



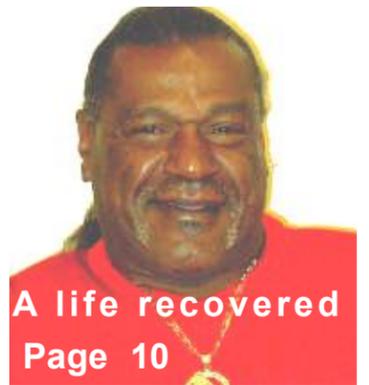
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# East Palo Alto Today



Providing news that is relevant, informative and critical

East Palo Alto and Belle Haven

May - June 2006

Vol. 1 No. 4

## City Might Make Job Cuts

If the current city budget proposal is passed, 21 city jobs might be cut. These proposed cuts include 14 vacant positions and 7 filled positions. East Palo Alto's City Manager Alvin James said that while he regretted

having to make the proposed budget cuts, "The reductions are necessary in order to finally close the city's longstanding structural budget deficit and to balance the Fiscal Year 2006-07 budget as required by state law."

In explaining the proposed

cuts, James wrote in a letter to the City Council that the City faces a deficit of approximately \$1.6 million in the General Fund. He said that this deficit would increase to over \$1.9 million if the Council were to take into account new budget requests of

various departments intended to improve service levels, and \$104,865 in requests for funding assistance from various community-based organizations."

James said that while his office has instituted tighter fiscal controls over the year, the \$350,000

that was saved by the cost cutting measures that were taken, was still not enough to make a substantial reduction in the deficit, which he explained as a long standing gap between the city's

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## NEWS BRIEFS

### Employee Files Complaint

East Palo Alto's Assistant City Manager M.L. Gordon filed a complaint of discrimination against the city. In his letter to East Palo Alto's City Manager Alvin James, Gordon said that he was in the process of filing a discrimination complaint against the City of East Palo Alto for permitting Vice Mayor A. Peter Evans to continuously slander, insult defame, harrass and create during public and administrative meetings, a hostile workplace environment in the City of East Palo Alto. See inside for more details.

## Leaders Win Health Commitment



The recent San Mateo meeting with County Supervisor Jerry Hill drew more than 500 leaders to hear about adult health insurance.

By Shoshanna Spector  
EPA Today Contributor

More than 500 leaders of Peninsula Interfaith Action (PIA)

gathered with San Mateo County Supervisor Jerry Hill to get his commitment to make the expansion of adult health insurance a county priority. It is estimated

that 282,000 adults (87,000 in San Mateo County and 195,000 in Santa Clara county are uninsured. These figures do not include the elderly.

Alejandra Mendoza, from St. Francis of Assisi Church in East Palo Alto, explained she was fired from her job as a cook for taking too much time off to care for her 10 year old son whom suffers from leukemia. She then developed high blood pressure, varicose veins, and depression. Alejandra applied for the WELL program but was denied because she could not afford the \$250 to join. "Peninsula residents are forced to choose between buying food, paying rent, over their own health. We need Jerry Hill to re-evaluate the eligibility requirements, so families such as Alejandra's do not suffer," says Sonja Spencer, from Faith Missionary Baptist Church in East Palo Alto.

The community meeting organized by Peninsula Interfaith Action, a federation of 31 faith-based congregations, representing over 19,000 families on the peninsula. In San Mateo County, the WELL Program provides financial assistance for healthcare for indigent adults whose income

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## Romic Discharge leads to State Action

The unexpected release of dangerous chemicals from a tanker truck on June 5th at the Romic facility caused much concern throughout the East Palo Alto community. The 10 p.m. fume of white smoke which came from the tanker spewed into the air, over adjoining parts of the Bay and onto surrounding vegetation.

This discharge not only alarmed residents, it also prompted investigations by local, state and federal agencies.

One of those agencies, the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) announced on June 15, that it had issued an enforcement order which put restraints on the way Romic Environmental

Technologies Corp, a hazardous waste removal plant located at 2081 Bay Road, handles toxic substances.

