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City Shocker

The Political Game of Hiding the Long-Term Debt

By George Wooding

San Francisco's cash-strapped politicians are relying heavily on an expensive form of debt called Certificates of Participation (COPs) to pay San Francisco's bills, perhaps hoping they can continue hiding this practice from voters.

The public doesn't know what COPs are, which seems to suit City politicians just fine. San Francisco construction projects that are either unaffordable, unpopular, or need to keep a low profile can be funded by COPs —without any public input or oversight whatsoever. Over a billion dollars in long-term City debt and interest have been issued with just the approval of the City's finance committee and our Board of Supervisors. Unlike issuing general obligation bonds or levying parcel taxes, COPs don't need public, two-thirds majority approval by voters mandated by the 1979 passage of Proposition 13. They don't even need public involvement.

COPs were specifically developed in San Francisco in the early 1980's as a hybrid funding scheme by a local law firm to provide a loophole to Proposition 13 borrowing requirements. The lack of public transparency and ease of approval proved to be irresistible to San Francisco's local politicians. COPs are now the City's primary vehicle for non-voter-approved debt. Someone stole Mom's credit card: According to the May 18th Legislative Analyst report, San Francisco has the highest COP debt per capita, \$735 per person, of 15 California jurisdictions surveyed. By comparison, the City of Los Angeles had the second highest per capita California COP debt at \$393 per person.

Due to arcane accounting rules, the money borrowed by COPs is not considered to be "long-term debt." Instead, this borrowed money is lumped into "long-term rental/lease" payments. Thus, the City can borrow hundreds of millions of dollars by issuing blank-check COPs, and not have this money shown as debt on a balance statement, or on the City's *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report* (CAFR) summarizing the City's detailed financial condition, a document which has become the nationwide paradigm for local government accounting practices.

San Francisco COPs are always reported as leases or long-term obligations. These long-term obligations usually consist of large upfront fees and two payments a year, a variable interest payment, and a semi-annual debt-service payment. Lease payments can be scheduled for as long as 12 to 33 years. The City also needs to pledge an existing City-owned asset as collateral worth at least as much as the money borrowed. If San Francisco subsequently defaults on its rent payments, the City may lose its pledged collateral. Confused, or outraged, yet?

District 2 Supervisor, Mark Farrell, a financial expert, stated in a February 11 *Examiner* article, "Masking the true cost of our City government is horrible financial planning. We have over \$1.3 billion in non-voter approved debt (COPs) on our books right now. What

really concerns me is the fact that we have over \$100 million on our books where voters have rejected bond measures, but we go ahead and issue the debt anyway, or fund routine maintenance operations. It's costing us millions [of dollars] a year in interest payments. We need to have a clear, transparent dialogue with the public about what we are doing."

Supervisor Farrell isn't kidding. His is a long-overdue voice of rationality on a Board of Supervisors who have lead us into a financial mess over the past decade, including current and past supervisors and the approval of our last two Mayors, Willie Brown and Gavin Newsom, who all avoided like the plague having this difficult conversation and dialog with voters

Until 2000, San Francisco COPs were used responsibly. This changed when U.S. District Judge William Orrick ruled that conditions at the San Francisco-owned San Bruno jail were unhealthy and that a new jail needed to be built. City voters twice rejected General Obligation Bond measures to fund the project and the City was forced in 2001 to use COP funding instead.

The construction costs of the San Bruno jail were \$137.2 million. The actual cost to City taxpayers, including loan costs and interest, is \$10 million to \$13 million annually, for the next 33 years (until 2033.). The City is hoping to hold the final cost to approximately \$350 million. This will mean that only thirty-nine cents of every dollar will have gone to actual construction costs, and the balance will go to interest payments and fees. A voter-approved general obligation bond would have probably cost at least a \$50 million *less*.

COP funding costs San Francisco more to use than voter-approved general obligation bond funding. According to Nadia Sesay, Director of Public Finance, COPs usually cost 45-65 base rating points more than general obligation bonds. For example, if a general obligation bond interest rate was 4.0, the corresponding COP interest rate would be approximately 4.55. This interest difference represents a huge amount of money.

General obligation bonds are a better financing tool than COPs because they create a new, voter-approved source of

The Breach at Ocean Beach

By Steve Lawrence

Ocean Beach is one of San Francisco's gems in the rough. What's up out there on the Western front?

All is not quiet. The beach is in retreat. In the past decade the boundary between ocean and beach moved east – quite a lot. While not noticeable to the casual beach walker, south

of Sloat Blvd the beach is inland on the order of 235 feet of where it was in 2000. That's a lot of change.

Beach erosion happens suddenly. While the sea rises slowly, suddenly the right, or wrong, conditions combine, and then the ocean can claim chunks in short order. In no time a roadway is vulnerable, as Great Highway became last year; within hours, expensive sewage infrastructure, built to last a hundred years, is in danger of being undermined and destroyed.

It's a truism to say that Nature is dynamic, but in the case of the ocean versus Ocean Beach and its cliffs, it does take on poignant meaning.

What to do, other than watch Nature's awesome power? That is the question SPUR is addressing. (SPUR is San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association, a non-profit.) SPUR is preparing a "master plan" for the 3.5 mile stretch of Ocean Beach. Perhaps the toughest question is how to deal with erosion and the advancing ocean. Protect the road and sewer infrastructure, or abandon to Nature?

So far we have protected human "improvements." But we do so mostly when danger approaches. Once danger passes, long-term protection measures bog down in controversy. The next crisis arrives, and then we react. Having a thought-through plan would be better.

Numerous agencies are involved at Ocean Beach. Among them, the Army Corps of Engineers, which maintains the Golden Gate's shipping channel, dumps sand in an attempt to replenish, or build up, the eroding beach. Department of Public Works has dumped rock, creating what is called a rock revetment, during winters of emergency. It expects to install a wall of piles in an attempt to save the bluffs. Other agencies protect endangered birds, the coast, and mediate between dog owners and others. Everything done and to be done at Ocean Beach must be done with sensitivity, and usually is preceded by outreach and process, which is time-consuming.

In stormy weather the Great Highway has become lesser. For a time a portion of southbound lanes was closed. Now a section is one lane instead of two, and that lane has been pushed eastward.

Your water rates have doubled over the past five years, and are set to increase another 13% July 1. Sewer rates are higher still. The major work to update the sewer system remains ahead. Planned work does not include relocating infrastructure at Ocean Beach.

Ocean Beach is where the city meets the wild. Surfers, bikers, fishermen, strollers, joggers, hang gliders, bird watchers...all find their way to this place to have fun and renew the spirit. The majesty and power of the great ocean lays, usually quietly, sometimes not, at the edge of our continent. That power is rising, relentlessly rising.

Feedback: lawrence@westsideobserver.com

Cont. p. 8

**PRESIDENT
BARACK OBAMA:**

“Smart meters will allow you to actually monitor how much energy your family is using by the month, by the week, by the day, or even by the hour.”

**ROLLING STONE
MAGAZINE:**

Smart meters are a “sure bet” to cool the planet.

**NOBEL PRIZE WINNER &
FORMER VICE PRESIDENT
AL GORE:**

The Smart Grid will “empower consumers to take charge of their energy use and respond to energy waste.”

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Parkmerced Edges Out Critics

By Jonathan Farrell

The proposal to redevelop Parkmerced passed the SF Board of Supervisors on a 5-6 vote. Spokesman for the 116-acre high-rise apartment and garden townhouse complex PJ Johnston said that the redevelopment project would be a “win-win.”



Spacious streets and low rise housing are likely to make way for more dense housing units.

Parkmerced was constructed between 1941-1951. It was then and still remains the largest privately-owned single apartment complex in the City. Designed by landscape architect Thomas Church, it is one of four such places in the nation. Parkmerced’s layout encompasses courtyards, gardens and wide sweeps of green space, giving residents, especially families, a sense of community and urban convenience. The proposal wants to expand the existing 3,221 units of housing into 8,900 units by demolishing the garden townhouses and replacing them with high-rises.

Once the project gets underway, demolition will eventually displace families and relocate more than 7, 000 residents. Current Parkmerced owners, under the management of Stellar/Fortress, believe this is the best plan for the future.

SF Housing Action Coalition executive director Tim Colen supports the proposal. “Population growth is anticipated to reach the size of Los Angeles or San Jose over the next decade,” he said. He insists the time to prepare for the future is now. He believes density housing with high-rises is “smart housing” for the future.

“The existing towers are fine,” said Colen to the members of Sunset Heights Association of Responsible People at a meeting last month. “It is the garden townhouses that have outlived their life-span,” he said.

Parkmerced as envisioned by the team of Skidmore Owings & Merrill will be more transit-centered instead of car-centered. The new design challenges Church’s mid-20th Century landscape design by incorporating an ecologically holistic pedestrian-focused design to create a sense of community for 21st Century needs. It will take an estimated 30 years to complete.

Speaking to Supervisor Sean Elsbernd by phone he assured that “this will be done in phases, gradually. Each phase will not proceed until the previous phase has been completed in full,” said Elsbernd.

Serving Parkmerced as part of his constituency, he is confident developers will honor their agreement. Elsbernd said that with the cooperation of Stellar/Fortress, the developers promise to pay for all relocation costs. And he also said that rent control would remain for the new units.

Yet long-term Parkmerced residents like Michael Russom and Susan Suval disagree.

In return for the city’s agreement to the proposal, the Parkmerced area will be re-zoned allowing for relaxing of current building height and density code restrictions.

“What will happen is a major demolition of a neighborhood,” said Suval. “People don’t realize that this proposed plan, if it gets its way, will create more congestion,” she said. And, said Suval, “what if the relocated families stay away and do not return to Parkmerced?”

She noted that with the economy the way it is how can anyone guarantee that the new units will remain under rent

control? “The developers need to make their money,” said Suval. With housing the way it is now and loans hard to find, she asked, “how will families be able to afford the new units if they go on the market at full value?”

Russom, who has lived in Parkmerced for more than 20 years and raised his children there, believes that the real plan is not about creating more housing, but for greedy investors to make more money. Russom believes the City thinks it is getting a great deal by allowing the developer to build more housing to increase tax revenues.

He fears that once the proposed project gets underway, unforeseen complications will prompt Stellar/Fortress to step away from the project and hand it over to another investor/developer. Suval agreed as she said, “it is important for the City to really look at their track record. With the current recession, this is not the time to be doing this kind of project,” she said.

Housing advocate and legal consultant Mitchell Omerberg said he has seen similar scenarios before. Lots of promises in the agreement but then there is a breach of contract. “This could very well end up like ‘urban renewal’ projects of the past such as what happened to the Fillmore District over 40 years ago,” said Omerberg.

Promises of relocation and tenants and owners being able to move back after new structures were completed sounds too much like “urban renewal.” As Carl Close noted in his blog article for the Independent Institute blog back in July of 2008, “with the help of eminent domain and federal funding, 4,729 businesses were forced to close, 2,500 households were pushed out of the neighborhood, and 883 Victorian houses were demolished.”

SF Planning Commission Vice President Ron Miguel insists that scenario was different. Elsbernd also reassured that such a scenario could not happen. But Omerberg and architectural analyst Aaron Goodman question the judgment of the Planning Commission in its 4-3 approval to allow the proposal to go on to the Board of Supervisors.

Goodman used to live in Parkmerced and coordinated a neighborhood alliance for the complex. He said that there is no guarantee that the developer agreement with the Mayor’s Office will be ironclad certain. To use this as a means to increase potential tax income Goodman sees is off balance.

Planning Commissioner Kathrin Moore questioned the feasibility of the project. “This is all speculative,” she said.

She pointed out Parkmerced is along 19th Ave, one of the most congested commute corridors in the City. “It’s not a city street,” she said. “It belongs to the State of California, part of I-280 going south and of Highway 1 going north, the construction will go on for years,” she noted. “The State and Caltrans has not even weighed in on this yet,” said Moore.

Jonathan Farrell is a free-lance reporter living in San Francisco.

RUMINATIONS FROM A FORMER SUPERVISOR By Quentin Kopp Nettlesome Gap Between Probable Revenue and Desired Expenditures



One of the most nettlesome aspects of City Hall folly is Board of Supervisors and mayoral treatment of the iniquitous “payroll tax.” To remind longtime San Franciscans and inform all readers, the payroll tax was imposed by the Board of Supervisors and then-Mayor Joseph L. Alioto in 1970, the year before I was elected to the Board of Supervisors. The tax rate was then 1% of any business payroll totaling \$250,000 or more annually. (It is now 1.5%) At the same time, the Board of Supervisors and Mayor enacted a gross receipts tax, based on a business’ gross revenue. Whichever yielded more money would be owed by the affected business. In 1970 the Board of Supervisors and Mayor Alioto preferred to impose a city income tax, primarily to levy upon commuters but which also would apply to residents. They couldn’t do so, because in 1963 the California Legislature and then-Governor Edmund G. (Pat) Brown enacted California Revenue and Taxation Code Section 17041.5, barring any city, county or local district from imposing an income tax. Mayor Alioto’s theory, and that of his tax supporters on the Board of Supervisors, was understandable: commuters used public services such as police, fire, street sweeping, public works, but allegedly didn’t pay a “proper” share of the cost of San Francisco services.

