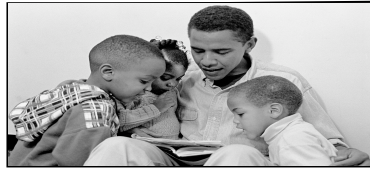




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Hail to the reader in chief page 7



Mi viaje a México page 9

East Palo Alto Today

Providing news that is relevant, informative and critical



www.epatoday.org

East Palo Alto and Belle Haven

January - March 2009

Vol. 3 No.16

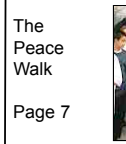
Inside News

Creating history



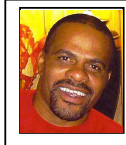
Teens discuss Pres. Obama

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The Peace Walk

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A celebration of life

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Looking at local sports

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By Henrietta J. Burroughs
East Palo Alto Today

For East Palo Alto resident Elizabeth Jackson the trip to Washington, D.C. to attend President Barack Obama's inauguration was a journey of a lifetime. Jackson decided before her trip that she would create and bring home her own souvenir to remember the historic occasion.

In deciding what to take for the trip, she packed a large piece of white cloth that she had purchased several days earlier. The cloth was the size of a queen sized bed sheet. On the cloth, she intended to get just a few comments about Obama and his inauguration from those she met along the way.

On Wednesday, January 14, Jackson left East Palo Alto and headed for Oakland, CA where she boarded a train for the three-day trip to Washington,

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Photo courtesy of HJBurroughs
East Palo Alto resident Elizabeth Jackson stands in front of her Expression Cloth which she created as her souvenir from her trip to President Barack Obama's Inauguration.

Getting ready for the outside world

By Claudia Hernandez
East Palo Alto Today Intern

East Palo Alto High School Academy encourages its students to do more than just work in school. The students also need to be involved in their community.

Because of this belief the East Palo Alto High School Academy created a new class called Service Learning. The

Service Learning class started in the fall of September 2007 to give interested students an opportunity to improve academic grades, increase attendance in school, and develop personal and social responsibility by serving as interns at local organizations.

The class is only provided for students who want to learn more about their community

organizations, and it gives them a good opportunity to work in something that will provide them with job skills.

This program was created by Jane Bryson, a teacher at EPA High School. When she visited New York City and saw that other schools had this program, she got really interested in it, and thought it would be a good idea for EPA High School to have this

class. "I went to New York City, and saw a wonderful school that had an internship program," she said.

"I loved the program so much that I wanted to bring something similar to my students. I started the internship program so that students can see the skills that they are learning in school are valuable in the real world. They get the opportunity to see

what the working world is like and what careers they might be interested in. Above all, the students create wonderful relationships with positive role models in the community and learn how and why to give back to the community that has supported them so well." Bryson said.

The service learning class is a way that students can pro
continued on page 5

The fight against crime

By Dana Tom
East Palo Alto Today Intern

Sergeant Ronaldo Rhodes, with the East Palo Alto Police Department, remembers the dispatch calls that he received one night in 1992. Rhodes responded to two separate reports of murder that night during a period of a

few hours.

"All I heard over the dispatches was, 'man down,'" he said. "On the ride there, I was just thinking about what I was going to do when I got there to help the people injured." Rhodes added, "I knew it was too late to be nervous, but two calls in one night is a lot to handle."

A night like this was once a normal occurrence for East Palo Alto police officers, like Rhodes. Rhodes, who has been serving as an East Palo Alto police officer since 1985, said he has noticed a change on the streets in recent years, particularly after EPA was named the nation's murder capital in 1992. For the past

four years, Rhodes said residents tend to call the police more often to report witnessed crime or violence, suspicious behavior, or even a barking dog.

"It's quieter now, and there aren't as many people hanging out on the sidewalk, up to no good," he added.

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Inside

- Editorial
- News Briefs
- Opinions
- TV Listings
- Youth News

Ways to prevent house fires

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 much attention and emphasis are focused on preventing home fires.