The order cited Romic for its "failure to operate the facility in a manner to minimize the possibility of a release of hazardous waste or hazardous waste constituents to air, soil, or surface water which could threaten

human health or the environment."

The DTSC's enforcement order limits the blending of hazardous waste to make fuel; ensures safe operation of fuel blending activities, and reserves the state's right to impose fines and penalties in the future. The order takes effect immediately and does not provide Romic

with an opportunity for appeal.

Before the order was issued, Romic had voluntarily stopped the blending of hazardous waste until the cause of the release was determined. Angela Blanchette, a DTSC spokesperson, said that the DTSC issued the order to insure that the necessary safe-

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# La Ciudad Podría Recortar Puestos de Trabajo

Si la propuesta presupuestal actual es aprobada, la Ciudad podría recortar 21 puestos de trabajo. Los recortes propuestos incluyen 14 puestos vacantes y 7 empleados. El administrador de la Ciudad de East Palo Alto, Alvin James, dijo que a pesar de que lamenta tener que hacer estos recortes presupuestales, "Estos recortes son necesarios a fin de cerrar finalmente el déficit presupuestario estructurado de la Ciudad, existente desde hace mucho tiempo, y equilibrar el presupuesto del Año Fiscal 2006-2007 requerido por la ley estatal".

En una carta dirigida a los miembros del

Concilio de la Ciudad, el Sr. James explica que la Ciudad enfrenta un déficit de aproximadamente \$1.6 millones de dólares del Fondo General. Él dijo que éste déficit incrementaría a más de \$1.9 millones si el Concilio tuviera que tomar en consideración las peticiones presupuestales nuevas de varios departamentos encaminadas a mejorar los niveles de servicio y \$104,865 dólares en solicitudes de asistencia financiera por parte de varias organizaciones comunitarias.

El Sr. James dijo que a pesar de que su oficina ha instituido controles fiscales rígidos durante el año, los \$350,000 dólares ahorrados como

resultado de las medidas de recorte de costos implementadas, no fueron suficientes para hacer una reducción substancial en el déficit presupuestario, que él explicó como la disparidad que ha existido por mucho tiempo entre los ingresos de la Ciudad y los gastos de la misma.

A la vez que afirma que el problema del déficit de la Ciudad no es nuevo, el Sr. James dijo, "Lo que sí es nuevo es el hecho de que los recursos que han estado disponibles para ayudar a la Ciudad a mantener el nivel de servicios deseado, como subvenciones... para apoyar los programas de servicios o los ingresos de los recursos de préstamos de la

las Agencias de Reurbanización, no son lo suficientemente grandes como para emparejar la disparidad entre los recursos disponibles y los compromisos de gastos autorizados por el Concilio".

Algunos residentes aplaudieron la decisión de la Ciudad de confrontar este problema. Lee Hawkins, Director Ejecutivo del Distrito Sanitario de East Palo Alto dijo, "Simplemente no hay decisiones fáciles, y...[la ciudad] no puede darse el lujo de seguir aplazando los problemas para después".

"No se pueden mantener los servicios sin los ingresos. Todos los

déficits del pasado simplemente se han estado acumulando', dijo el Sr. James.

En un intento por cerrar el déficit, los oficiales de la Ciudad tomaron varias acciones en el pasado. El Concilio de la Ciudad presentó una medida en el boletín electoral de noviembre de 2005 que enmendaría las categorías de los impuestos sobre las ventas en la Ciudad, incluyendo una categoría nueva a las Instalaciones de Desperdicios Tóxicos (Medida R). "Aún cuando esta medida fue aprobada por los votantes, todavía habrá que esperar a que se materialicen los ingresos", dijo el Sr. James.