Interestingly, the City of Los Angeles emulated San Francisco. Los Angeles’ payroll tax was, however, challenged in court for unequally and unconstitutionally treating businesses. Los Angeles settled the case by repealing its payroll tax and changing its gross receipts tax to collect revenue it lost from abolition of the payroll tax. There was no such challenge in San Francisco, but in 1982, I introduced a proposed ordinance eliminating the payroll tax. The incumbent mayor (I think her name was Feinstein) strongly opposed my ordinance, having advocated the payroll tax in 1970 as a supervisor. Ultimately, my ordinance

tax on money bestowed upon our employees from stock options?” Well, with the nearly \$100,000 per year geniuses at the Board, who qualify for the insolvent city pension plan after only eight years, that’s easy: Supervisor Mark Farrell introduces an ordinance to exempt stock option profit from the payroll tax. (Twitter supposedly claims it would pay \$50,000,000 per annum in payroll tax just for stock option compensation and in the City’s 2010-11 budget, approximately \$350,000,000 emanated from the total payroll tax.) Amidst the implication that Supervisor Farrell’s private finance business benefits from stock options, another supervisor’s ordinance was enacted to remove stock option profit from the definition of compensation for payroll tax purposes for six years to satisfy the clamor of fashionable internet corporations possessing over 100 employees which are privately (not publically) traded

If, however, you’ve been a business owner of long-standing elsewhere in San Francisco, paying all your taxes, including the tax on your payroll, you receive no such exemption. Is that just or sensible?

was rejected by a Board of Supervisors committee. Consequently, San Francisco for 41 years has enacted an illogical tax on businesses. It remains the only city in California to do so! For every business with a payroll amounting to \$250,000 or more that hires a new employee, a payroll tax on that job is collected. Instead of simply repealing the foolish payroll tax, which handicaps San Francisco competitively, and modifying the gross receipts tax to secure the lost tax revenue, the Mayor and Board of Supervisors take “baby steps” with the concomitant effect of treating businesses unequally by favoring a few new businesses and creating “winners and losers.” First, under threat from highly successful Twitter to relocate from San Francisco to Brisbane and not consummate a lease of considerable space in the one-time Furniture Mart at Market and 10th Streets, the Mayor and Board passed an ordinance exempting from the payroll tax Twitter and other businesses, not throughout the city, but solely in that specified “zone” generally characterized as the mid-Market Street area.

Thus, only Twitter and any other business with an annual payroll of \$1,000,000 or more which moves into such “zone” will not pay a payroll tax on new employees. Its present payroll tax will remain unchanged for the next six years. If, however, you’ve been a business owner of long-standing elsewhere in San Francisco, paying all your taxes, including the tax on your payroll, you receive no such exemption. Is that just or sensible? I think not.

The plot thickens. For purposes of the payroll tax, compensation includes any profit from stock options exercised by a business’ employees. The tax break to Twitter exempts any stock option compensation. Now, another San Francisco business, Zynga, a new and successful corporation (Zynga and Twitter have been valued in excess of \$7,000,000,000 each) has asked. “What about us? Why shouldn’t we be exempted from a payroll

corporations. But City Hall isn’t through.

In April, with a prospective budget deficit of \$306,000,000, City Hall announced a doubling of its subsidy to businesses which hire people on welfare. The initial subsidy was \$2,500 per new employee. Asserting that few businesses have used the program, city government will now subsidize a business at \$5,000 per employee if it hires a San Franciscan on welfare. The Federal government originally furnished the money. Congress, however, stopped the funding in September 2010. City Hall, nevertheless, used approximately \$2,100,000 from the city’s General Fund to perpetuate it. Claiming not enough employers used the money, the new Mayor raises the subsidy and you wonder why the City faces a huge gap between probable revenue and desired expenditures for fiscal year 2011-12?

Finally, to complete the tale, in early May, Senate President pro-tem Darryl Steinberg of Sacramento introduces a measure to repeal the 1963 ban on local income taxes and allow counties and school districts (San Francisco is both a city and a county) to impose a local income tax with voter approval. Hold onto your wallets.

Next month, readers will know which of two competing proposed Charter Amendments to cure the indicated \$650,000,000 or more unfunded pension liabilities of San Francisco taxpayers should be supported in November, and whether San Francisco law should be amended to require competitive bidding and payment of a franchise fee to San Franciscans for the multi-million-dollar privilege of collecting local garbage will grace the ballot. It’s noteworthy that at the May 2011 meeting of the West of Twin Peaks Central Council attendees learned from Supervisor John Avalos that, as a candidate for Mayor, he supports such an initiative ordinance amendment and openly proclaims his backing, unlike other mayoral candidates who practice evasion.

Quentin Kopp is former San Francisco Supervisor, State Senator and Judge.

Always Look A Gift Horse In The Mouth

By Anmarie Mabbutt

On Wednesday, May 11, 2011, the San Francisco Recreation & Park Department held a ground-breaking ceremony for the Mission Playground improvement project. The project includes a new playground, new landscaping, new fencing, resurfacing of the tennis and basketball courts and a completely renovated and seismically retrofitted clubhouse. The project also includes converting the open blacktop soccer area to a fenced artificial turf field. At first glance a free \$500,000 gift of a new state of the art soccer field to a historically lower income minority neighborhood sounds great, but then why all the secrecy and backdoor lobbying?



The official RPD Notices for the public meetings for the Mission Playground renovations held in summer 2009 never mentioned the renovation of the soccer area or the installation of artificial turf. In fact, the notices did not provide any details about the project. The official Department Notices for the Playfields Initiative projects at Garfield Square, Silver Terrace, Crocker Amazon, South Sunset and Kimball Field also never

The official Department Notices for the Playfields Initiative projects at Garfield Square, Silver Terrace, Crocker Amazon, South Sunset and Kimball Field also never mentioned the use of artificial turf or synthetic products. Instead, the Notices used the phrase "the renovation and improvement of the soccer field" or "the renovation and improvement of the turf field."

mentioned the use of artificial turf or synthetic products. Instead, the Notices used the phrase "the renovation and improvement of the soccer field" or "the renovation and improvement of the turf field."

The San Francisco Recreation & Park Commission Gift Policy (Resolution #9716-230) reads "Any gift-in-place or in-kind gift valued in excess of \$10,000 must go to the Commission for their recommendation to the Board of Supervisors to accept and expend such gift before construction may begin or a gift is used." Yet, according to official Commission records, the Recreation & Park Commission has never considered or approved the City Fields Foundation gifts for the artificial turf conversion projects at Mission Playground, Beach Chalet, Crocker Amazon, South Sunset, Franklin Square or Kimball Playground.

The required Board of Supervisors approval for these gifts is also lacking. Administrative Code Section 10.100-305(b) clearly states "The acceptance of expenditure of any gift of cash or goods of a market value greater than \$10,000 shall require approval of the Board of Supervisors, by resolution." But according to official Board of Supervisors records, the City Fields Foundation gifts for Mission Playground, Beach Chalet, Crocker Amazon, South Sunset, Franklin Square and Kimball Playground have never been considered or approved by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

Why have General Manager Phil Ginsburg and former General Managers Yomi Agunbiade and Jared Blumenfeld reportedly accepted more than \$10.7 million in philanthropic gifts without ever seeking approval for these gifts from the Commission or the Board of Supervisors? Back in February 2006, Commissioner Tom Harrison proposed as a last minute amendment to the City Fields Foundation partnership (Resolution #0602-010), a clause allowing the RPD General Manager to accept any future Foundation gifts without seeking Board of Supervisors approval.

Despite being described by Supervisor McGoldrick as an ill-advised and unprecedented delegation of authority over multi-million dollar philanthropic gifts to a single individual, in April 2006, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved this proposal as part of Ordinance #060255. This delegation of the Board's authority should have been presented separately as an amendment to the Administrative Code. Instead, it quietly created a singular exception for the RPD General Manager to accept multi-million dollar philanthropic gifts without Board approval.

On January 12th, 2010, Supervisor Eric Mar introduced Ordinance #100053 providing formal Board of Supervisors approval of the City Fields Foundation gifts for Mission Playground and Beach Chalet. Supervisor Mar introduced this legislation a week after a letter was sent to Deputy City Attorney Virginia Dario Elizondo requesting clarification of the legislative intent of the portion of Ordinance #060255 that had given the RPD General Manager authority over all future Foundation gifts. Ms. Elizondo never responded to the letter but it did appear to spark a flurry of activity by Fisher family lobbyists Susan Hirsch and Alex Clemens. According to official Ethics Commission lobbyist activity summaries, between January 5th (the day I sent the letter) and January 13th, 2010, Ms. Hirsch and Mr. Clemens made a total of 16 contacts including meetings with RPD General Manager Phil Ginsburg, Board President David Chiu and Supervisors Alioto-Pier, Elsbernd, Dufty and Supervisor Eric Mar. But Ordinance #100053 was never calendared for a committee meeting and simply expired.

At Mission Playground, the Foundation and the Department claim they are providing the neighborhood with a new state of the art soccer field. But if the history and usage patterns at the other Playfields Initiative sites are any indication, what had been a free walk on neighborhood field will now become a locked destination field used largely by outside organizations and leagues that can afford to pay the \$25-\$65 hourly permit fee for use of the field. According to information released earlier this year on the City Fields Foundation website, walk on free play at the Mission Playground soccer field will be restricted to three evenings per week and a portion of Sunday afternoon. For the rest of the week, play at the field will now be controlled by the Recreation and Parks Department and its Permits and Reservations Division.

For more information about the City Fields partnership with the Recreation and Parks Department and the future of free neighborhood play at Mission Playground, contact Permits and Reservations Manager Dana Ketcham. Ms. Ketcham is an original member of the City Fields Foundation steering committee and a former President and VP of Scheduling for the Viking Soccer League. According to records released by the RPD, Viking Soccer League appears to be the private organization receiving the greatest number of hours of permitted play on the artificial turf fields. If you would like more information about the Department's and the City's gift approval and reporting procedures, contact General Manager Phil Ginsburg. Given the events of the past few weeks, Mr. Ginsburg might be interested in talking about something other than Stow Lake and Alex Tourk.

Anmarie Mobutt: A California attorney and former longtime resident, Anmarie is currently writing a book about the privatization of San Francisco's public park space. She can be reached at tenniselement@yahoo.com.

MY TWO CENTS By Will Durst

RUN, NEWT, RUN!

Out of elective politics for over a decade, dithering on the sidelines like a moody Southern fried Hamlet, Newt Gingrich jumped back into the ring announcing plans to run for the 2012 Republican Presidential nomination. And for every analyst and every pundit and every satirist everywhere, allow me to say: Hooray! Thank you, kind sir, may I have another?

His re-entrance onto center stage is welcome on many fronts. First off, the guy's name is Newt. Never in the annals of political mockery have we had the chance to make herpetological jokes before or after. And rest assured we will avail ourselves of the opportunity. Expect the phrase Lizard-Boy to reassume a central role in the national lexicon soon.

Then there's his penchant for routinely ratcheting the rhetoric up past eleven. Hundred. Our recent precipitous plunge into polarization can easily be traced to Gingrich's scorched earth ascension in the early 90s. There are no honorable opponents in Newt World, only despicable traitors. Each disagreement, a nuclear war. And anybody who isn't a white male Christian poses a major threat to democracy as we know it and should be vaporized only after having his knees broken as an example.

"Obama is the most radical president in American history and views the citizenry through a Post-Colonial Kenyan perspective." "The gay fascist movement wants to overthrow the government and destroy religion through violence." He's a trash-talking intellectual poseur with the subtlety of a hippo in a tutu.

The good news for Gingrich is that he ranks very high in recognition polls. The bad news for Gingrich is that he ranks very high in recognition polls. The founder and spokesman of Renewing American Leadership comes equipped with more baggage than a Carnival Cruise liner taking on the contents of two stranded sister ships. Might be three people tops in the country whose opinions of the former Speaker of the House haven't solidified like frozen chicken grease.

Love him or hate him, there's no in-between; and that includes his own party. To some Republicans, he's Moses who led them out of the desert to the promised land of taking back the House in 94, for the first time in 40 years. To others he's Voldermort. Sparking an ill-fated government shutdown then resigning under a cloud of ethics violations: some still refer to him as "He Who Must Not Be Named."

Dr. Newton Leroy Gingrich is generally considered an ideas man. Not good ideas necessarily, but big ideas. Accusing enemies of being socialist Nazis. That's new. Also odd ideas, like claiming his adulterous behavior stemmed from loving his country too darn much. So essentially, he did to two mistresses what he wanted to do to us. Thanks ladies. And yet, he attracts evangelical followers with his traditional family values platform. And having three wives just proves he's Extra Traditional.

Gingrich can't win and if he's half as smart as he thinks he is, he has to know that. So, why is he running? To what end? Increased face-time to sell more of his twenty plus books? Can't get enough of the sound of his own voice? Or is his responsibility simply to throw bombs at all the major edifices and let Mitt Romney waltz through the smoldering ruins unscathed? The only problem is, like sweaty nitroglycerine, Mr. Gingrich is highly charged and unpredictable. A human IED. Run. Newt. Run.

The New York Times says Emmy-nominated comedian and writer Will Durst "is quite possibly the best political satirist working in the country today." Check out willdurst.com to find out about upcoming stand-up performances or to buy his book, "The All-American Sport of Bipartisan Bashing."

Letters to the Editor

This is in response to the photo published on the back page of your February 2011.

Today was the pre 50th Reunion of my graduating class at Abraham Lincoln High School. We were given an organized tour of the School. At the School Tour, one of my Classmates, Arthur Elvin of Pacheco Street (Forest Hill), brought the clipping to me and asked if it was me. Answer "Yes".