CAL FIRE and fire departments across the country will be encouraging everyone to check their homes for fire hazards.

California's fire officials stress that with a little extra caution, preventing the lead-

ing causes of home fires – cooking, heating, electrical and smoking – is within everyone's 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.

Unfortunately, fires can

spread and cause untold damage to lives and property.

The infamous "Great Chicago Fire" of 1871 killed 250 people and destroyed over 17,000 homes.

Fire safety is not something to be practiced by adults but by children, too.

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

Reducing the drop out rate

By Claudia Hernandez
EPA Today Intern

Minorities have higher drop out rates than white and the latest statistics show that blacks and Latino's have the highest dropout rate of all students enrolled in the public schools in the State of California.

In San Mateo County, for example, 31.3 percent of African American high school students dropped out; 23.4 percent of Latino high school students dropped out and 8.6 percent of white students dropped out. In San Mateo County one in 6 teens do not finish high school.

As high as it is, the drop out rate for minority students in San Mateo County is not

the highest in California.

In Stanislaus County, for example, nearly 32 percent of African American students dropped out compared to 42 percent throughout the State of California.

In that county, 28.3 percent of Latinos dropped out compared to 30.3 percent throughout the state. The dropout rate for white students in Stanislaus County is 18.7 percent compared to 15.2 percent for the entire state.

For Gail Ortega, parental involvement is very important in reducing the drop out rate. He said that it is harder for students to complete high school without the support of their parents.

Ortega is the executive director of Built to Last, an

organization that was created to tutor East Palo Alto students in order to decrease their drop out rates and improve their chances of doing well in school.

In order for everyone to be successful," he said, "We need to lower illiteracy."

Ortega stressed that a person's chance of obtaining a good job increases when the person has a strong educational background.

"If you have a strong education, then you can overcome poverty, and have lots of choices," Ortega said.

For more information, go to the website below:

http://www.kidsdata.org/top-ictables.jsp?csid=0&t=30&i=1&ra=3_132&sort=a&va=a&vb=a&yr_a=1&yr_b=9&o_id=0

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Community News Briefs

Film on EPA Resident

The Commonwealth Club of California and the Northern California Inno-cence Project sponsored the premiere of a new documentary called \$100 a Day.

The film tells the story of East Palo Alto resident Rick Walker. It is a story that involves wrongful conviction and imprisonment, political partisanship, and the difficulty of righting the wrongs in America's justice system.

\$100 a Day premiered at Santa Clara University on February 18.

The film also discusses just

how difficult it was for Walker to get the \$100 a day compensation he was entitled to for every day he spent in prison.

Following the film's showing, Walker appeared on a panel with attorney Alison Tucher, who was primarily responsible for his exoneration and Jim Sanders, a senior writer at the Sacramento Bee newspaper who wrote major articles detailing Walker's fight to get compensation for his years in prison.

Make the Call

The East Palo Alto Police Department and the Palo Alto

Community Media Center taped the second one of the "Make the Call" television show.

The Make the Call series profiles unsolved East Palo Alto homicide cases and it features the families and friends of the victims in an effort to humanize the victims and encourage those who have information about the featured crimes to come forward with crucial information.

The new Make the Call show will begin airing soon. Watch for more information.

City Award

Public Works Director Jay

Farr received an award from Canopy during a ceremony which acknowledged all of the extra work that East Palo Alto's public works staff has put into the care and maintenance of the 1000 trees that were planted around the city.

Farr was also recognized at the February 3 East Palo Alto City Council meeting when he and others on the public works staff were commended for their efforts.

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

Local business forum exposes economic needs

By Kim Carlton and Henrietta J. Burroughs

A concerned group of residents and small business owners showed up at the East Palo Alto City Hall to get survival ideas and voice their unease about the state of the economy.

They met at the East Palo Alto City Hall on February 26 to attend the last in a three part series of meetings designed to discuss current needs and opportunities in East Palo Alto for local businesses.