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## NOTAS

## INFORMATIVAS

### Empleado Introduce un Reclamo

El asistente del manejador de la ciudad de East Palo Alto, M.L. Gordon introdujo un reclamo por discriminación en contra de la ciudad. En su carta a Alvin James, manejador de la ciudad de East Palo Alto, dijo que estaba en proceso de introducir un reclamo por discriminación en contra la ciudad de East Palo Alto, por permitir al Vice Alcalde Pete Evans constantemente acosar, difamar é insultar durante las reuniones administrativas y en publico, y crear un ambiente hostil en el lugar de trabajo en la Ciudad de East Palo alto. Ver en la pagina 5 para mas detalles.

# LIDERES DE PIA LOGRAN EL COMPROMISO



Lideres de la Peninsula se juntaron con el Supervisor Jerry Hill en San Mateo.

Más de 500 lideres de la Organización Acción Interreligiosa en la Peninsula se

juntaron con el Supervisor Jerry Hill del Condado de San Mateo el Martes, 16 de Mayo

2006 a las 7:30pm en la Iglesia católica San Mateo en San Mateo y lograron su com-

promiso para hacer una prioridad en el condado la expansión del programa de seguro medico para adultos. Aproximadamente 87,000 adultos en el condado de San Mateo y 195,000 adultos en el condado de Santa Clara sin contar los ancianos, no tienen seguro medico. Alejandra Mendoza de la iglesia de San Francisco de Asis explicó que su patrón la despidió por el tiempo que ella tenía que tomar para cuidar a su hijo de 10 años que sufría de leucemia. Luego, Mendoza se enfermó con alta presión, venas víricas y depresión. Alejandra se inscribió para el programa WELL pero negaron su solicitud porque ella no pudo pagar los \$250 requerido para registrarse. "Residentes de la Península tienen que decidir entre comprar alimentos, pagar la renta, o mantener su salud. Necesitamos que Jerry Hill

continuación de la pag.17

# La descarga de Romic atrae acción del Estado

La inesperada fuga de peligrosos químicos de un tanque camión en las facilidades de la Romic el 5 de junio. Causo mucha preocupación entre los habitantes de la comunidad de East Palo Alto el manto de humo blanco que se vio a las 10:00 de la noche que se fugo de un tanque y que se

esparció por el aire sobre partes de la bahía y la vegetación adjunta. Esta fuga no solamente alarmo a los residentes locales pero también activo investigaciones de agencias locales, estatales y federales.

Una de Estas agencias, el Departamento de control de sustancias toxicas del

Estado de California (DTSC sus siglas en Ingles) anuncio el 15de Junio que puso una ordenanza en mandato que pone impedimentos a la manera que Romic Environmental Technologies Corp. Una planta de deposición de material toxico localizada en 2081 Bay Road, maneja substancias

químicas.

La orden cito a Romic por fallar en operar las facilidades de una manera en que se minimiza la posibilidad de una fuga de substancias toxicas o constituyentes de sustancias toxicas al aire, tierra o al la superficie del agua que puede poner en peligro la salud de los

humanos y al medio ambiente.

La ordenanza de la agencia DTSC pone limites en la efusión de materiales tóxicos para convertirlos en combustible; asegura la seguridad en las operaciones en la efusión de

continuación de la pag.17

# City Recycling Program Tackles Rampant Dumping

by Meda Okelo

Dumping in East Palo Alto is unfortunately a common practice. It is not rare to find street intersections, cul de sacs, ends of streets, and vacant lots that are permanent depositories of furniture, electronics, tires, construction debris, clothes etc. The city's maintenance supervisor Jay Farr estimates that the City spent over \$50,000 in staff and operating expenses annually just roving around the city collecting and appropriately disposing of the debris. In an effort to reduce the costs the city incurs collecting and disposing of this trash, the City established a free recycling program at its

corporation yard at 150 Tara Road off of Bay Road. The program accepts used motor oil, furniture, electronic products, latex paint and tires. Residents of East Palo Alto can drop off such items between the hours of 8am to 4pm (except between 12-1pm lunch period) Monday through Friday.

