people such as Mrs. Johnson. Sincerely,

The Viet Nam Vets

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Lifecycles

Charles Jones

A friend of the East Palo Alto Community



Charles A. Jones

As a child, Charles Jones had a dream. It was his desire to serve families during one of the most difficult periods of their lives. After relocating to California from Louisiana, Jones' dream was to build a mortuary and provide quality service to the residents of East Palo Alto and the surrounding communities.

Charles Jones received his State Board of Directors and Embalmers License in 1976. He was awarded his embalmers certificate from the Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers. Jones Mortuary opened for business in March 1976.

Upon opening, Jones developed a policy to help couples who lost their young

babies. He has continued that policy and he currently provides complete funeral services, free of charge, for babies less than one month old.

Through his compassionate and caring nature, he has helped many families with services that were dignified, yet affordable.

Because of his kind and giving spirit, he has received many awards for his community-his involvement and his support in promoting educational literacy among youth. Some of the awards he has received include:

1976 - East Palo Alto awarded a "Resolution of Appreciation."

1982 - Community Service Award from Stanford University Hospital

-San Jose Mercury News award for promoting the education of children

- Lucille Salter Packard Children's Hospital for his gifts of time, energy and resources

-Starlight Baptist Church "Father, Son, Big Brother Community Service Award"

1991 - Awarded Life Membership in the NAACP

1992 - Recognized by the City of EPA for his faithful and unselfish service to its people

1993 - Inducted into NAACP Hall of Fame for outstanding support and community service

Certificate of "Special Congressional Recognition" from Congresswoman Anna G. Esch.

1995 - Jones was accepted for admission into the "National Select Morticians Association" and the "National Funeral Director's Association".

1995 - "South Bay African American Image Award" in "Commerce"

1995 - "Corporate Philanthropy Award" in the small business category by the United Way

1997 - Humanitarian award for distinguished service to the community by the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center.

-100 Black Men of Silicon Valley for his dedication and committed service to the community.

In 2007, Jones was recognized by the Mid Coastal California Pre-Natal Outreach Program and received a 2007 Outstanding Service Award for providing newborn loss assistance to families served by Stanford Hospital and Lucille Packard Children's

Hospital.

In March of this year, Jones was recognized by the San Mateo County Historical Association as one of the "Outstanding African Americans in San Mateo County".

Other organizations honoring him with certificates of appreciation and community service awards for support, leadership, dedication and sensitivity are the Gertrude Wilks Academy, numerous schools in the Ravenswood Unified School District, St. Mark AME Zion Church, Saint John Baptist Church, East Palo Alto Seventh Day Adventist Church, Faith

Baptist Church, the National Child Safety Council, the California Baptist State Convention, the Al Baqi Islamic Center, Martin Luther King, Jr. the Masonic Lodge, Stanford Hospital Family and the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Epsilon Mu Chapter among others.

On May 31, 2008 the RHSAA, Inc. honored Charles A. Jones with a plaque of appreciation for his many years of contributing to its scholarship fund which has made a significant impact on the lives of East Palo Alto students.



Charles A. Jones works with his daughter, Sandra Jones Spencer, at Jones Mortuary Incorporated in East Palo Alto.

Summer activities that make a difference

Testing the elements

Students in the U.C Sea Grant Extension program which took place at College Track this summer discovered that East Palo Alto's water is among some of the best in the region.

The discovery about the water was made during a water testing experiment held on the last day of the program.

Visiting parents and guests, including State Assembly Member Ira Ruskin, were shown a mural the students painted and viewed yoga and martial arts displays during the students afternoon presentations.

The students also displayed their experiments with air, earth and fire.

The Sea Grant Extension Program, is an educational



Moniqueka Jackson, Alexia Segura and Rosa Hernandez

outreach program sponsored by the University California's Agriculture and Natural Resources Department. The program focuses on ocean and bay issues and is designed to show students how these issues affect their lives. It also provides the students with information about career opportunities in marine science.

Forty five students from East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Redwood City participated in the program

Seeing how things work

When you're a fourth or fifth grader taking a class called "How Things Work," it becomes an added experience to actually take a trip to see how things work.

Fourth and fifth grade pupils enrolled in the Bay-shore Christian Ministries' summer program called SAIL got a chance to do just that: see how things work.

Since the class was studying the history of the printing press and paper, one of their teachers got the bright idea to have them take a field trip to see how and where newspapers are printed. Thanks

to the management and the staff at the Southwest Offset Print shop in Menlo Park, the fourth and fifth grade students had the opportunity to see the whole print process behind the actual production of newspapers.

For Pamela Myers, one of the teachers in the program, the field trip was a meaningful experience for the students. "Going on the field trip



Brianna Munoz, Dania Stamper, Aileen Sanchez, Paco Agvilar, Ashley Jack, Onaje Julian, Alejandro Llanes Daniel Martinez study newspapers during their class.



Fourth and fifth graders hear Lloyd Jones during their tour of the Southwest Offset Printing Company in Menlo Park.

to an actual printing press definitely helped them get a better idea of what they were learning in class," she said.

What did the students think of the trip? Alejandro Llanes said, "It was cool. We got to take a lot of newspapers home."

The field trip included eleven students and three chaperones. "The tour really helped the kids grasp all the various ideas we were discussing," Myers said.