The meetings were called Small Business Town Halls and they were sponsored by the City of East Palo Alto and Renaissance/StartUp.

In addition to the business owners who participated, the meetings were also attended



Some of the participants who attended the third business forum.

by staff from the Redevelopment Agency and Vice Mayor David Woods who is the Chair of the Redevelopment Agency.

San Francisco City Treasurer José Cisneros delivered the keynote address at the first forum. He spoke about the success of efforts to help San Francisco's underserved residents to avoid predatory lenders and the high-cost check cashing serv-

ices provided through the Bank on San Francisco program.

During the three town hall meetings, forum participants talked about the challenges facing business owners in East Palo Alto and held lively discussions about how the needs of local businesses could be better met.

They said that many of the challenges facing East Palo Alto based businesses appeared to stem from resource constraints at the city level.

During one of the forums, Renaissance/Start Up shared findings from a needs assessment survey commissioned by the Redevelopment Agency that was undertaken in the fall of 2008.

Business owners at the forums expressed frustration

over the difficulties they faced working with some city agencies.

It was pointed out that budget limitations, for example, have led to key city agencies being understaffed. This understaffing has caused long delays for those seeking necessary permits.

Other concerns included the lack of suitable, affordable space for business operations, whether retail, office, or light manufacturing.

Several business owners spoke about the lack of access to capital for business operations as an obstacle to business success, and some cited the need for flexible zoning to help take home-based businesses out of the home.

Participants offered constructive ideas and recommendations for actions that

could significantly improve the local business climate.

It was recommended, for example, that the city and nonprofits collaborate in seeking funding for infrastructure development; that the city provide land and zoning for a local business district and that local agencies teach specific trades to youth to facilitate their ability to obtain employment, especially in local businesses.

For a complete list of the recommendations and for more information, contact Renaissance/Start Up at (650) 321-2193.

Kim Carlton, the executive director of Renaissance StartUp, was the key contributor for this article.

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

Ruben Abrica- Mayor
(650) 321-4001

David E. Woods Vice Mayor
(650) 853-1907

A. Peter Evans
(650) 321-1009

Carlos Romero
(650)328-4363

Laura Martinez
(650)714-5337

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 first Monday 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 agen-

das 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

Heyward Robinson Mayor
(650) 208-1512

Richard Cline Vice Mayor
(650) 228-5166

John C. Boyle
(650)906-7163

Kelly J. Fergusson
(650) 327-4533

Andrew M. Cohen
(650)327-5332

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 March 3, 17, 31, & April
14, 28 2009 in the County of
San Mateo 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
(650) 688-6384

Living around foreclosed homes

By **Rafael A. Dagnesses**
EPA Today Contributor

Today's tumultuous housing market can be a dangerous place for residents living near foreclosed and REO properties. These unoccupied homes have created a hotbed for vagrants, criminal activity and opportunist. Whether happening upon a dangerous occupant, weapons and/or drugs, foreclosures can create innumerable hazards to the health and well-being of entire neighborhoods.

Danger can lurk anywhere, not only in the roughest of neighborhoods; and as more

and more families lose their homes to foreclosure, these dangers have only multiplied.

Recently I was asked by REOMAC, the not-for-profit trades association serving the default industry, to educate real estate professionals about the dangers associated with default properties.

While speaking with those within the industry I realized this was a message I should share with residents of foreclosure-laden neighborhoods.

It is important to note, that no one is completely safe, and everyone can benefit from adhering to the guidelines and tips for "playing it safe," in and around foreclo-

sure properties:

Top Three Tips for "Playing it Safe" in Today's Risky Foreclosure Market

Be Aware. If you decide to enter a property of concern, walk the perimeter to ensure there has not been a break-in. Another red flag to be aware of is excessive foot traffic or bicycle traffic on a residential street during work hours, which is a good indicator of lookouts for drug and/or gang activity.