As of the end of April the City had collected 139 tons of debris of which 54.05 (39%) consisted of recyclable material and 61% consisted of rubbish that ends up in the county landfill. Although figures were not available for the amount of oil the city has collected through this program, Farr is particularly proud of the used oil recycling pro-

gram. He said that it prevents used oil from being disposed of in storm drains and draining into the Bay. The program ensures that the plant and wildlife characterizing our bay will forever be there for future generations to enjoy.

The city is a certified recycling oil collection agent and would particularly like to encourage residents who work on their own cars to take such material to 150 Tara Street. The city would also like to encourage residents to abide by the three principles of environmental stewardship: reduce, reuse and recycle. Reduce the use of resources because that will not only save resources for

the use by future generations, but in the short term would save one a few dollars. Reuse, in the sense that what may be of little use to you now may be desperately needed by someone else, so provide opportunities for others to use such items that are no longer important to you. Finally, dispose of items in a way that they can be processed into other products and go the extra step of purchasing items processed from other materials.

For more information about the program please call 650-853-5916.

**PAPER OR PLASTIC?  
REDUCE, REUSE AND  
RECYCLE**  
Reduce, Reuse and Recycle

are three little words that I think would literally save the world from an imminent resource crisis. In simple terms, the three words acknowledge that the world has finite resources and therefore it makes sense, for our own sake, to first "reduce" the amount of resources we consume, secondly, "reuse" a lot of things that we normally discard and that may still have a long lifespan and finally "recycle", items that we can no longer use or reuse and have them converted into some other product.

Examples abound to illustrate each of the three words in action. How does a person  
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# Asst. City Manager files complaint against city's vice mayor

In an effort to bring, what he considers, civility to East Palo Alto's city council meetings, ML Gordon, East Palo Alto's Assistant City Manager, wrote a letter of complaint threatening the City of East Palo Alto with a lawsuit. Gordon wrote his letter, dated June 9, to East Palo Alto City Manager Alvin James who is his immediate supervisor. In the letter, Gordon charged that the city is permitting Vice Mayor A. Peter Evans to continuously slander, insult, defame, harass, and create, during public and administrative meetings, a hostile workplace environment in the City of East Palo Alto.

Gordon said, "I have witnessed and have been offended by Mr. Evans' insulting behavior and disrespect for certain staff members, as well as some public and private individuals wanting to and currently doing business in and

with the City of East Palo Alto."

He said that he was "deeply offended by the insulting repetitive comments" made by Evans about the City manager, which he said he had seen "increase from once per meeting to several times throughout a single meeting. These insulting and intimidating comments are not new, but reiterations that are becoming intolerable."

"Mr. Evans has made me a victim by his continued insult, intimidation and ridicule of me and others. Mr. Evans has repeatedly made derogatory and racist comments which fall under verbal harassment."

Gordon sent copies of his letter to the city's five council members: Mayor Ruben Abrica, Vice Mayor A. Peter Evans, Patricia Foster, Donna Rutherford, David Woods and City Attorney Michael S. Lawson.

Vice Mayor Evans responded to Gordon's charges by

stating that Gordon had a right to express his opinion. "I don't have a problem with the fact that he wrote a letter," Evans said.

The Council members held a special closed session just before the City Council's scheduled budget study session Wednesday, June 14 to discuss Gordon's letter. After the special meeting, Michael Lawson, the City's Attorney reported that the Council will meet with special legal counsel Cynthia O'Neill from the San Francisco law firm of Liebert Cassidy Whitmore to get advise. The law firm specializes in employment and labor law.

The council met with Ms. O'Neil and will deliberate further with legal counsel before making an official response to Gordon's complaint.

Council member Pat Foster said, "I am hoping we can come up with a code of con-

duct for our city. I would love to see us be a model city where this type of thing does not occur. I think all council leaders should be role models, someone our children can look up to."