My Uniform was sponsored by Siskin's Thrifty Drug, located next to Angelo's Restaurant, just across from the Tunnel Entrance. The Coach on the right rear is John Pearce, and his son, John Pearce, Jr. is in the back row, (Big Smile) third from left. I am the little guy, middle row, far right. Next to Mr. Pearce is Gil "Buddy" Haskell, now prominent in the NFL as a coach. I remember some of the other names, but I couldn't tell you who was who.

Even the name of Walt Lunny rings a bell, but I'm not sure which one is him. I still have a copy of this actual photo. I wish I would have written down the names.

Where are they now? Here I am. Mark D. Zimmerman, Emeryville; age 67+. Semi-retired Real Estate Broker.

Before the School Tour today, Three of us had lunch at El Toreador, 50 West Portal Ave., and it was excellent. I didn't know then that I would be getting the photo from your Westside Observer, so it is funny, in a way, that I made conversation about our West Portal Merchants Midget Baseball Team. Truly a great neighborhood memory.

By the way, I think that the Photo is not '53, but more like '54, or '55.

Mark Zimmerman

(See the photo at: westsideobserver.com/letters.htm)



WESTSIDE OBSERVER

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Neighbor-on-Neighbor Disputes Resolved



By Darlene Weide, Executive Director of Community Boards

Many of us have dealt with neighbors with overgrown yards, but the large bushes next door recently became a lesson in conflict prevention for one West Portal resident. He was concerned that the bushes prevented him from seeing the road (and oncoming traffic) when he was entering and exiting his driveway. He usually had a good relationship with his neighbors, but it quickly soured when he asked them to take care of the thick brush. The conversation was tense, nothing was resolved and then the neighbors did not even say hello when passing each other.

Rather than harbor hostilities or leave the hazardous conditions unaddressed, the neighbors turned to Community Boards, a San Francisco non-profit that provides low-cost mediation services to the city's citizens and merchants. For only \$10, the neighbors started a community mediation and sat down with three trained volunteer mediators who listened to their concerns and helped find a mutually agreeable solution.



Gardener's frustrations with neighbors' shady, overgrown trees are a frequent dispute handled by mediators.

Bruce Tow is a volunteer mediator for Community Boards, and has lived in the Westwood Highlands for nearly twenty years. He hears cases like this all the time, and finds that solutions are more readily accessible when neighbors take advantage of the non-profit's services. Community Boards settles disputes between neighbors, roommates, families, co-workers, landlords and tenants, and consumers and merchants, offering services in English, Spanish, Mandarin and Cantonese.

"If you're having a dispute," said Tow, "Community Boards is a very good place to go first. It is fairly easy, costs virtually nothing, you get treated respectfully and you have an opportunity to tell your story. You will be heard, and you have the opportunity to work out a solution, which can be difficult if you don't have someone helping." Over 90% of Community Boards' cases are resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

Being heard by a group of problem-solvers can be the first step to settling conflict, as it was for two neighbors in the Sunset. A downstairs neighbor was disturbed by noise coming from the upstairs neighbor's television, which was left on all night. The two did not even know each other by name, and the notes left by the downstairs neighbor did nothing to solve the situation. When the police were called, they referred the issue to Community Boards.

During the mediation, it was revealed that the upstairs neighbor was recently widowed and left the television on to ease her loneliness. This caused the downstairs neighbor to feel some compassion, and the situation changed. They agreed to work together to solve the problem. The upstairs neighbor offered to turn down the volume after 11:30 PM and to try not to fall asleep with the television on. The relationship formed during the mediation helped bring the neighbors together, and now they call each other and talk directly when one is feeling disturbed.

"I suspect the mediation services offered by Community Boards slightly lower the temperature in San Francisco.

It is a materially more peaceful place where people can live higher quality lives with fewer painful disputes than they might otherwise. Community Boards has certainly made the city a better place," said Tow. In recognition of Community Boards' 35th anniversary last month, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors officially commended the organization, whose work has inspired similar community mediation efforts across the world.

Community Boards helped solve the conflict between the West Portal neighbors concerned about overgrown bushes. In just one three-hour session, the two parties were able to come to a mutually agreeable solution to their property use dispute. The neighbors that owned the bushes agreed to hire and pay for a gardener, and the resident concerned for his safety agreed to chip in with an annual sum that would offset some of the gardening costs. Both parties were happy with the result of the mediation and felt that they gained valuable communication and dispute resolution skills that will serve them well in the future.

Bruce Tow agrees that the tools learned in community mediation serve him well in other aspects of his life. "I too have gained a better set of tools for dealing with problems that involve high emotions and disputes. I encourage someone who is interested in a quite satisfying form of volunteer service to work with Community Boards. You see firsthand that you are making a fairly significant difference in the peace and tranquility of lives of both individuals and communities," said Tow.

Community Boards offers mediation certification courses for volunteers interested in becoming mediators. The 40-hour basic course is held over two consecutive weekends several times throughout the year. The next course starts Friday, June 10th and partial scholarships are available. For more information about becoming a mediator, or to start a dispute mediation from the comfort of your home using their new online platform, visit www.CommunityBoards.org or call 415-920-3820.

BUSINESS CORNER by Mitch Bull

TRUE SOUND...a resourceful store for your hearing

TRUE SOUND is a dynamic new store in the Lakeshore Plaza Shopping Center that can deliver a big change in your life. Most of us have exceptional hearing when we are in our youth, but the daily noise can slowly cause damage that erodes our ability to hear as clearly. Many of us have been to concerts where we were too close to the speakers, or worked in areas where repetitive noise (like jackhammers, car engines, etc.) is the daily norm.

The question is: How many of us have ever thought about having a hearing evaluation (unless we have a family member who is telling us that we need to)? The answer is probably very few, as the typical response is, "My hearing is fine!"

Owner Robert Gilligan and the team at TRUE SOUND have created an easy, non-threatening way to see how your hearing stacks up. When you walk into the studio, it's not like a typical medical facility that deals with hearing related issues, instead, the green and silver interior and electronic equipment are very hands on and self-service oriented to encourage the taking of a self administered hearing check. No appointments are needed for testing; it's an interactive approach where one can just walk in, put headphones on and, using the touch screen do a simple test to evaluate where your hearing level is.

This casual approach to testing makes TRUE SOUND different than 99% of other hearing testing and device related stores. The layout and makeup of the operation is "lifestyle oriented" so that if it is determined that a hearing accessory is needed, you can work with the audiologist (in the store) to determine the best type to fit your lifestyle and needs. Unlike a "one size fits all" approach, different types of hearing aids are matched to each individual client. They range from devices for "simple needs" to ones for those that have moderate or high need levels. There are stylish devices that are almost imperceptible.



Heather-Little, Robert-Gilligan and Gloria-Hernandez

The lifestyle aspect of hearing plays a large part in the way that the staff at TRUE SOUND approaches its work. Owner Gilligan explains, "People with hearing loss will change their lifestyle due to the impact that it makes in their lives. Many are reluctant to go to restaurants, or movies, where those with hearing loss have a very difficult time either hearing the movie, or dealing with the echoing of multiple conversations. As a result, many people decide that it's too difficult, so they stay home. The new technologies can help to restore the ability to enjoy conversation, movies, concerts and restaurants as many new advances have been made in how hearing assist devices can now differentiate multiple conversations and where the 'primary' conversation is coming from. This is an important improvement over the general single direction microphones that were used in the past."

I was led through a demonstration by Dr. Heather Little, a Doctor of Audiology, who evaluates and assists clients with more specialized testing to ensure the best result for each person looking to improve their hearing. I learned that hearing loss could result from a single episode, or from a lifetime of loud noises that damage our hearing in a cumulative way. The studio has a sound testing room on site with acoustically foam-lined walls where private hearing tests can be conducted. A window in the wall ensures that the clients don't feel

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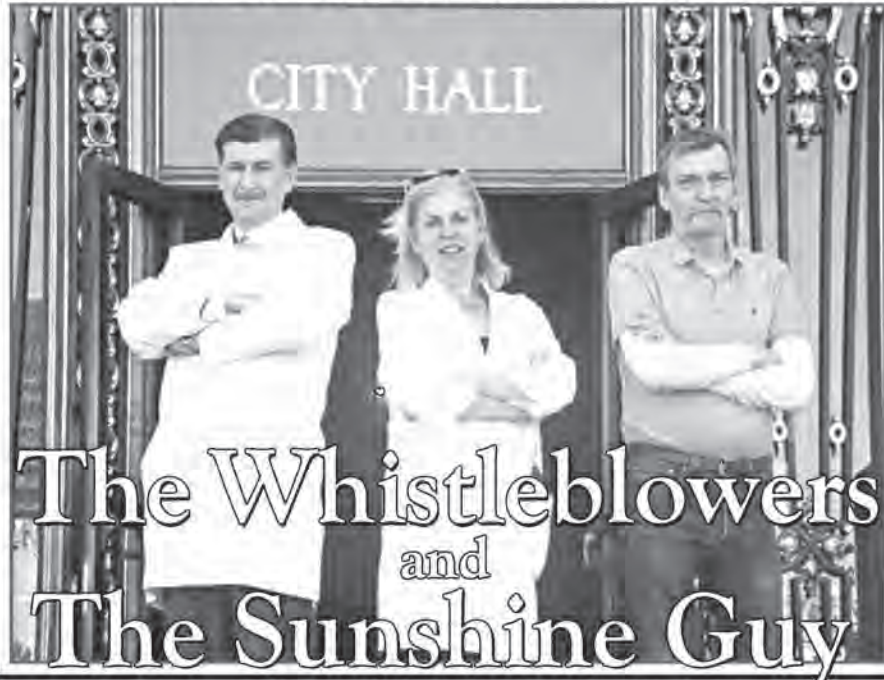
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OPENING PANDORA'S SECRECY BOX: CORRUPTION OF SAN FRANCISCO'S WHISTLEBLOWER PROGRAM



Derek Kerr, MD Maria Rivero, MD Patrick Monette-Shaw

Who could have predicted that Laguna Honda Hospital's (LHH) patient gift fund scandal would eventually evolve into an investigation of San Francisco's Whistleblower program?

Who could guess the Whistleblower program would morph from being about investigating complaints involving city services, and government waste, fraud and inefficiency, into a "risk management" program assessing the the "relative materiality of possible loss to the City"?

...by December 2010, the policy and procedure manual was revised. Rather than having a semi-independent entity investigate whistleblower complaints, departments are allowed to investigate charges against their own departments.

In March 2010, former Laguna Honda Hospital (LHH) doctors Maria Rivero and Derek Kerr filed a whistleblower complaint concerning potential misuse of patient gift funds donated for patient amenities.

Had the gift fund scandal never been exposed, perhaps the commingling of public and private funds by the City, Laguna Honda Hospital, and two non-profit organizations, Laguna Honda Volunteers, Inc. and former city attorney Louise Renne's separate Laguna Honda Foundation, may not have come to light. The second scandal is still unexplained.

Now it appears clear that the LHH patient gift fund scandal led to exposing a third scandal — the corruption of the voter-approved whistleblower program.

What started out as a model whistleblower program has become a betrayal of open government, with apparent collaborative consent of the City Attorney's Office, the Controller's Office, and the Ethics Commission.

Proposition C in 2003 created the whistleblower program that requires the Controller to investigate whistleblower complaints unless the Ethics Commission states in writing that an investigation would substantially impede or delay the Ethics Commission's own investigation of whistleblower complaints.

A Sunshine complaint was filed to

obtain any and all routine, but non-investigatory, correspondence between the City Controller's Office and the Ethics Commission regarding Kerr's and Rivero's gift fund whistleblower complaint. When both agencies refused to provide the correspondence, the author filed a Sunshine complaint on March 6.

The Ethics Commission claimed that all of its records, including routine correspondence between the two agencies, were totally confidential.

Amazingly, Deputy City Attorney Jerry Threet combined Kerr's and Rivero's gift fund whistleblower complaint, which had *not* alleged a conflict of interest, with two other whistleblower complaints the doctors had submitted that *did* involve conflicts of interest. By lumping all three cases together, Threet wrongly sought to justify that the Ethics Commission had jurisdiction over all of the gift fund whistleblower complaints.

City Charter Section C3.699-13 applies only to cases involving Ethics Law, not Public Records Access Law. On April 26, Sunshine Task Force members voted unanimously that both agencies had violated sections 67.27, 67.26, and 67.25 of the Sunshine Ordinance regarding untimely response from the Controller, that withholding of records must be kept to a minimum, and that materials not exempt

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MONEY MATTERS • By Brandon Miller and Joanne Jordan

Get Smart About Getting Smart

Are the season's hottest accessories—a cap and gown—in your future? You might be returning to school to advance your career, or start a whole new one. Maybe you've heard a rumor that your department is slated for the next round of layoffs. Perhaps your little one now needs diplomas instead of diapers. Or maybe you're finally ready to fulfill that promise to yourself.

Great, you've made a smart decision. Now the question is, will you be the one paying, or can you get someone else to do it? For many people, it's a combination of the two. But before you start figuring out who owes what on the bill, you have to know the total.

Decide When Enough Is Enough Obviously, the school you choose is a key factor in how much money you'll need. Average annual tuition and fee costs range from \$35,000 or more for a private four-year college to \$2,700 for public two-year colleges.¹ If the upper end is beyond your reach, perhaps you can receive comparable training from online courses. It might also be possible to take prerequisites at an affordable community college and transfer those credits to a more expensive school later. If all else fails, there are tuition-free colleges, though they're very difficult to get into.