Act With Caution. I remind my colleagues that gang activity begins to increase after 2 pm. Before approaching a potentially dangerous property, tell a co-worker,

family member or neighbor about your plans. Also, consider leaving the phone on while entering the property, keeping the person on the line or standby to call 9-1-1 should an encounter occur.

Don't be Afraid to Call the Police. Too many homeowners will put themselves in a potentially life-threatening situation before "bothering" the police. When living near properties in very high risk areas, do not be afraid to contact the police. If there is evidence of a break-in, this is another prime example of when one should leave the immediate area and call the police from a safe location. Remember:

Bad things can happen even in the best of neighborhoods. Good safety procedures should be applied if you feel unsafe in your own neighborhood. (Use Common Sense) No property is worth injury or death.

Rafael A. Dagnesses, a long-time REOMAC member and REO Director and broker for Quantum Realtors of Southern California. Dagnesses is a licensed bilingual REALTOR® with more than twelve years of full time real estate experience. To learn more about REOMAC, visit www.REOMAC.com

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For more information, please contact John Murphy at (650) 330-6433 or jmurphy@JobTrainworks.org

WiFi 101 is an **East Palo Alto Digital Village** project and a **California Emerging Technology Fund**-supported partnership which includes the following organizations :



Teens discuss President Barack Obama

By Samnit Kumar
EPA Today Intern

Many awaited January 20th eagerly. It was the day Barack Obama would be inaugurated as the 44th president of the United States of America.

This presidential election has drawn attention from all over the world, but no group was more interested than the young men and women of this nation. This election drew more interest from teens than ever seen before.

Since many adults might want to know how the leaders of tomorrow feel about history being made, I decided to interview students from Menlo Atherton High School, a highly diverse school, about how

they felt about the election personally.

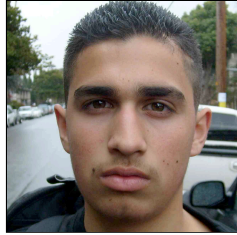


Caprice Powell

Caprice Powell, 16, East Palo Alto

Obama becoming president has brought joy into my life. Being an African American young lady, this means a lot to me. Dr. Martin Luther King once had a dream, and Obama has made that dream come true. I believe that America will be transformed

into a more unified family, hard work and determination. God has a plan for you and me, and especially America! Yes we can. Yes we will. Yes we did.

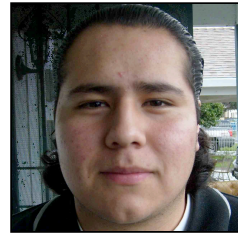


Freddy Cruz

Freddy Cruz, 16, East Palo Alto

I feel great about the result of

the election, I believe strongly in the Democratic Party and I believe this nation needs change, and the thought has crossed by mind at a young age if we would ever have a colored president, and now we do. I believe in Obama and his hope for this nation. Changes what America needs at this time and we got it.



Jonathan Vasquez

Jonathan Vasquez, 17, East Palo Alto

I am glad that I am alive to witness history being made, and the best thing about it is that so many young people are involved. This election has become such hype, America loves Obama, and he is very much capable of running our nation. I believe that he will help people like in East Palo Alto who are overwhelmed by crime and poverty. Obama has brought this nation together; again I am just glad I am alive to see it.

Samnit Kumar is a junior at Menlo Atherton High School and an intern with East Palo Alto Today.

East Palo Alto youth kept out of harm's way

By Betty Meissner
EPA Today Contributor

A rash of incidents in East Palo Alto last winter prompted East Palo Alto's Mayor Ruben Abrica and the city's Chief of Police Ron Davis to initiate "Fourth Quarter", a major crime suppression, prevention, and intervention program. This unique idea had a two-fold thrust:

- 1) to enable law enforcement to intervene and suppress criminal activity in EPA
- 2) to provide safe places with activities for students during the winter holidays.