She said that demeaning and degrading staff is unacceptable behavior. There are ways to evaluate staff and if council members have criticisms, then Foster said that they sure voice those criticisms in ways that did not insult and demean someone.

Lois Fontino, the executive director of the East Palo Alto Senior Center agreed. "All criticisms should be made privately, not publicly with an eye towards building a team," she said.

Sharifa Wilson, one of the city's former mayors who served on the East Palo Alto City Council longer than anyone else said that city council members have to be careful.

"As elected officials, we have an obligation to conduct ourselves in a manner that does not expose the city to litigation. Once you are elected, you are no longer seen as an individual, but as a representative of the community, therefore, you must be careful about what you say, how you say it and to whom you say it and you must put the city's interest first."

Gordon said that he will wait for the City Council's formal response to his complaint before taking any further action.

"I'm not trying to create trouble, but I am doing what I think is right. No one needs to be harassed or intimidated," he said.

Some thought that it was interesting that at one of the City's recent budget hearings, Councilman Evans suggested that Gordon's job be eliminated to save the city money.

# EPA grocery store still on track

By Russell Averhart  
EPA Today Contributor

The City's effort to bring a full-service supermarket to town will continue in spite of the designated site at University & Bay Road being sold to a new developer, Barry Swenson Builder.

The City Council scheduled a Study Session, which took place on Tuesday, June 6, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

During the session the council introduced the new property owner to the community and discussed the owner's plans and intentions for the site.

Representatives from Barry Swenson Builder made a PowerPoint presentation in which they provided background information on their firm. The backgrounder included the firm's history, capabilities, and the types of developments they have done. Additionally, they spoke

about why they purchased the University and Bay site, what type of project they think would work on the site and why.

They also discussed how their company intends to engage the community to help it shape a vision for the site; where a supermarket fits into their plans, and a general timeline that works with their perspective.

During the question and answer session which followed the company presenta-

tion, Barry Swenson stated that he looked forward to working with the City Council, the public and the city staff.

Over the past several years, the City has been working with the firm, Blake Hunt Ventures, to develop a mixed-use project at Bay and University that included a 50,000 square foot supermarket (Rancho San Miguel), 120-units of residential housing (Meritage Homes), and 23,500 square feet of leasable retail space.

As a result of the property being sold to a new property owner, the Blake Hunt Ventures proposal may go away unless the new property owner and Blake Hunt Ventures are able to form a partnership to jointly develop the property.

The City is encouraging the new property owner and Blake Hunt Ventures to explore that possibility.

Whether or not the project developed by Blake Hunt Ventures continues or goes away, the City remains well-positioned to achieve its goal of bringing a full-service supermarket to town.

The site is zoned commercial and will require City Council and Planning Commission approval to change the zoning to allow housing on the site.

A zoning change most likely will not be allowed unless it includes a supermarket.

Russell Averhart is the Redevelopment Project Manager for the City of East Palo Alto

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# Local Businesses Receive Awards

**By Raquel Medina**  
EPA Today Contributor

It was an event designed to honor East Palo Alto businesses and the event lived up to its billing. Three successful local businesses -Home Depot, Knotty Hole Woodworks, and Touchatt Trucking Company - were recognized on May 18th, 2006 at the Second Annual Small Business Event. The event was hosted by the City of East Palo Alto's Economic Development Committee and the East Palo Alto Belle-Haven Chamber of Commerce.

Over 100 residents, small business owners and friends attended the event to meet, honor and dine with the management of the three businesses, which had similar success stories to share.

Council Member, David Woods, Co-chair of the Economic Development Committee, recognized the businesses by providing the opening remarks to the event and presenting representatives of each business with

City of East Palo Alto pins. State Assembly Member, Ira Ruskin, was also a featured speaker, who spoke about recent bond measures and legislation he was working on and the impact they would have on East Palo Alto residents.



Councilmember David Woods presents an award to Sandy and Charlie Touchatt as Raquel Medina looks on.