Your life and living expenses won't stop once your studies begin, so how will you

Even if you're not 59½, you may be able to make early withdrawals without penalty to pay for school. Restrictions apply, of course, such as distributions can only be used for qualified higher education expenses and you have to own the IRA for at least five years.

balance school and work? Continue to work full time, shift to part time, or not work at all? If your income will drop while you're in school, remember to add the gap in living expenses into your total equation. If you're only going to school at night, it will take longer to graduate and tuition costs may rise significantly during that time.

There are other factors that will influence your total sum, so be realistic to get a clear idea of how much help you need.

Leverage What You've Got Since most student aid has to be repaid, a smaller debt load will make life easier once you've graduated. Here are some resources you might already have access to:

- **Savings.** Basic savings accounts, money market accounts, CDs, bonds, the cash under your mattress—the source doesn't matter. Just the amount.
- **Traditional or Roth IRAs.** Even if you're not 59½, you may be able to make early withdrawals without penalty to pay for school. Restrictions apply, of course, such as distributions can only be used for qualified higher education expenses and you have to own the IRA for at least five years. Just remember that any amount you withdraw will not be available for your retirement.

• **529 savings plan.** If you have a few years to save, you can open this account where earnings grow tax-free, but must be used for tuition, books and other related education expenses. You have to designate a student beneficiary, which can be yourself or a child.

Find a Helping Hand(out) To help you cover what your savings won't, look at these sources:

- **Government-sponsored financial aid.** Federal student loans usually offer lower interest rates and more flexible repayment options than loans from private sources. That's why it's wise to start here before turning elsewhere. At www.FAFSA.ed.gov, you can fill out one application to

determine your eligibility for available grants, scholarships, work-study opportunities and federal student loans.

• **Employer financing.** Many employers offer education assistance as part of their benefits package. Even if you're facing a layoff, some companies will pay for all or part of education costs for training in a new field. Check with your HR department to see if you're eligible for any assistance.

• **Pension plan.** If you can borrow against your contributions, this could help you meet education expenses. The advantage to this loan type is that you don't need to worry about qualifying as long as you meet your plan's eligibility requirements.

• **Private and home equity loans.** Your great credit might qualify you for funding from a bank, credit union, etc. Just be aware that you'll probably have to begin repaying immediately. Other forms of student aid often defer repayment until after you leave school.

Any loans you secure could mean years—even decades—of repayment. Depending on where you borrowed, you can possibly modify the terms to suit your circumstances, such as making payments that get gradually higher as your salary increases. There are also some government jobs that will forgive all or part of your education debt if you stay in the job for a set number of years.

A smart first step may be to sit down with a financial professional to assess your situation before, during and after school. With a little planning—and a lot of hard work—you could be hanging a tassel from your rear-view mirror sooner than you think.

Brandon Miller, CFP and Joanne Jordan, CFP are financial consultants at Jordan Miller & Associates, A Financial Advisory Practice of Ameriprise Financial Inc. in SF, ¹Trends in College Pricing 2010, College Board, 2011.

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- SFMTA Customer Service, 11 South Van Ness 415.701.3000 Mon–Fri 9 am to 5 pm



WEST OF TWIN PEAKS CENTRAL COUNCIL
By Mitch Bull

Planning, the Housing Element and another Supervisor/Mayoral Candidate visit highlighted the May 23 meeting of the West of Twin Peaks Central Council, held at the Forest Hills Clubhouse.

WOTPCC President George Wooding called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM with about 30 people in the audience and an agenda which would stretch the meeting until 9 PM. After the roll call of member organizations, and the approval of the minutes from last month, Treasurer Carolyn Squeri followed with her report stating the dollars in the account and reminding the organizations to file their IRS form 990 to stay in compliance, as it is now an annual requirement.

Committee reports followed as Avrum Shepard (Transportation), George Wooding (Public Health and Open Space), Matt Chamberlain (Planning and Land Use) and Dave Bisho, representing the Nominating Committee, gave updates.

Shepard detailed MUNI's disagreement with the State Transportation Board, requiring MUNI to improve in safety; MUNI feels no improvement is necessary.

Wooding reported on the issues with the concession bid at Stow Lake where the incumbent operator (for 67 years) has been outbid by a new bidder in a problematic bid practice where allegations of wrong doing have been reported. These allegations resulted in lobbyist and political guru Alex Tourk resigning from affiliation with DA George Gascon's campaign for election. Wooding also detailed the situation at the Arboretum where the admission fees have not nearly approached the levels that were predicted when implemented. The Board of Supervisors recently voted to keep the entrance fees in place. In the Public Health sector, Wooding reported that things at Laguna Honda were basically unchanged, with the exception of ongoing problems with neighbors who are complaining about the excessive noise generated by the air conditioning units in the new portion of the hospital.

Matt Chamberlain's report on planning issues continued with the main emphasis being on five topics that have been reviewed by the WOTPCC in the past: urban wind generation (on which a policy declaration has been prepared); cellular antennae (no policy yet); the AT&T boxes that were discussed last month; the Parkmerced Special Use District; and the Housing Element.

As to the Housing Element, Chamberlain believes that the Supervisors will vote to approve it, probably by an 8-3 count, or no vote will be held and it will automatically go into effect on June 22nd. Dave Bisho informed the attendees that his is part of a group that sued to stop the 2004 Housing Element. The case took 5 years and the arguments against the HE were upheld. The group is prepared to sue again over the 3rd draft of the 2009 HE. – more on the HE below.

Bisho also spoke as head of the Nominating Committee. The slate as proposed by the Nominating Committee for the 2012 WOTPCC is: President – Matt Chamberlain; VP – George Wooding; Treasurer – Carolyn Squeri; Secretary – Blue Mudbhary. The Parliamentarian (Avrum Shepard) serves at the request of the President. The floor is open to other nominations up to and including next month's meeting prior to the vote for the new term, which takes effect with the September meeting.

SF Planning Chief John Rahaim was the first speaker and he opened the floor up for discussion on issues involving the proposed 3rd draft of the Housing Element. Rahaim answered each question courteously while maintaining his view that the HE is a planning guide and not a policy, and not one that is a zoning change to the RH1 and RH2 designations. He explained the rationale that zoning can only be changed by the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission. Questions centered around the definition of height and bulk density guidelines for projects in RH1 neighborhoods, and the importance of preserving the neighborhood ambiance, and not allowing a property owner to purchase an existing home, gut the interior and build a non-single family structure like a tri-plex, etc. Rahaim expressed surprise and disagreed with people concerned and upset about maps (from ABAG – Association of Bay Area Governments) showing overviews of infill projects expected to be zoned for the Westside. Overall, he made his case for the 3rd draft of the HE and the changes from the 2nd draft. For many in the audience, they seem resigned to agree to disagree.

Rahaim reiterated that the purpose of the Planning Department is to give everyone involved the best advice and information on planning for the city as a whole, not just for neighborhood activists or the political will of the day.

The final speaker of the evening was District 11 Supervisor John Avalos, a resident of the Excelsior who is also running for Mayor. The candidate spoke about the makeup of the district (67% single family homes) and his involvement as he has two children in the SF public schools. (His wife is also a teacher at a SF school.) During his talk he touched on his achievements as a Supervisor on legislation he has sponsored, as well as the challenges of the Park and Rec department, the ongoing battle with graffiti, the lack of real "transit first transit" in his district, and the need to bring people and institutions together for the betterment of the city.

The supervisor answered questions ranging from reinstituting SF Police Dept. Academy classes, to Pension Reform (supports it), the Housing Element (will probably vote for it, as he feels the process is in place to maintain the characteristics of each neighborhood), and some lively questions on how non-profit dollars are allocated from City Hall to the non-profit service providers within the City and County of SF.

After the presentations, the speakers and the attendees spent the better part of the next hour having smaller discussions on the topics in small groups and one-on-ones.

Next meeting: June 27th at the Forest Hills clubhouse at 7:30 PM.



Planning Director John Rahaim agrees to disagree with questioners



Supervisor John Avalos, Candidate for Mayor, answers some tough questions from WOTPCC audience

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COPs*Money (Cont. from p. 1)*

tax revenue to pay for all project debt service. General obligation bonds are considered to be the safest kind of municipal debt and typically garner higher ratings from the credit rating agencies and, in turn, cost issuers less in debt service payments and set-up fees.

COPs have lower credit ratings and higher set-up charges as non-voter-approved debt is considered less secure by credit rating agencies. COPs have to be paid entirely from existing General Fund resources or revenue that would flow to the City’s General Fund.

Every penny spent on COPs takes money directly out of the General Fund — money that could have been spent on basic City services like fixing potholes (which street maintenance the City now wants to put as a general obligation bond ballot measure next November, kicking the can on basic maintenance down the road).

The main problem with general obligation bonds is that the unpredictable citizenry of San Francisco have to be convinced to pass ballot measures. During the Newsom administration, it became easier and easier to rely on COP funding, even though COP funding costs more, but was always a sure thing. Dealing with the public can be messy. Newsom and others before him feared embarrassing losses at the ballot box.

Incredibly, COP money does not even have to be spent on the project for which it was appropriated. COPs usually

include a clause which states, “The project lease permits the City with the consent of the Trustee and Certificate insurer to amend the Project lease to release any portion of the Project or to add other property and improvements to the Project or to substitute other property for all or any portion of the Project.”

Sound like a blank check?

Once issued, COP money can be spent anywhere. In 2005, the City declared a “state of emergency” when San Francisco General Hospital’s (SFGH) two auxiliary steam powered generators started to fail. According to City documents, both generators could have been replaced for \$7 million. Currently, the City has a generator-replacement date of January 1, 2012 and has already spent over \$700,000 in generator repairs.

The City issued a COP for \$36 million, which included combined fees, principle, and interest to be paid over a 16-year period. Five years and eleven months after the City-declared “emergency”— and \$29 million over the initial replacement cost estimate — the back-up generators will be replaced. No wonder the City has a budget deficit, which can’t be blamed solely on the need for pension reform.

Even worse, COPs are now being used for services and maintenance that taxpayers have already paid for, but have been deferred by the City. On May 5, 2009, then-Mayor Newsom authorized the execution and delivery


of COPs to fix City streets, using the brand new Laguna Honda Hospital as collateral.

The Laguna Honda - collateral COP generated approximately \$39 million for road repairs. Its COP expense fees cost an additional \$5.6 million, and its twenty-year interest payments will total \$38.9 million. The total cost to the public for this road-repair COP was \$83.5 million. Approximately forty-seven cents of every COP dollar was actually spent on road repair, with the rebuilt Laguna Honda Hospital swinging in the wind as collateral.

It was approved because polling numbers showed a general obligation bond to fund the same work would not be passed by voters; a bond measure to do so was previously rejected by Supervisor Elsbernd as a long-term debt financing solution for one-time, or ongoing, needs. History will likely repeat itself next November, when voters will be asked to approve a new street, and pot-hole-fixing, bond measure.

This road-repair COP is an example of terrible financial waste and mismanagement for several reasons: 1) citizen tax dollars are already supposed to pay for annual road repairs; 2) it’s stupid to use 20 years of long-term debt to pay for short-term road maintenance; 3) it costs \$83.5 million to collect just \$39 million for road repairs; and 4) San Francisco’s General Fund will have to pay \$4.2 million annually for the next twenty years, rather

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173 Crestmont Dr	3	3	2	N/A	05/17/11	890,000
225 Oak Park Dr	4	3	2	1,746	05/10/11	905,000
71 Starview	2	1	1	1,062	04/29/11	610,500
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Source: SFMLS

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West Portal Writer Celebrates Publishing Debut

By Mitch Bull

"I have to write, it's what I am meant to do. I have always had this preoccupation of being 'incomplete' in various ways, not physically incomplete, but looking at the incompleteness of the spirit. That's what guided the stories in this collection."

Sitting with West Portal writer Ethel Rohan, I am struck by her intensity and dedication to the craft of writing. An accomplished and prolific magazine and short story author, she has recently celebrated the publishing of her first novel. In the debut, *Cut Through the Bone*, she has given us a set of 30 stories, most spanning only 3-4 pages, but in those pages we are teased with prose in which there are no pat endings and where every word and phrase counts. We have to "guess" what happens next, a little unsettling for those of us that "want to know."

Recently, the writer celebrated the launch of the book with 200 friends and family at the United Irish Cultural Center, a logical place for the Dublin-born wordsmith. "It was one of the most special nights of my life," she said. "The release of the book is every writer's dream, and it has helped me to put aside the angst and self-doubt that all writers share. I've spent three years in my office/dungeon asking myself, am I delusional? Is my writing any good?"

When I ask her where she draws the stories from, she explains that she "honors the stories that come out. The stories center on the fears that each character has and somewhere in there are my own fears. Fear is universal and we all know suffering. Fear keeps us from moving forward. Through my fiction it is a safe place to see and explore these places and feelings that drive us."

In reading the stories, the elements of uncertainty and fear are everywhere



and yet the reader is drawn to the characters and wants some sort of resolution, but is denied, left to ponder "what if?" She explains that the ideas are very family-centered, often times focusing on historical



ideas of family function and dysfunction and the emotions that are involved.