In mid-December, under the auspices of One East Palo Alto, over twenty community-based youth service organizations met to study ways to



Children playing in one of the "Keeping Our Children Out of Harm's Way" activities.

implement the second goal: to keep children and youth out of harm's way. They realized that by pooling their collective resources, they could provide safe and enjoyable activities during the winter break. So "Keeping Our Children Out of Harm's Way"

became the community arm of "Fourth Quarter."

Programs were established and services organized, with Juanita Croft developing, managing, and updating the community calendars. Calendars were then distributed via email. Copies were

sent to St Francis of Assisi Youth Club; the Lord's Gym; Bayshore Christian Ministries; The Built to Last Collaborative, Walls of Faith East Palo Alto and Menlo Park Sites; and Boys and Girls Club of the Peninsula.

During the two week winter break, over 575 youth participated in "Keeping Our Children Out of Harm's Way" activities and events. Among the things that youngsters enjoyed were drop-in sports and games, sports tournaments, cooking sessions, field trips, movies, dance parties, holiday celebrations, conflict resolution classes, and a potluck dinner with youth from other areas.

The Cultural Meal has had a long-term effect on EPA

youngsters. Whether they shared pizza or home-made ethnic food, these 60 youngsters met kids from other communities and got to know each other, and many established friendships across the geographical, cultural, and social boundaries.

With the success of "Fourth Quarter's" Keeping Our Children Out of Harm's Way", organizers are optimistic and looking ahead to organizing activities for Spring Break. Individual groups do valuable work, but this collaborative model has proven to be effective on the organizational level as well as on the implementation level.

For more information contact Gail Ortega at Gail.ortega@gmail.com

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Getting ready

cont. from page 1

vide service in the community on a voluntary basis to local businesses and to public and nonprofit agencies. Under the program, students are assigned to work in an organization for four hours one day a week. The program runs from the first week of September to the second week of December.

By the end of the semester, students should have completed 52 hours of community service. The teacher gives the students choices in which they are interested in working for, and the students picks the site were they will be working for the next semester.

Jorge Gaytan a sophomore is an intern at the YMCA. He helps little kids draw, do their homework, do activities, and play soccer. "I really like my internship because I'm learn-

ing how to interact with little kids" he said.

He chose the YMCA as a place to work because it gave him an opportunity to start an art club, which it didn't have at the time he started doing community service.

Two other students in the Service Learning program work at the Ravenswood Technology Center. Victor Hernandez and Lissette Valadez help by fixing computers. "Yes, I like my internship because I get to help other people, and I like the idea that kids are going to learn from these computers" Lissette said.

She chose the Ravenswood Technology Center because she wanted to learn about technology. Victor chose it because he likes working with technology.

Maria Olivares is a sophomore and an intern at EPA Today

Jorge Gaytan a sophomore is an intern at the YMCA

Jalisa Henderson a sophomore is an intern at Fair Oaks Clinic

Claudia Hernandez a sophomore is an intern at EPA today Victor Hernandez a sophomore is an intern at the Ravenswood technology Center

Velia Robles a junior is an intern at the Menlo Park Library

Cynthia Alvarez a junior is an intern at Charter Academy Lissette Valadez a junior is an intern at the Ravenswood Technology Center

From the Editor's Desk

A time to hope and a time to act

America has reached a watershed. The election of Barack Obama as President of the United States will be remembered by so many for a multitude of different reasons.

In writing about his own experiences at Obama's inauguration, which you can read on page 8 of this issue, longtime East Palo Alto activist Bob Hoover, recalls his relationship with civil rights activist Stokely Carmichael, who is also known as Kwame Toure.

Associations are amazing because, when shared, they can trigger a whole stream of associations for those with whom they're shared.

Hoover's remarks about Carmichael triggered my own memories of him as a classmate of mine at Howard University.

Carmichael and I were both philosophy majors as undergraduates at Howard and we took classes together for three years.

I remember when he became the leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the major rift that developed which caused many to leave the organization.