The Home Depot is known throughout the country for its products and a do it yourself philosophy. Every store looks and feels the same. It is an icon seen by millions along our freeways. So what makes the Home Depot in East Palo Alto special and important to

East Palo Alto? If you ask the city's civic leaders, they will tell you that Home Depot was the first big business that opened here when no other business wanted to invest in East Palo Alto. When it opened, The Home Depot agreed to hire at least 30% of its workforce from the City under a First Source Hiring contract. To date, The Home Depot has done this and more. Currently, it maintains 35% of its workforce from the local community and has the highest employee retention record of any First Source Hiring Employer in the City.

According to East Palo Alto Store Manager John Cunningham, the store has 219 employees working in its East Palo Alto store. The company plans to hire more after its expansion into the adjoining space where Design Expo used to be, making The Home Depot store in East Palo Alto the largest in the company.

Knotty Hole Woodworks, started in a home garage in 1978 by its owner and President, Tod Detro, before

moving to East Palo Alto in 1989.

The company manufactures high end residential cabinetry and millwork, using very sophisticated computerized woodworking equipment. Believing that people are the most important asset in a business, Mr. Detro credits his staff for making his business a success.

Knotty Hole has approximately 25 employees and operates in a 12,000 square foot building on Bay Road. Soon, the company will be expanding in East Palo Alto by moving into a new 35,000 square foot space where it will continue to make beautiful cabinets for Bay Area residents.

Touchatt Trucking Company was founded over 46 years ago by Charlie Touchatt with one truck. Since then, the company has been hauling sand, rocks and asphalt for California's largest construction contractors. When IKEA and The Home Depot were constructed, Touchatt Trucking Company was there, providing construction services and employing local residents.



Councilmember Woods gives a key to the city to Home Depot staff members.

Touchatt Trucking Company employs approximately 30 people and functions successfully with the practical management skills of Charlie Touchatt and wife, Sandy. The company came to East Palo Alto over twenty-five years ago, before the city was incorporated. According to Mr. Touchatt, East Palo Alto is 1000 times better than it was then.

Touchatt Trucking Company is a prime example of a business built on a good reputation that has been broadcasted word of mouth by satisfied customers. The company has never had to advertise. According to Mr. Touchatt, his trucks carry his name, and that is all it has taken to market the business.

## Dressed for success at OICW job fair



Several attendees at the job fair

Over 200 job seekers dressed for success and eager to find employment brought their resumes and more than a few hopes and dreams to the OICW Job Fair in Menlo Park on Wednesday, May 3rd. Over 27 major employers from throughout the Bay Area stood ready to meet, greet, and interview prospective employees.

Kaiser Permanente, Starbucks, and the Palo Alto Medical Foundation were just a few of the companies that set up shop for the day at the OICW Job Training & Placement Center, one of the Bay Area's oldest non-profits. Macy's presented a Customer Service Workshop and Wells Fargo Bay Area brought their eBus, complete with a facilitator who gave enthusiastic job

seekers resume critiques and advice. OICW's SASSY (School After School for Successful Youth) program prepared lunch for the attendees.

Attendees received interviewing tips and other valuable information from recruiters and HR professionals to help them in their job search. They were also able to submit job applications for

good jobs and network with one another.

Keith A. Young, Business Services Representative at the County of San Mateo, Human Services Agency gave the event a thumbs-up when he remarked: "You all put together a great job fair. I attend them all over the Bay Area and this was one of the BEST. Great Job!"