The writer is currently completing her next project, a first novel, which she is busy shopping to agents. "Set in Ireland, it's the story of a 47 year old Dublin bus driver. I've been working on it for nine years. It's tentatively titled, "Kisses with Teeth."

Born in Dublin, Rohan came to San Francisco 18 years ago for a three-month vacation, and decided to stay, eventually graduating from Mills College with a Master's Degree in Fine Art. She jokes that she had to come all the way to San Francisco to find her Irish-born husband. The couple lives in West Portal, raising two daughters.

The literary world is also taking notice of her work. She has been invited to give a reading at the Frank O'Connor Literary Festival in Cork (Ireland) during September, and the novel was long listed as a finalist for the Story Prize Award in 2010.

In closing I asked her what she wants to leave her readers with when they are reading her work. "I would like readers to appreciate the power of imagination and story telling. The words can transport us, and make us ask 'what if?' I hope the readers also are able to think and be empathetic towards the characters, by disengaging judgment to look beyond the superficial."

Cut Through the Bone is available at BookShop West Portal, from Amazon.com and other literary outlets. For more information about the book and the author visit her website at ethelrohan.com; or go to the website for the book, www.darkskybooks.com.

Robberies Up in the Taraval Beat

At a recent Compstat meeting, the ten district station captains, the commanders, the deputy chief, and the Chief of Police gathered to discuss one topic. Robberies. Robberies are up in the in SF, including the Taraval Police District.

Passengers using iPhones and laptop computers on Muni vehicles are being targeted. Also being targeted are people using these devices while waiting for Muni vehicles at Muni coach stops, bus shelters, and light rail vehicle platforms.

Passengers are reminded to be aware of their surroundings while traveling on Muni. Suspects prey on victims using these devices knowing they are distracted while texting or listening to music on PDAs, using laptops, and talking on cellular phones. Passengers should be careful to limit the use of these devices and always be aware of other passengers on the vehicle.

While robberies in the Taraval Police District are up 9 %, robbery arrests are also up. Robbery arrests in the Taraval Police District are up 44 % compared to the same time last year. Uniformed and plainclothes officers ride Muni and patrol in the area where most of the robberies are occurring.

Here are some things which you can do to prevent yourself from becoming a victim.

- Call 311 for real time bus arrivals to avoid long wait times or use www.nextbus.com.
- Carry only what you need for that day. Keep keys separate from you purse or



bag. Keep your wallet in an inside pocket.

- While waiting at a bus stop, stand with other people.
- If the immediate area is deserted or dark, stand near an occupied building or a lighted area.
- Avoid using mobile electronic devices. They diminish your awareness.
- Upon arriving at your stop, be aware of those who get off the bus with you. If you feel that you are being followed, go to the nearest occupied building for help.
- Pick pocketing usually occurs in crowded conditions. Be aware of jostling and pushing.

More personal safety tips are available from SF Safety Awareness for Everyone (SAFE), 553-1984, or www.sfsafe.org

If you notice anything suspicious, call the Muni complaint line, 923-6164. For emergencies or for crimes in progress, call 9-1-1 (553-8090 for cellular phones), and for non-emergencies, 553-0123.

COPs' Money (Cont. from p. 8)

than using this money for road repairs.

San Francisco has to become more careful about COP funding. Citizens have a right to know what is happening with their tax money. The entire COP process needs to become more transparent and politicians need to become more responsible. COP money should be spent on capital improvements, not maintenance projects. And COP funds should only be spent on projects for which the money was originally issued. Due to the high finance cost of COPs and their drain on the General Fund, they should not be San Francisco politicians' preferred method of financing long-term projects.

San Francisco's bond rating is starting to decline due to unfunded pension

mandates, overly aggressive financial forecasts that have not been achieved, and over reliance on issuing more COPs. San Francisco needs less long-term debt — under whatever rubric it is labeled — not more.

Supervisor Farrell should introduce legislation that will impose a requirement that voter approval be obtained prior to the issuance of COPs. If local politicians don't have the will power to enact this legislation, the voters should consider mounting a referendum—a signature-petition ballot measure—to restrict the City's ability to unilaterally issue COPs as long-term debt. Someone needs to take back Mom's missing credit card.

Feedback wooding@westsideobserver.com.





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Friday Night Jazz Fri | 7–11 pm | Cliff House, Balcony Lounge – 1 Seal Rock.

SAT • OCEAN BEACH MASTER PLAN

Sat June 4 | 10am–1pm | Ocean Beach Master Plan Public Workshop #2 on the future of Ocean Beach. GGP Senior Center. 6101 Fulton St. (@37th Ave)

TUE • AUTHOR ROGER HOUSDEN

Tue June 7 | 7pm | The author will discuss *Saved by Beauty* at BookShop West Portal. Adventures of an American Romantic in Iran 80 West Portal Ave. Info: (415) 564-8080.

THU • AUTHOR MATT RICHTEL

Thu June 9 | 7pm | The author will read from *Devil's Plaything* at BookShop West Portal. Pulitzer prize-winning writer's exquisite nightmare. 80 West Portal Ave. Info: (415) 564-8080.

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June 10–12 for ZIP codes 94116, 94122 | Residents of these ZIP codes get Academy of Sciences for free! Limited to six children each, photo ID, proof of residency. Acceptable: a driver license or state ID card, photo ID plus postmarked bills, statements, etc. 55 Music Concourse Dr., GG Park.

TUE • AUTHOR ANN PATCHETT

Tue June 14 | 7pm | The author will read from *State of Wonder*. The New York Times bestselling author of *Bel Canto* and *The Magician's Assistant* 80 West Portal Ave. Info: (415) 564-8080.

THU • LET'S DANCE

Thu June 16 | Social Ballroom Dances classes for couples – 6 lessons for \$70 per couple. Thursday evenings beginning June 16th at the Forest Hill Christian Church 250 Laguna Honda Blvd. 661-2746 for details

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THU • POETS FLORSHEIM AND FRANK

Thu June 16 | 7pm | Stewart Florsheim reads from *A Split Second of Light*. SF writer Diane Frank will read from *Entering the Word Temple*. BookShop West Portal 80 West Portal Ave. Info: (415) 564-8080.

SAT • DANCING WITH THE STARS

Sat June 18 | 8pm | Kristi Yamaguchi's Dancing The Night Away. Hilton Union Square, 5:30pm Reception. 333 O'Farrell St. 608-5488, Info: alwaysdream.org

SUN • STERN GROVE MUSIC FESTIVAL

Sun June 19 | 2pm | SHARON JONES / DAP-KINGS • 19th Ave/ Sloat /. FREE / Info 252-6252 www.sterngrove.org

THU • AUTHOR ROBERT VAMOSI

Tue June 21 | 7pm | The author will discuss *When Gadgets Betray Us*. BookShop West Portal 80 West Portal Ave.

TUE • TARAVAL PUBLIC SAFETY

Tue June 21 | 7pm | Captain Curtis Lum, Taraval Station Public Safety Community Meeting, the 3rd Tuesday of each month at Taraval Station 2354 24th Ave.

SUN • STERN GROVE MUSIC FESTIVAL

Sun June 26 | 2pm | the JAZZ MAFIA SYMPHONY • 19th Ave/Sloat/. FREE / Info 252-6252 www.sterngrove.org

MON • CENTRAL COUNCIL MEETING

Mon June 27 | 7:30 pm | West of Twin Peaks Central Council | A resource for neighborhood organizations. 4th Mon. Forest Hill Clubhouse at 381 Magellan.

THU • AUTHORS SOYKA AND LEYUNG-RYAN

Tue June 28 | 7pm | Birgit Souka will read from *To Drink the Wild Air: One Woman's Quest to Touch the Horizon*. Teresa LeYung-Ryan *Love Made of Heart*. BookShop West Portal 80 West Portal.

SAT • RED WHITE & BLUEGRASS

Sat July 2 | 2-4pm | Kemo Sabe + Milk-Drive@The Music Store, 66 West Portal Ave, 664-2044. \$5 gets you a fresh burger or hot dog & cold drink. / FREE / all ages www.shelbyashpresents.net/

SUN • STERN GROVE MUSIC FESTIVAL

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SHARON THE HEALTH / By Sharon Caren



Strokes Happen at Any Age/Know the Identifiers

This topic became personal last month when my dear friend (only 50 years old) suffered a stroke. She explained, that morning she felt nothing, but while getting breakfast for her daughter her speech was slurred. When she looked in the mirror at her face, one side drooped. Early identification is the primary key for a more positive recovery. Neurologists say if they get to the stroke victim within three hours, they can totally reverse the effects. The trick is getting a stroke recognized, diagnosed and to get the patient medically cared for within three hours...which is tough.

Stroke Identifiers – Call 911 There are four we need to remember:

- S Ask the individual to SMILE
- T Ask them to TALK (a simple sentence like “It’s a beautiful sunny day.”)
- R Ask them to RAISE both arms

The fourth one is “Stick out your tongue.” If the tongue is “crooked” going to one side or the other, it’s an indication of a stroke. If the person has a problem with any one of these, call the emergency number ASAP and describe the symptoms to the dispatcher. You will save a life!

Other Symptoms

- Be aware of SUDDEN changes in the following:
- Numbness, tingling, weakness or paralysis in the face, arm, leg, and especially on one side of the body
- Vision changes
- Trouble speaking
- Confusion or trouble understanding simple statements
- Problems with walking or balance
- Severe headache different from any prior

There are two types of strokes:

Ischemic – caused from a blood clot in the brain

Hemorrhagic - when an artery in the brain leaks or bursts

A Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA) is sometimes mistaken as a stroke but it’s actually a warning sign that a stroke may occur. Prompt medical attention may help prevent a stroke. Seek immediate emergency medical help just as stated for the two others.

To determine the type of stroke, the doctor will perform an X-ray called a CT scan and/or an MRI. Other tests are done to find the location of the clot or bleeding. A hemorrhagic stroke can be harder to treat. Surgery may be required to stop the bleeding or reduce pressure on the brain. Medicines can also control blood pressure or brain swelling.

Stroke rehab is the best way to get better and the greatest chance of recovery is during the first few months. The goal is to regain skills lost or make the most out of the remaining abilities. It’s important to take steps to prevent future strokes.

Whistleblower Scandal (Cont. from p. 6)

should be redacted rather than withheld entirely. The City Attorney’s office apparently believes the Sunshine Ordinance does not apply to the Ethics Commission, despite the fact that there is nothing in the Ordinance that exempts any City department, board, or commission.

Garrett Chatfield, Ethics Commission investigator would neither confirm nor deny that Kerr and Rivero submitted a whistleblower complaint, though both doctors were present during the hearing. Chatfield repeatedly refused to disclose whether the investigation was on-going or closed, claiming Commission regulations prevented him from all disclosure.

Task Force member David Snyder introduced a motion which passed unanimously, finding that the Ethics Commission had violated California’s Public Records Act (CPRA).

A second motion, asserting that the Ordinance expands state law by requiring that withholding be kept to a minimum, and that the Commission violated that requirement, introduced by the Task Force’s Hope Johnson, passed.

Chatfield relied on a single in-house Ethics Commission ruling that all their records are confidential.

The Task Force members were shocked. “Since the Task Force agreed in the first motion that the Ethics Commission had not appropriately cited a CPRA exemption for withholding records, my second motion provides direction to the Ethics Commission ... for disclosure,” Ms. Johnson said.

Along the way to these two Sunshine victories, the Controller’s Whistleblower Program released its policy and procedure manual highlighting that its “risk assessment” of whistleblower complaints

Stroke Prevention – Do’s and Don’ts

- Don’t smoke
- Eat a heart-healthy diet, more fruits and veggies
- Do moderate activity 2.5 hours a week in 10 minute blocks
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Control cholesterol and blood pressure
- Keep blood sugars close to normal
- Limit alcohol – 1 drink for women, 2 drinks for men increase the risk of stroke
- Avoid illegal drugs
- Take an aspirin daily
- Avoid getting sick

It’s most important to have regular medical checkups and pay close attention to test results. Be proactive and listen to your doctor. If you have health issues, do not kid yourself regarding the severity. There are people who have suffered a stroke or heart attack who refuse to make life style changes as the doctor recommended and resist prescribed medications. This behavior is a death sentence.

Two issues rarely mentioned as stroke causes are lack of sleep and stress. These seem to be prominent in the younger age stroke victims. If the body is suffering from sleep depravation, the cells have no time to rebuild, causing added stress. Then pile on worry, anxiety, overwork, problems with children and the worse it gets, the more severe it gets. When we are stressed, the body creates higher than normal cortisol levels (the death hormone) that shortens a healthy life.

Each day is precious and is an opportunity to find what brings the joy into our lives. When we live from a joyful place, we can change the outcome of disease in the body.

Research from WebMD.

The views expressed are those of the writer. If you have any questions about your health, you should always consult with your doctor. A special thanks to Henry Tilsley for the feedback on my May 2011 article!

Please call me with questions or comments at 650-359-6579 or sharoncaren@comcast.net. Also visit: www.sharoncaren.com

hinges, in part, on the criteria of evaluating risk based on “rating potential monetary loss to the City, level of staff involved [elected officials or department heads], potential reputation damage, and the use of ARRA [Recovery Act ‘stimulus’] funds.”

All whistleblower complaints are rated according to “risk of loss to the City”; they are rated as high-, medium-, and low-risk to the City. Complaints and whistleblowers are seen as threats and risks, which explains why whistleblowers are not protected against retaliation. The City Controller’s whistleblower website does not disclose the use of such risk profiles—they are kept secret.