The rift centered around the call for "Black Power." The Howard campus became a key place for student debates and the organizing activities that inspired students to participate in the Freedom Rides.

It was an exciting time in which to live. It was the height of the civil rights era. It was also a tumultuous time with the murders of so many who died struggling for the ideals they thought this country should embrace.

A few names immediately come to mind: Medgar Evers, Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, Viola Liuzzo, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy.

In the midst of it all, President Lyndon Baines Johnson, who was the commencement speaker when Carmichael and I graduated from Howard, ushered through Congress the unprecedented Civil Rights Bill

that led to fundamental changes in the laws that were on the books that kept black people from enjoying basic rights that were long enjoyed by whites in America.



Henrietta J. Burroughs

For me it was a time of hope and I can remember being truly excited that I was alive at the dawn of a new day in this country.

Now, given the increasing levels of poverty and homelessness and the continuing high drop out rates among minority youngsters, it is truly amazing how so many of the apparent gains that were expected to occur after the '60's and 70's fell far short of expectations.

In spite of the ongoing setbacks and the bleak statistics, the election of Barack Obama as this country's 44th President is concrete evidence that enormous changes have obviously taken place within our country.

Hope must spring eternal, because Obama's presidential campaign and his inauguration ignited the hopes of millions around the world -- even the hopes of many who had all but lost hope.

Should we thank Bush and his administration for the role they played in giving us Obama?

The passage of the economic stimulus bill, the promise to shut down the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp and the declaration that the war in Iraq will end in 18 months constitute the stuff that many have dreamed about for a long time. It is amazing how dramatically things can shift. So, we'd better make haste while we can.

Yes, we live in a time of hope, a time like the civil rights era that saw a major shift in consciousness and the sowing of the seeds that have given rise to the dramatic changes we've just witnessed.

We also live in a time that is giving birth to many future memories and it is great that our hopes, dreams and memories can be shared.

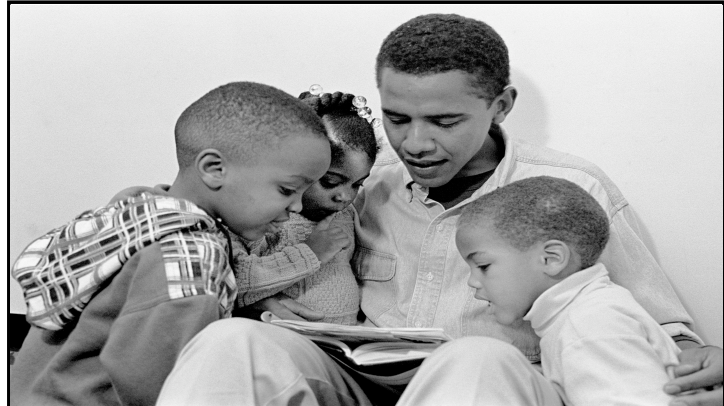


Photo courtesy of Marc PoKempner
The above photo was made in December 1995 during Barack Obama's first campaign for political office. He successfully ran for the Illinois State Senate. In this picture, he is reading to a group of kids at a preschool/daycare facility in his Hyde Park neighborhood in Chicago. Please read the article on the adjoining page titled Hail to the reader in chief: Barack Obama.

Letters in East Palo Alto Today

Arrested Democracy

Dear Editor

We don't need weapons to create mass destruction. Just lack of participation, empty seats at the table, Apathy for registration, and believing everything we hear on cable.

That "dream" with the white picket fence, Has shifted to pipe dreams of bailouts and tax-cuts that "trickle down."

Divisions of class are not clean-cut. Percentages of wealth are disproportionate. Redistribution is not socialistic. It is Equality.

Because, though, we have climbed mountains, "Isms" still sit in our living rooms. California's effect on Bradley and Florida's dismissal of Chad Have only added to our Fear List of Invisible enemies, fictitious characters, exaggerated associations, Lions, tigers, and bears, oh my! When will we find our Wizard of Oz?