## 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](http://www.ci.east-palo-alto.ca.us)

### East Palo Alto City Council Members

Ruben Abrica - Mayor  
(650) 321-4001

A. Peter Evans - Vice Mayor  
(650) 321-1009

Patricia Foster  
(650) 328-3944

Donna Rutherford  
(650) 327-7926

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 subscribe 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

Nicholas P. Jellins - Mayor  
(650) 329-1300  
Kelly J. Fergusson - Vice Mayor  
(650) 327-4533

Andrew M. Cohen  
(650) 327-5332

Lee B. Duboc  
(650) 322-3651

Mickie Winkler  
(650) 473-9722

### 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: 8a.m. 9a.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](mailto: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  
(650) 688-6384

# In Other Local News

## Is East Palo Alto ready?

**By Cassie Harvey**  
EPA Today Contributor

One hundred years ago on April 18th, 1906 a shift in the tectonic plates along the San Andreas fault led to one of the country's greatest natural disasters. The 7.8-magnitude earthquake that resulted rocked the Bay Area and transformed the then-vibrant San Francisco into a rolling ball of flames.

Scientists who study earthquakes for a living say that it is only a matter of time before another earthquake hits the Bay Area. In fact, a recent U.S. Geological Survey predicts that there is a 62 percent chance that a magnitude 6.7 earthquake or higher will hit the Bay Area in the next 30 years.

Given the possibility that another earthquake can hit at any time, many ask whether East Palo Alto is prepared for the chaos that might result. In the Bay Area in the next 30 years.

Lt. Rahn Sibley, EPA's director of emergency services, said he felt confident in the city's emergency response program. He said that the Standardized Emergency

Management System (SEMS), which is currently in place, is a highly efficient system that "outlines the roles and responsibilities of officials in the event of an emergency."

Under the Standardized Emergency Management System, certain highly defined steps would take place. For example, in the event of a major earthquake, an incident commander would activate a centralized emergency center

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known as the Emergency Operation Center (EOC).

Next, a special officer with the EOC, the Operations Section Chief, would oversee the management of the city's emergency response by designating unit leaders in Law Enforcement, Fire/Rescue, Medical/Health, and Public Works.

"The law enforcement unit leader would coordinate evac-

uations and respond to situations as necessary," Sibley said. "The fire department would handle search and rescue operations. The Public Works unit leader would oversee various reports and repairs, and the Medical Unit leader would provide treatment to disaster victims."

In a recent talk, Celeste Cook, the director of the Santa Clara County Office of Emergency Services compared SEMS to a military structure. Cook said SEMS was so detailed in its design that an emergency worker from another county could "walk into the emergency operations center and know exactly what's expected of them."

Yet, even though SEMS' clearly describes the roles and procedures that should be taken in an emergency, city officials stress that there is only so much they can do to prepare for a major disaster.

They stress that a successful response throughout East Palo Alto will depend on the level of individual preparedness throughout the community.

"Responses to 'Level III' situations, like an earthquake, are always the reactive type,"

**During the first 72 hours you are on your own.**

explained Sibley. "In the beginning, it's total chaos. During the first 72 hours you are on your own," he said. That goes for any 'Level III situation', no matter where you live. It is the job of city officials, over the course of the 72 hours, to try to take the total chaos and make it controlled chaos."

He added that the greatest challenge facing EPA in the wake of an emergency is "getting the population to take care of themselves for the first 72 hours."

Carole Parker, Public Education Specialist at the Menlo Park Fire Department, put it another way:

"There are seven [fire] engines between Menlo Park, Atherton, Redwood City and East Palo Alto. Each truck carries three firefighters, and some staff. That's approximately 30 people for 93,000

residents, or one 'first responder' for every 3,100 residents. They'll be busy, and you might be on your own. It will be the residents, not just the first responders, who will be saving lives."

Parker coordinates The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), a program designed to teach basic disaster skills to residents of the Menlo Park Fire District. Free to residents of Menlo Park, Atherton, Redwood City, and East Palo Alto the 6-session, 15-hour program teaches light search and rescue skills, disaster psychology, and how to extinguish fires and treat victims.

"If a catastrophic event overwhelms or delays the community's first responders, CERT members can assist others by applying the basic response and organizational skills that they learned during training," Parker said. "These skills can help save and sustain lives following a disaster until help arrives."

Approximately thirty EPA residents are currently enrolled in CERT. Parker estimates over two hundred and fifty residents have been trained to date.

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