When voters passed Prop C in 2003, they were told the City Controller would investigate whistleblower complaints, not that the various City departments who may have engaged in government waste, fraud, and inefficiencies would be permitted to investigate themselves. But by December 2010, the policy and procedure manual was revised. Rather than having a semi-independent entity investigate whistleblower complaints, departments are allowed to investigate charges against their own departments. The 2010 revision of the policies also introduced the risk assessment of whistleblower complaints, involving three categories of relative risk to the City. The highest risk category, involving loss to the City of more than \$50,000 or cases involving elected officials and appointed department heads, was created to limit the City’s liability, not to expose wrongdoing at the highest levels of City government.

Monette-Shaw is an open-government accountability advocate, a patient advocate. Feedback: monette-shaw@westsideobserver.com.

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Taraval Police: Sidewalk Parking Crackdown

The Department of Parking and Traffic (SFMTA) will be stepping up sidewalk violation enforcement next week. I wish to inform the Taraval Community of SFMTA’s plan.

California Vehicle Code Section 22500f prohibits the parking, stopping, or standing of a vehicle on ANY portion of the sidewalk (property line to curb line). Parking on the sidewalk is a hazard to pedestrians and the disabled individuals and is subject to a \$105 fine (effective March 2011).

Parking is in high demand, and parking across the sidewalk, even in front of one’s own house, is common. This is still a violation, nonetheless. Cars parked across or on the sidewalk block pedestrians’ access, especially those who have limited mobility. Please inform your friends and neighbors.

A Pro

By Carol Kocivar ©2011

Every once in a while I decide I am going to be more efficient. I am going to learn a new skill or learn how to work with people. I am going to learn a new language. And I am going to get organized. Unfortunately, I usually decide to do ALL of these things at once. You would think I would learn.

Well, I guess I have. I have learned the 7 habits of highly effective multi-taskers.

1. Program a shuffle on your iPhone that includes multiple learning opportunities.

Now this is really fun.

Just last week on a two-hour drive to Sacramento, I hit the jackpot. Not only did I hear Tina Turner remind me that I am the BEST, Better than All the rest, but through the magic of shuffle, this was followed by a five minute podcast in Japanese helping me find the ladies room on the second floor of a department store. And then Ricky Martin sang to me in Spanish. Could I ask for more?

2. Create a new calendar that works on your phone and your laptop and the computer at work.

This is really a good thing to do when you are traveling. Before you do this, make sure you download all of your meetings onto your phone. Be really efficient. Eliminate all paper, including your airplane ticket and your hotel reservation. Store it in the cloud. Now update your calendar so everything works soooo smoothly. The multi-tasking involved here is hitting your phone, your laptop, and your head all at the same time.

3. Download one of those simple checklist apps so that you know the best ways to get anything done.

I just did this and discovered a world of possibilities. There is the checklist to make sure I know what to buy at the grocery store. And while I am at it, I can select wardrobe basics. But who knew I could also organize a wedding and work on getting out of debt at the same time.

4. Clean your office.

5. Clean your office.

6. Clean your office.

7. Clean your office.

This is the best opportunity of all, especially if this is your home office.

It can involve washing dishes, shredding highly confidential notes, and finally discovering where you left your stash of secret passwords—all at the same time.

(Are these the old secret passwords or the new secret passwords?)

The most exciting part of steps 4 and 5 and 6 and 7 is that after you have carefully labeled all your binders and even made notes to yourself in a computer folder, someone calls you and asks for that one sheet of paper you just filed.

And you put it.....?

Never mind. I think it is time to cut the grass and find my car keys.

Carol Kocivar feedback: kocivar@westsideobserver.com



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SECOND THOUGHTS / By Jack Kaye

Numbers Count, Size Matters



One effect of our de-emphasis on math in this country is that we have stopped thinking with numbers, preferring descriptive adjectives that are more forgiving and less intimidating. Instead of saying that it is 3,280 feet high, we say that it was very tall. Instead of saying that the car was 183 inches long, we say that it is a compact. Instead of being told that our cholesterol is 150 or 205, we are told that it is normal and we accept that.

We now see this happening in the media. San Francisco's major daily has been moving away from numbers on every front. First it was the stock market results. All stocks traded on the New York or American stock exchange had always been listed daily showing their most recent prices as well as past highs and lows. This was then abbreviated to showing only the major stocks. And now there are just a few highlights. They then contracted out their entire business section to gain further distance from the tyranny of numbers. They still use numbers to describe the weather but that also has been contracted out to a national service that seems to think that the San Francisco airport is in downtown San Francisco, especially for rainfall totals.

It turns out that somehow rainfall totals for San Francisco have always been contentious not to mention inaccurate. There always seems to be a bias toward understating rainfall totals in order to prolong the illusion of a drought. In the mid 90s, as we were drowning in heavy rainfall, the media kept insisting that the drought was still with us. (It ended the career of a respected investigative reporter when she persisted to report the drought even as record high totals were being witnessed.) This year, it took the State until the beginning of May to announce an end to the drought even though our totals for this year are as high as 150% of normal and our reservoirs are overflowing. This year San Francisco is on track to have had a record rainfall year, but you don't hear much talk about it. Some people, apparently, have something to gain by keeping the "D" word constantly in play.

Our same daily paper also has told its very small band of news reporters to refrain from using numbers in their reports. (Sports reporters are exempt from this so far, but who knows? They might have to start reporting just who won and who lost without using the actual scores.) Perhaps they want to avoid making factual errors or maybe they want to soften the effect hard numbers might have on their readers.

But numbers have their place, especially when describing finite objects. Numbers help us make more precise evaluations so that we can make the best choices. Sometimes a bigger number is better, but I find that, more often than not, size matters and smaller could very well be better.

We have seen this repeatedly with American fashion: Remember when women's shoulder pads made them look like linebackers in uniform? Until recently men wore jackets that were several sizes too large. We are still designing and producing men's shorts and bathing suits that are so long that they appear to be attempting to conceal as much as possible while making the wearer look as unappealing as he can be. They cannot be described as "shorts" and should be referred to as "mediums" or "knee-lows." There were times when men's ties were clearly much too wide and suit jackets had lapels that were grossly oversized. Now we have a craze among some to wear pants many sizes too large so that they settle much too low and leave the wearers looking clown-like in their baggy length.

And as mentioned in an earlier column, watches have gotten too big since Rolex underwater watches got popular in the 60s.

And, of course, there is the debate about our national budget crisis with no one providing the actual numbers to make the choices clearer. No one mentions that though Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid take up a sizable part of our \$3.5 trillion annual budget, all the money comes from separate trust funds and their costs do not add to our budget deficit and won't for at least 15-25 years. No one mentions that the biggest item is defense at more than \$800 billion a year funding two unnecessary wars and staffing more than 700 bases overseas to protect the citizens of other countries from possible attack from a Soviet Union that no longer exists and a North Korea, which can barely feed its own people.

But what most concerns me at this moment is the size of American family cars and the public's unawareness of the vast variations. What American car companies call a compact car is what I consider a large car, but I use actual numbers to describe their differences.

Family cars sold in America range in size from about 147 inches for the Mini Cooper to about 223 for the Cadillac Escalante. That's a 76 inch or 6.3 foot difference. And like Goldilocks, I think that some are too small but many are too large and some are just right. I believe that a small car should be around 165 inches long - about the size of a VW beetle, VW Golf, Honda Fit, Mini Coachman (the new four-door), the Audi A3, etc. The next size still acceptable and roomier is around 175-180 inches long and is found in cars like the BMW 1 and 3 series, the Audi A4, the VW Jetta, Mercedes C class, Volvo 50, etc.

I think that the largest size should be no more than 190 inches. There are many examples of this size as well.

The only problem is that America car companies are not producing quality small cars. American buyers and car makers seem to not really see the problem. The large cars and SUVs many of us are driving are not only gas guzzlers and a danger to more reasonably sized vehicles, they are also much more difficult and less fun to drive than smaller cars. And they are harder to park.

Yes, Chevy and Ford do have some smaller cars, but who wants them? Who even knows what they are? The Chevy has the Aveo and the Cruze. The former is 170 inches and the latter is 180. Ford has the Fiesta at 174 inches and the Focus at 178. How do they compare with the smaller European cars named above?

I strongly believe that the American car producers should begin the process, as they did in the early 60's, of building high quality, attractive, and exciting, cars that also have great fuel economy and are small but roomy. After the great VW Beetle invasion of the early 60's, American car companies began making small and appealing cars. There was the Pontiac Tempest/Lemans, the Chevy Corvair, the Oldsmobile Cutlass, the Buick Skylark, the Rambler Metropolitan, the Ford Falcon, Plymouth Valiant, and the Dodge Lancer, to name a few.

But each one of these models either grew significantly in size or disappeared. The Tempest/Lemans grew in every way to become the mighty G.T.O. by 1964. The Corvair was killed single-handedly by a young upstart named Nader. The Skylark, Valiant, Lancer, and Falcon grew a little and then disappeared. The Metropolitan, which started in the 50s and was as cute as cute can be, just disappeared.

The American car industry decided to go the other way. Instead of making excellent small cars, they decided that they would make high-powered, large cars. Then they realized they could take cheap pick-up trucks, doll them up with more seats and a covered truck bed, call them S.U.V.s and people would be willing to spend big bucks for them choosing comfort, imagined safety and size over small and economic cars.

The Japanese and Europeans jumped in to fill our small-car gap.

I would like to see a small, elegant, attractive and economical model for each of the six car lines: a 165 inch Chevrolet, Buick, Cadillac, Chrysler, Ford and Lincoln as well as a 175-180 inch model in each line and maybe one top-of-the-line model of no more than 190 inches for the premium lines using their old premium names: Cadillac Eldorado or Fleetwood, Buick Roadmaster, Chrysler Imperial and Lincoln Continental. The small Chevy could be called the Monza.

I have not included Dodge in this list because I think that it should and will be discontinued as a car line and become, like Jeep and GMC, a truck line.

I think in order for this reduced-size car plan to succeed, Americans must become more number conscious.

But if we as a people are to become more number conscious, we must become more attentive to our everyday events and much more accurate in our descriptions. This is not a bad thing. It is nice to pay attention and to be able to clearly and precisely describe objects or events.

Numbers really do count and size really does matter, even if we are not aware of it.

Jack Kaye feedback: kaye@westsideobserver.com

Now At the Movies • By Don Lee Miller

BRIDEMAIDS

Annie: Kristin Wiig (also co-producer and co-writer), chosen as head bridesmaid by her lifelong best friend, Lillian: Maya Rudolph, encounters a competitive new friend, Helen: Rose Byrne. Helen is very wealthy and very spoiled, expecting to get everything she wants. At the pre-wedding banquet hosted at the family estate, she and Annie vie for the microphone and the last word in a scene that drags on much too long. Heavy-set Megan: Melissa McCarthy proves to be a friend when Annie needs one. Annie finds a new boy friend in highway patrolman Rhodes: Chris O'Dowd, who loved the pastries in the shop she closed down. She has been strung along by Ted: Jon Hamm. The gross-out scene comes after they have lunched at a Mexican restaurant and get simultaneous diarrhea at the bridal shop with not enough stalls. Jill Clayburgh, in the last of her 70 films, plays Annie's mom in three scenes with the charm and grace we have come to rely upon. Paul Feig directs this humorous, raucous chick flick. Profanity. Crude humor.

FAST FIVE 3-D

Industrialist Hernan Reyes: Joaquim de Almeida runs all the racquets in Rio de Janeiro. When the Fast Five move in, that's Dominic Toretto: Vin Diesel, his buddy, Brian O'Conner: Paul Walker, his sister, Mia Toretto: Jordana Brewster, plus Roman Pearce: Tyrese Gibson and Tej Parker: Ludacris, things change. Reyes thinks he has everything secured, even putting his money in a bank vault in a police station. Does that stop the Fast Five? Hardly! Dom's brother is one of the losses in the crossfire. The rapid action adventure has Justin Lin's direction of a great script by Chris Morgan and Gary

Scott Thompson. Action violence. Profanity. Sexuality.

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: ON STRANGER TIDES

Jack Sparrow: Johnny Depp and Barbossa: Geoffrey Rush seek the Fountain of Youth in the Caribbean. They soon discover that Blackbeard: Ian McShane and his daughter, Angelica: Penélope Cruz, who turn up in every dive they visit, also have interests in the Fountain of Youth. When they get to the bay of the mermaids, the pirates realize how violent and flesh-eating to the bone they really are. The handsome religious youth, Philip: Sam Claflin, who falls in love with the captured mermaid, Syrena: Astrid Berges-Fresbey, will soon be the Prince in Snow White and the Huntsman. Violence. Profanity. 3-D, IMAX.

PRIEST 3-D

This post-vampocalyptic action thriller from Scott Stewart throws together elements of a John Ford western (maybe The Searchers), vampires, a runaway train, martial arts, and the good guys led by Priest: Paul Bettany with stunning Hicks: Cam Gidandet and a knockout in tight black leathers, Priestess: Maggie Q. Monsenior Orleans: Christopher Plummer is leading the church down a dangerous path that won't prove healthy for his congregation. Priest's 18-year old niece Lucy Pace: Lily Collins is kidnapped from the home of Priest's brother, Owen Pace: Stephen Moyer. Black Hat: Karl Urban, the kidnapper with fangs, and Salesman: Brad Dourif round out the cast. Violence. Gore. Profanity.