Read in between the lines, "my friends" Because aw-shucks! I am not Joe Six-Pack doggone it.

I am a young woman of color who works two jobs just to make ends meet Caring for a mother who can't afford healthcare and Going to school on the side because Education Is my only Hope of Survival in a System That limits my Access and gives me no Privilege.

But like Maya Angelou, I, too, "know why the caged bird sings." My Voice is my only Freedom.

by 'Amelia Kolokihakaufisi
East Palo Alto, CA

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

East Palo Alto Today

Publisher: East Palo Alto Center for Community Media
Editor: Henrietta J. Burroughs

East Palo Alto Today is published bimonthly;
Address all letters to: East Palo Alto Today
321 Bell Street, East Palo Alto, CA 94303
(650)327-5846, ext 311 (phone)
(Fax) (650)327-4430
epatoday@aol.com; epamedia.org and epatoday.org

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.

Hail to the reader in chief: Barack Obama

By Ishmael Reed

Barack Obama, a Celtic African American with a golden tongue and a golden pen, will not be the first literary president

John Quincy Adams wrote an essay about Hamlet. Franklin Pierce palled around with Nathaniel Hawthorne. High school graduate Harry Truman might have been the most well read of all of the presidents. John F. Kennedy could quote the Greeks and entertained James Baldwin and Langston Hughes at the White House.

But to see a black man who is literary and is the president sends a powerful message to young people who are abandoning books for the iPod and

other gadgets that a curmudgeon like me has given up trying to keep up with.

Once in a while, the black boys on my block stop by the house to get autographed copies of my youngest daughter's books. One day I stopped them and challenged them to read some passages. They zipped right through. I promised them cash incentives if they would write a poem for me. They weren't able to do it. When I asked one of the boys, a kid who should be in a classroom for the gifted, why, he said that it was "football season."

They probably go to schools where there exists no black male writer on their reading

lists. The people who have defined what black men are insist that they be athletes, entertainers or criminals, or misogynists and absent fathers in a country where half the marriages end in divorce and the nuclear family is in the minority.

The election of a cerebral black president could indicate that whites, yellows and browns might want more from the black experience than that made available by the middlepersons, the television and Hollywood executives and book publishers and the newspapers that are in trouble because they turn off black and brown consumers. We read about Latino rapists, but seldom about great Latino

painters, astronauts, scientists, architects and authors who receive recognition in South America, Europe and Asia, but not here.

Playwright Wajahat Ali has compared Barack Obama to Superman. He has a point. On his way to the White House, Obama shattered a whole bunch of stereotypes and clichés about black life and, like a cool man of steel, deflected the outpouring of racist bile aimed at him. (My favorite was a banner put up by the Republican Party in New Jersey: "Obama loves America like O.J. loved Nicole.") Maybe young people will learn from his campaign that words and a cool demeanor can be as effective

as an Uzi. Don't riot, get a blog.

Though black kids are singled out as those who believe that intellectual life is a white thing, another media hoax, anyone who is acquainted with the facts understands that the decline of literacy is a national problem. Why else are bookstores closing and book reviews becoming obsolete, and why is affirmative action extended to white men to keep them in college?

I always say that I have never seen a movie that was as good as the best book that I've read. One comes close. "The Reader," a superbly acted movie, is about a previously illiterate woman who actually

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A most severe city housing crisis

By Christopher Lund

East Palo Alto is currently facing the most severe affordable housing crisis it has seen in decades.

Since late 2006, Page Mill Properties, a Palo Alto based real estate investment firm, has purchased over 1790 rental units in the Woodland Park neighborhood of East Palo Alto. This neighborhood is bounded

on its eastern edge by Highway 101 and on its western edge by San Francisco Creek. With these purchases, Page Mill Properties now owns roughly 50% of the rental units in the City.

In what is commonly described as a predatory equity scheme, Page Mill Properties, doing business as Woodland Park Apartments, hopes to make "opportunistic" profits for itself and its partners by undermining

the City's Rent Stabilization Ordinance.

The City of East Palo Alto was incorporated, in part, to guarantee an adequate affordable housing stock for its citizens and to establish laws governing tenant-landlord relations.

For the City and its residents, the costs of Page Mill's business model are steep.

In walking the neighborhood last month, I met a 30 year old woman that had been evicted

from her unit on Dec 1. Struggling to meet Page Mill's rent increases and to provide for her family, she was late with her November rent by several weeks. When she went to the management office to settle her account, Page Mill simply refused payment.

Unfortunately, this is a common practice. She was last seen living out of her car with her 9 and 7 year old daughters as well as a 6 month old infant.

I also met a woman, Tina, who had left her apartment on Dec 1 to avoid having an eviction on her record. She is a brittle diabetic and struggles with the burden of heavy medical costs. This summer, Page Mill informed people with disabilities that they would offer reduced rents under special circumstances. She pursued this offer, and to Page Mill's credit, they agreed to meet.

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The peace walk: a reflection of East Palo Alto

By Eliza Smith

EPA Today Contributor

On Wednesday, January 21, 2009, youth from East Palo Alto and East Menlo Park took to the streets to demand Peace, as a response to the recent string of violence in their community. The Peace March was partially suggested by an eighth grader at Belle Haven Community School.

Eliza Smith and Dupe Thomas, both coordinators for Youth Community Service, coordinated the final concept. Youth Community Service (YCS) is a non-profit organization with 6 after-school clubs in the Ravenswood City School District. All students learn curriculum from the Cesar Chavez Foundation following monthly core values that Cesar Chavez himself lived by. January's them is Non-Violence.

Over the course of January, students learned about Non-Violence. Including civil rights leaders from past and present



Young people marching in East Palo Alto on January 21 2009

history. Positive influences such as, Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Rosa Parks and Gandhi played a huge part of inspiration for the "Peace Walk." Over one hundred students, volunteers, parents and other organizations participated in the Peace Walk. The march started at East Palo Alto City Hall on University Ave at 2pm. All uniformed in white t-shirts and peace arm bands and accessories, the youth began to chant. "Si se Puede! Yes we can and P-E-A-C-E." YCS coordinators helped pump the crowd up and keep the

momentum. The group began to walk towards the 101 University overpass.

With vivid signs and united voices, their chants sound like a lion's roar. It was so beautiful as commuters honked their car horns in support. This ambitious group marched several blocks to their second destination, Bell Street Park. Students showed their solidarity and opposition to the violence occurring not just in EPA and EMP, but the world. This was a movement and it felt so powerful, everyone so full of energy and pride. We were proud to be a part of this moment. This Peace Walk

was definitely necessary and overdue. Everyday us as adults should encourage a child if not several children to voice their opinions and discuss real life situations that affect them. Directly or indirectly, our community is a reflection of all of us. Our children of East Palo Alto are warriors. In a sense, they are put to the test daily to see if they can overcome life's obstacles. At school with their peers or just walking to the corner store our youth are faced with negative situations. In reality, in our community you may see much more than intended. So instead of becoming a part of the problem, I encourage youth to fix



Young people carrying posters at the peace march

the problem. By confronting the issues of our community through exercise of critical thought and conscious action.

All Participants signed the "Live in Peace" banner, as their personal pledge to practice living more peacefully. The banner was later hung at the University and Donohue intersection. Even thou the intended spot for the banner display was the 101 overpass, East Palo Alto and all commuters get the direct effect of driving by the banner as a reminder for peace. All YCS clubs are back to work with planning our next steps for February's theme: Sacrifice.

The next event with hopes will be even more massive and leave another positive impact on youth, our community and ourselves. We still have hope in EPA and our future leaders are being molded now. For more information, visit our website:

Youthcommunityservice.org

Eliza Smith was one of the organizers of the Peace March.