SOMETHING BORROWED

Manhattanite Rachel: Ginnifer Goodwin finds

herself falling in love with a law school classmate, handsome Dex: Colin Egglesfield, who is engaged to her best friend, Darcy: Kate Hudson. As the summer weekends provide close contact when they share a house on Long Island, they realize that Darcy hasn't been exactly honest with them about a number of things, like where she went to college and her fidelity. Rachel's best male friend and coworker Ethan: John Krasinski gives her a shoulder to lean on. Screenwriter Jennie Snyder Urman based her work on the novel by Emily Giffin with the romantic comedy directed by Luke Greenfield with a good feel for developing his multi-faceted characters. Colin comes from Daytime TV: All My Children and, I predict, will be starring in many upcoming movies. Ginnifer and John have winning personalities that should keep them busy in films and TV. Profanity.

THOR

The frost giants go back to Norway in 965 AD. Arrogant powerful handsome Thor: Chris Hemsworth is cast from the planet Asgard by his father, King Odin: Anthony Hopkins to live on Earth without powers. There he meets the pretty scientist, Jane Foster: Natalie Portman, whose specialty is Surprise! Asgard. When government agents seize all her research and records, her friends Erik Selvig: Stellan Skarsgård and Darcy Lewis: Kat Dennings team up with Thor to get them back. He is seeking his hammer which only he can wrest from its base. Thor's brother, Loki: Tom Hiddleston takes control of the realm when Odin falls into a coma, sending mighty characters from Asgard to kill Thor. He's a nasty villain making pacts with hideous underworld critters. The action is

fast and unique once Thor falls in love with Jane, learning there is power in humility. Rene Russo gives support as Queen Frigga. Kenneth Branagh's brilliant direction of the screenplay by Ashley Miller and Zack Stentz + 6 provides terrific entertainment for anyone over 12. Violence. 3-D

WATER TO ELEPHANTS

During the Depression, Jacob: Robert Patison's Purnell College exams for his license as a veterinarian are interrupted by the tragic news that his Polish parents have died in an auto accident. Their farm is in debt to the bank. When Jacob happens upon a travelling circus in town and comes to the rescue of an ailing show animal, the owner, August: Christoph Waltz hires Jacob as their vet. The circus stars August's equestrian wife, Marlena: Reese Witherspoon. When they have to shoot her crippled horse, she is despondent until they acquire Rosie, an elephant. Jacob finds that Rosie only understands German commands and is able to train her for Marlena. August has workers thrown from the moving train at night to keep the payroll under control. He is a bomb waiting to explode and, soon enough, it happens in a way that brings Jacob and Marlena closer. Old Jacob: Hal Holbrook narrates his tale of 1931. Francis Lawrence directs the colorful screenplay by Richard LaGravenese from Sara Gruen's best-selling novel. Violence. Animal cruelty. Profanity.



AT THE THEATER • By Dr Annette Lust and Flora Lynn Isaacson

WRETCH LIKE ME AT OLD ROXIE

After successfully staging his award winning solo "Wretch Like Me" in Bay Area and North Bay venues, David Templeton brought his piece to the hundred year old Roxie, a favorite spot for movies today, in the heart of San Francisco's Mission district. The one hour and a half live show narrated by writer/performer Templeton details his unhappy boyhood as a "geeky, skinny kid" unpopular with his schoolmates who poke fun at him for playing with puppets. After passing quickly over his early childhood, we learn how in the seventies he became a born again Christian in Downey, California. He is soon experiencing numerous baptisms, religious ceremonies, and fasts in the Jesus Club related with humor, as when he baptizes Eddie at Huntington Beach and suddenly realizes the latter has drowned in the waters only to see Eddie resurface covered with seaweed and enter into a fervid spiritual trance. We laugh heartily when he describes how his eccentric friend Cindy goes about telling strangers that she loves them but Jesus loves them more and how she wets her pants for Jesus in order not to lose a couple's attention while speaking about the Lord. His meeting with an Israelite begins to render him more conscious of his strenuous efforts to suffer like Jesus when the latter tells him this has removed all joy in his life. In a moment of clarity he realizes it may be preferable to live in a world like Jesus created where one is loved and never has to feel like a wretch.

Directed by David Yen, storyteller puppeteer Templeton's tale of his religious torment is related with both humor and glimmers of sorrow. He generously shares his failures once he rapidly gains his audience's support in his quest to find himself that is resolved when he discovers Jesus as a humanitarian. He has a talent for stepping into the skin of his characters and could enliven and enrich his many eccentric character descriptions with added impersonations. Templeton's lucid descriptions of his journey to find acceptance within himself gives spectators a sense of liberation when he finally succeeds.

A Wretch Like Me is spiritually, psychologically and artistically a highly worthwhile experience and an entertaining as well as thought provoking solo piece.

Information about upcoming performances of Wretch Like Me, such as at the Santa Rosa Cinnabar Theatre in August, click on the [www.Wretch Like Me website](#). Dr. Annette Lust

GEOFF HOYLE'S OLD GEEZER AT THE MARSH

So packed with spectators each night is Geoff Hoyle's Geezer with performances added each week that an audience member remarked that the Marsh walls would soon need to be expanded. Hoyle's new show, is both visually entertaining, because of his talent as a mime with a flexible, rubber like body and thought provoking, because of its search for the meaning of life and its remarkable portrayal of old age. It is biographical of his boyhood in England, his loss of his father, World War 11, training with Etienne Decroux, master of Marcel Marceau, his role as a father, and, among other world wide stage and film activities, his clown career with the Pickle Family Circus. This eventually turns into a philosophical meditation when he reflects on growing older.

Hoyle's multiple talents comprise clowning, miming, slapstick, and physical comedy that enliven his depiction of slowly becoming an old geezer. All of these talents bring a

rich fullness to the verbal aspect of the solo in which he is not only an actor but a multi skilled stage performer.

Do not miss participating in Geoff Hoyle's captivating so-called workshop of Geezer- through July 10th. For information call 415-282-3055 or click on [www.the marsh.org](#). Dr. Annette Lust

RABBIT HOLE: A FAMILY COPES WITH THE PAIN OF LOSS

Rabbit Hole by David Lindsay-Abaire, which just opened at Ross Valley Players, is a 2006 Broadway smash hit which won the Pulitzer Prize and was nominated the Best Play for the Theatre Guild's Tony Awards.

Eight months after the accidental death of their four year old son Danny, Becca (Beth Kellermann) and Howie (Gregg LeBlanc) are struggling to return to their daily lives when Becca's younger and perpetually troubled sister, Izzy (Floriana Alessandria) announces she is pregnant. The couple's differing styles of grieving are thrown into sharp contrast as Becca's desire to escape the constant reminders of her son clash with Howie's attempts to hang on to the details of their little boy's past.

Becca, as played by Beth Kellermann, at first is difficult to like. She's distant from her husband, judgmental of her sister and rude to her mother, her sense of humor helps to balance. Howie played by Gregg LeBlanc is Becca's husband--a patient man who specializes in pretending everything is fine. Izzy (Floriana Alessandria) is Becca's younger sister. Ms. Alessandria plays her as a perennial party girl who never grew up. Izzy is still trying to find herself. She and her mother are the only two characters who use a New York accent. Her mother, Nat (Maureen O'Donoghue) is the opinionated alcoholic with a knack for sticking her foot in her mouth, telling parables about the Kennedy curse. Liam Hughes gives a sensitive performance as Jason, the awkward seventeen year old boy who drove the car that accidentally killed Danny.

Maryann Rogers directs Rabbit Hole with a recognition that we are not so different from each other. By doing so, we connect with a universal human experience as Rogers creates a unified vision of the play. She is

ably aided by Ken Rowland's set and Ellen Brook's lighting design. Billie Cox's mel-low sound design enhances Rabbit Hole's shifting moods and Michael A. Berg's costumes are just right for each character. Rabbit Hole through June 17 at Ross Valley Players Barn Theatre. Reservations: 415-456-9555 or go online at [www.rossvalley-players.com](#) Flora Lynn Isaacson

CORRECTION to the The May issue: Aurora Theatre Company's next production is not Edward Albee's Delicate Balance. It is METAMORPHOSIS (June 10-July 17); Albee's Delicate Balance production does opens in September (Tickets for the Albee production will go on sale in August).



Dr. Annette Lust



Flora Lynn Isaacson

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Phyllis’ Findings / Phyllis Sherman

The Incredible Shrinking Everything

I read a lot and I’m constantly reading that manufacturers are surreptitiously shrinking the size of their products as a sneaky way to avoid raising prices (although their not adverse to do that also.) So many half-gallon containers of orange juice now hold 59 ounces, not 64. And many bags of sugar are now 4 pounds, not 5. Although I haven’t actually gone out and measured them, I suspect that many foot-long subs now log in at a demure 10 inches.

The shrinkage problem applies to many things. The sum of \$24,000 used to pay for a huge van or a flashy sedan. Now it gets you a dinky Prius. The world of culture is no exception to this gimmick. Concerts at Carnegie Hall used to last 2 1/2 hours...sometimes three. Now they last an hour and three quarters, including a late start, and a long intermission. Encores used to be freebies, now forget it, they’re things of the past.

Surreptitious product shrinkage also applies to the world of politics, the world of academe, the world of travel. Six hundred dollars used to be good for a round trip to Venice, Italy, plus space for your coat in the overhead bin, plus a hot meal, plus a couple of drinks, plus a movie, plus room for your legs, plus friendly staff. Now it will just get you the round-trip to Venice, California. Think it ends there? For \$150,000 kids used to get a degree in physics, prestige and a future. Now, if the kid is lucky, it will get a degree in gender studies and an unpaid internship at a nonprofit Romanian alternative think tank that only exists on Twitter.

Then there’s the world of politics. As recently as the Clinton administration, \$100,000 would buy you a politician lock, stock and barrel. If you were a crooked labor union or a shady real estate developer, you plunked down a hundred grand and you had that pol locked up for life. Now a hundred G’s won’t keep your average pol on the payroll till Flag Day.

Underhanded tactics by cereal companies, car manufacturers and travel agencies, I don’t mind, and have to live with, but if politicians are suddenly going to dilute value without warning the rest of us, this society has had it. It’s high time this country passed a Truth in Deceptive Advertising law to curtail such abuses. If only to keep politicians dishonest. (If you pay attention to news reports, advertising ads and small print on everything, you’ll find your own shortages abound.)

It’s really hard to see them all...but if you try hard you

can get to several of the winners. A few must-sees include EAST 14th: TRUE TALES OF A RELUCTANT PLAYER.. Don Reed creates his world on Oakland’s East 14th Street in the 1970’s. It’s a hilarious 100 minute coming-of-age tale that’s scheduled to close June 18th but probably will continue at the Marsh Berkeley.800-838-3006. Very worth while. Of equal value is LOVELAND..a tightly written, compelling and hilarious solo-show by Ann Randolph regaling her misadventures and musings on a long flight home..also schedule to end soon, but probably will continue at the Marsh on Valencia St. in San Francisco..800-838-3006. Check her out. The SF PLAYHOUSE on Sutter Street is currently showing REBORNING by Zayd Dohrn. This dark, unusual comedy takes an unsettling look at work, latex, and the power of creation. A young artist who crafts custom made dolls begins to suspect that a demanding client may be the mother who abandoned her at birth. As she tries to unravel the mystery, she discovers the path to her own “Reborn.”

Movies...If you enjoy French cinema, you’ll thoroughly enjoy POTICHE directed by Francois Ozon. Set in a provincial French town in 1977, Catherine Deneuve stars as a submissive, housebound “trophy wife”, married to a selfish factory owner. When he is kidnapped by his workers, she comes into her own, a journey from a sheltered pet to a figure of national importance. Gerard Depardieu plays the ex-beau with great verve. English subtitles.

MIDNIGHT IN PARIS is Woody Allen’s latest venture. It tells the story of a family that travels to the picturesque French capital on business. The party includes two young people (Owen Wilson, Rachel McAdams) who are engaged to be married in the fall and have experiences there that change their lives forever. It’s about a young man’s great love for a great city, Paris, and the illusion people have that a life different from theirs would be much better. It’s smart, sweet and very funny with beautiful photography of a wonderful city.



BRAIN FÜD

Consecutive Double Letter Fun

Feed, good, and kiss are examples of words with double letters. Use the clues and fill in the blanks to find words with consecutive double letters. These words have 2 sets of double letters in a row!

1. Its a bird! It's a plane! It's a... B _____ N

2. Body modification. T _____ O

3. A Group of people. C _____ E

4. Acuteness or acumen. K _____ S

—Experts Only!—

5. Kangaroos, dingos, and kookaburras! C _____ E

Answer

1. Balloon - Clue: It's a bird! It's a plane! It's a...
2. Tattoo - Clue: Body Modification
3. Committee - Clue: A group of people
4. Keenness - Clue: Acuteness or acumen.
5. Cooree - Clue: Kangaroos, dingos, and kookaburras!

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

his knowledge of this word to solve "The Boscombe Valley Mystery;" (Written by attention, indicate one's location, or find missing people. Sherlock Holmes used Cooree is a chant used in the Australian Outback. It is usually shouted to attract similar words. The word "keen" comes from an Old English word that means brave. Keenness is a synonym for acuteness, acumen, brilliance, cleverness, and other are delegated to decide on legislation. most well-known examples of committees are in government where committees They can range in size from just a few people to a very large group of people. The Committees are often formed when a group of people need to make a decision. 3. Committee - Clue: A group of people. "Oz" the leeman," who was found frozen in the Italian Alps! Tattling is a form of body modification. Many cultures all over the world practice tattooing. The first tattoos were found on ancient Egyptian mummies and on hot air balloons can be seen and hidden during parades and festivals. design, in celebrations, and even in medical Military use of the balloon first occurred in the American Civil War in map-making and in signaling armies. Now, The first balloon was invented in 1793. Now, balloons are used as an airship

Sudoku-fun!

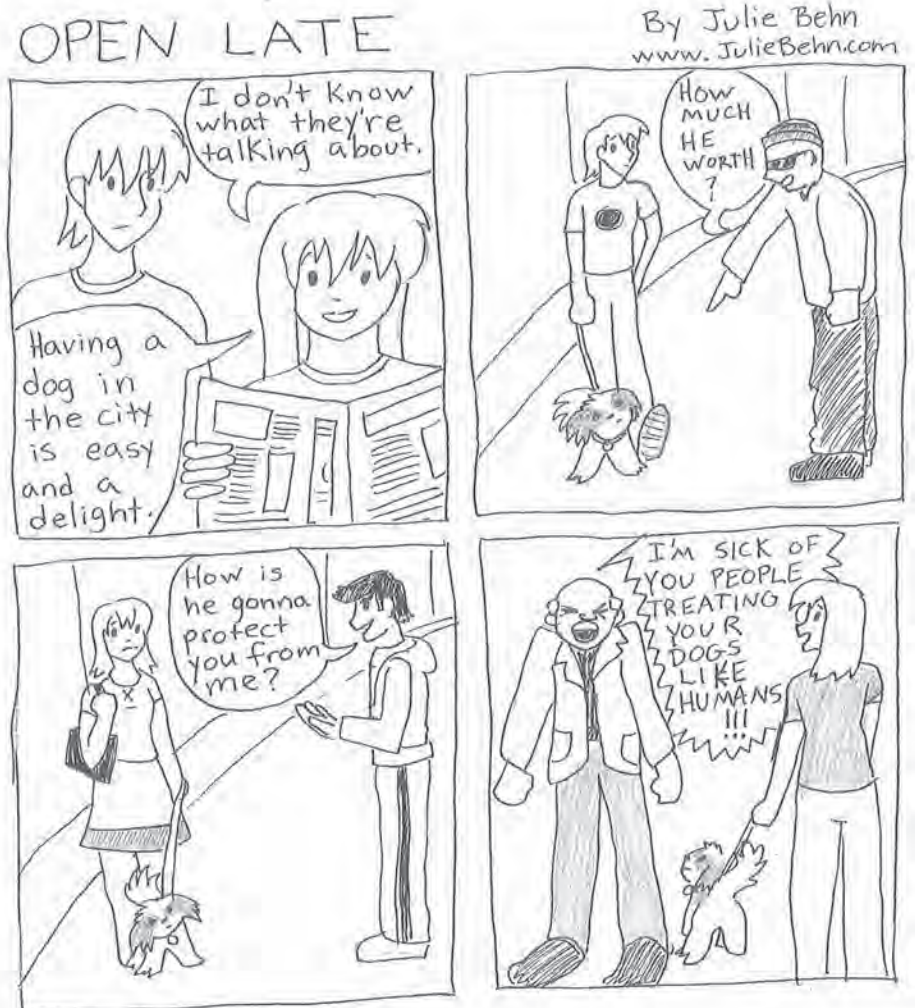
Rules: Each puzzle is a 9 by 9 grid of squares divided into nine 3 by 3 square blocks, with some of the numbers filled in for you.

The Object: Fill in the blank squares so that each of the numbers 1 to 9 appears exactly once in each row, column and block.

Answer: The answer appears below..

9	8	4	2	3	1	6	5	7
6	5	1	7	9	8	2	4	3
7	3	2	6	5	4	1	6	8
8	6	6	1	2	7	5	3	4
5	4	3	9	8	6	7	2	1
1	2	7	5	4	3	6	8	6
2	1	8	3	6	5	4	7	9
3	6	9	4	7	2	8	1	5
4	7	5	8	1	6	3	9	2

	9						7	
			2		4	6		
	7				3	8		
9	8				5			1
1				8				5
4			7				6	8
		1	4				3	
		2	8		7			
	5						8	



From the Border

THE PENINSULA FROM LONG AGO

By Hilary Gordon/Photos by Blair Randall, 2010

May Day is like Christmas for gardeners except all the packages are opening themselves simultaneously. There is so much to fall in love with. Here are a few of my heartthrobs this month.

The compost thermometer jumping up to 140 degrees...when compost is built right, it heats up so hot that on a cold foggy morning in the garden, you can warm your hands on it. If you dig in a little way, steam starts to rise in the cold air. Every single time, this generous miracle of fertility blows my mind. Thanks, Sir Lawrence and the intern crew, for building such a great pile.

The spring mix lettuces standing erect and gorgeous like Carnival marching bands, each group with different costumes on...snip, snip, snip, go the harvest volunteers, and the lettuces fluff into a bag of salad mix for our harvest box. Off they go to feed salad to youth at Larkin Street Youth Services.

California wild lilacs (*Ceanothus* shown above) blooming in the Native Backyard, and buzzing with a dozen different pollinators and beneficial insects...the



Garden for the Environment nestles under Mt. Parnassus in the watershed coming down through Laguna Honda reservoir from Twin Peaks. We are contiguous with some of the last remaining native chaparral in San Francisco. So we have some cool weird insects that even insect enthusiasts have trouble identifying.

Berschorneria yuccoides...three years we've been waiting to see it bloom. It is an unusual agave relative, which produces one gigantic and dramatic flower. It's worth a visit to the GFE just to see it blooming behind the big Ceanothus in the summer dry area (shown below).

Orchid Rockrose (*Cistus purpureus*)...I've always loved this summer-dry shrub, which explodes with big pink flowers marked with dramatic dark splotches in each petal. The tissue paper fragility of the flowers belies the toughness of the plant. It stays neat and green all year long when out of bloom, whether or not it receives any summer water.

Bearded Iris!...so beautiful that the ancient Greeks named the



Wild Iris (*Iridaceae Douglasiana*) is native to San Francisco Bay forests. rainbow goddess after them. Or maybe it's the other way around, and they are named after the goddess. Anyway, these guys also do fine without summer water, simply resting after bloom until next year.

Roses! I know it's old-fashioned of me, but I love roses. The GFE features several climate appropriate roses. (In this case, I mean that they can tolerate our cool foggy summers, not that they need no summer water.) My favorites are Altissimo and Mutabilis, both single roses... old-fashioned, like me.

Happy June, and see you in the Garden.

Hilary Gordon is Sustainable Landscape Education Manager at the GFE. A life-long gardener, trained at the City College Horticulture program, she has worked as a professional landscape gardener from 1984 until the present. Have a question for Hilary? Meet her in the garden Wednesdays 10-2 and Saturdays 10-4.

Business Corner (Cont. from p. 5)

"closed in" and helps to contribute to a more comfortable, interactive experience. Dr. Little grew up locally in Miraloma Park before attending Lowell High School, and eventually receiving her Audiology degrees at California State University, Sacramento and Salus University in Pennsylvania. She has worked in the field in both the US and in New Zealand and cites a major difference between the countries. "Here in the US, the testing and verification of the fitting of hearing aids is a bit different. In New Zealand the industry is much more stringent in the verification process and as a result the clients have a much better chance of receiving the best amplification for their individual needs," said the audiologist.

Both Gilligan and Little stress the importance of testing prior to working with a client to fit a device. "Without testing there can be no realistic outcome that can be predicted. We work with each client individually to set realistic expectations of what improvement can be expected," said Gilligan, who explained some of the challenges for people.

"It has been studied all around the world, and pretty much universally it takes a person 7 to 9 years from the time that they first think they may have a hearing problem before they do something about it. The problem is, that as hearing is damaged the ears get 'lazy,' the portion of the brain that processes sound also gets 'lazy' and the ability to understand or filter sound deteriorates. As a result, the person can be embarrassed to seek help, and their day-to-day lifestyle becomes more limited over years. We can change that and make a big change in the lives of those who have hearing loss."

The staff members at True Sound are excited to assist people with their hearing and it goes much further than just being a vocation; it is a business, but it's one where they get to help people and really make a difference. They almost become part of the "family" since they get to see them from time to time for tune ups, battery replacements, or when they just stop in to say hello.

True Sound is located at 1539 Sloat Blvd. (Lakeshore Plaza). Open Monday through Friday, 9 AM- 6PM, Saturday from 10 AM - 4 PM. For more information give them a call at 1-888-228-1378, or visit their website at www.truesoundhac.com



We're On the Web
www.westsideobserver.com

Real Travel By Sergio Nibbi



Crazy Like a Fox

As a youngster growing up in the Bay Area, I vividly remember people always associating Napa with those of us who were deemed to be a little mentally unstable. "That guy should be in Napa." For years the State Mental Hospital in Napa was better known than the world class wines now enjoyed throughout the world. Now granted, some of the early jug wines didn't garner many awards or bring in ridiculous prices at today's charity auctions, but for a buck and a half you got a gallon of wine that proudly wore the label of "Dago Red."

Fast forward to just a few years ago and the Napa Valley exploded into the world scene, fueled in part from Silicon Valley's infusion of big bucks and the search for trophy properties. Attorneys, doctors and young nerds now became better versed in "Terroir" than in source code or scalpels and depositions.

The Napa Valley became the weekend choice for those looking for the latest cult wine or a mud bath to soak away the week's aches and pains. With the transformation came some of the best restaurants in the nation, if not the world. Who has not heard of the French Laundry and its two month wait for reservations, or Bistro Jeanty, Redds or Michael Chiarello's new and wildly successful Bottega. All well-known and highly respected but what about poor old Napa? The city was a mere dot on the map that lent its name to the valley beyond and not much else. But through careful planning and gutsy moves the city fathers chose to roll the dice and followed the old adage, "If you build it, they will come." And so they did. With federal help, a massive project was initiated to control the flooding of downtown so familiar to the old timers. No more sand bags, just new and flashy hotels, restaurants and a massive development on the Napa River called, appropriately, River Front. In the last year three major restaurants opened in this new complex: Fish Story, Morimotos and Tyler Florence's Rotisserie and Wine. The sidewalks were no longer being rolled up by 9:00 pm. In most places it's standing room only at the bars and cafes.

So now it's Napa's turn to shine and with the new Westin Verasa Hotel and its luxurious La Toque dining room, or the less formal BANK Cafe in the hotel lobby, visitors are treated to a bevy of unique tourist destinations. The new and ultra modern Avia Hotel on 1st.

Street is directly across the street from Oenotri and Norman Rose, and for the less sophisticated there's even a Subway next door. The Uptown Theater, a masterpiece of Art Deco, has been newly remodeled and features major performers on a regular basis. Sweetie Pies Bakery is a dessert-lover's dream come true, and who can resist the late-bake baguettes at Model Bakery.

The Napa Valley Opera House has been in existence since the late 1800s and has been home to famed performers like Wynton Marsalis and Willie Nelson. Across the river is the new Oxbow Public Market, a spin-off of San Francisco's Ferry Building Marketplace. With over two dozen merchants one can enjoy oysters on the half shell, followed by wood-fired pizzas, cupcakes and delicious cheeses from near and far. Of course a nice glass of wine is never far away and during late spring and summer months, 1st Street is closed to traffic on Thursday nights, where people stroll with a glass of wine in one hand and a huge bar-b-que turkey leg in the other. Veteran's Park on the river's bank anchors the end of the line. Free music and dancing caps off the evening as the ducks and swans float silently on the outgoing tide.

So no longer is anyone kicking sand in Napa's face. The City is facing an amazing



renaissance, and in the last year or so all the premier publications in the country have published major stories, from the New York Times to the San Francisco papers and local travel magazines. The Wine Spectator this month did a 37-page spread, appropriately titled "Napa, A City Reborn."

For those of us who have been enjoying the Napa Valley for all these years the addition of a new Napa is a welcome sight, but for the new tourists and visitors, not having seen the before, will they appreciate the transition? I certainly hope so. Old or new, Chardonnay or Cabernet, its still one of the most beautiful valleys in the world. No need to go to France, Italy or Australia. A short ride over one of the most beautiful bridges in the world and the experience becomes magical. Let's all raise a glass in appreciation. "Salute a Tutti."

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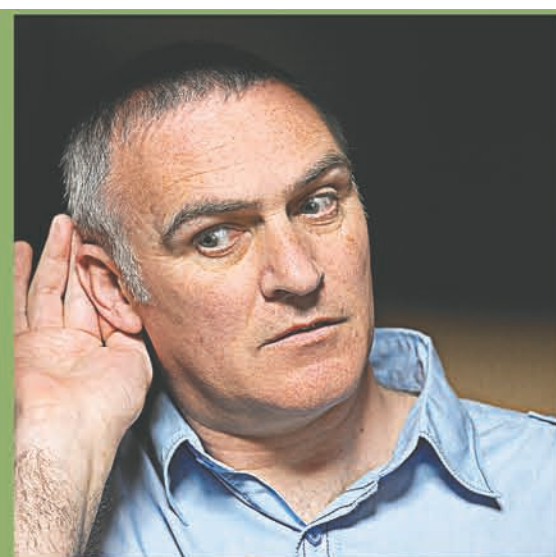
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