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Frances Freyberg took this photo of spring leaves while hiking at Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve in Half Moon Bay in April 2009.

Freyberg among artists at Open Studios

Five award-winning Peninsula artists — Marcia Enns, Frances Freyberg, Kim Holl, Julia Munder Seelos and Alice Weil — will exhibit paintings and fine art photography at 856 Partridge Ave. in Menlo Park during the annual Silicon Valley Open Studios the weekends of May 8-9 and May 15-16. Hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The event is part of the 24th annual Silicon Valley Open Studios, with some 320 local artists

opening their studios to the public the first three weekends in May.

During the weekend of May 15-16, photographer Frances Freyberg of Menlo Park will donate her net proceeds to Mission Hospice, to support patients who cannot afford hospice care.

Ms. Freyberg, director of development for Mission Hospice, specializes in color portraits of people, wildlife, nature and architecture from her travels to more than 50 countries. This year's open studio will feature photos from her 2010 trip to India.

Johns signs lawsuit settlement; council OKS pact on 3-2 vote

By Renee Batti

Almanac News Editor

John Johns, the former finance director of Atherton who sued the town over his firing, has signed a settlement agreement awarding him \$225,000, an agreement approved by a 3-2 vote of the council at a March 29 closed session meeting, according to the town.

Mayor Kathy McKeithen and council members Jim Dobbie and Jerry Carlson voted for the settlement, with council members Charles Marsala and Elizabeth Lewis opposed.

In addition to the cash, Mr. Johns will receive a letter of commendation from the town after he is rehired, then resigns.

Under the agreement, Mr. Johns also forfeits the right to sue the town, council members, current and former employees, and contractors, according to a statement issued by the town on April 19.

"The settlement allows the

Town to limit its exposure to hundreds of thousands of dollars in additional future litigation costs (including a possible award of attorney's fees to Mr. Johns if he prevailed on certain causes of action), should the case have been litigated through discovery and trial," the written statement said.

Mr. Johns was fired in October 2007. He has maintained that he was targeted for blowing the whistle on fiscal improprieties in Atherton's building and other departments, and filed his wrongful termination lawsuit in 2008.

Mr. Johns said the town pressed for a settlement provision prohibiting him from speaking publicly "on my experiences," but he wouldn't agree to it. Since the agreement was reached, Mr. Johns has issued numerous highly charged statements, both in a public meeting and on Town Square, The Almanac's online forum. ■

Seniors can apply for parcel tax exemption

Senior citizens who own property in the Las Lomas School District have until June 1 to apply for an exemption from the \$311 parcel tax passed by voters in 2007.

To qualify for the exemption, seniors must be 65 years old or older by July 1, and live on the

property they own in the school district.

Those wishing to apply for the exemption should contact the district office at 854-6311 for an application form.

The tax is expected to raise about \$1.2 million in 2010-11.



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Open studios

Alice Weil's painting "Palo Alto Hills" was inspired by summer walks to "the dish." She is among the artists exhibiting works at 856 Partridge Ave. in Menlo Park during the annual Silicon Valley Open Studios the weekends of May 8-9 and May 15-16. Hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.



Pension poll hints at marketing campaign

By Sean Howell
Almanac Staff Writer

Menlo Park residents reported receiving phone calls last week in an apparent marketing poll concerning a "pension reform" initiative that a group of residents has launched.

Based on reports from residents, the poll seems designed to shape a marketing campaign against the initiative effort, which would scale back pension payments to future non-police municipal employees. It provides a glimpse into the tactics that might be employed in such a campaign, such as linking the initiative to former council members Lee Duboc and Mickie Winkler, and noting that it would reduce pensions for librarians.

The company conducting the poll did not say who had paid for it, according to people who were surveyed.

Sharon McAleavey, a spokeswoman for the union that represents the city's middle management employees, said that her union is not connected to the poll. A call to a representative of Service Employees International, the city's largest employee union, was not returned.

The initiative would reduce pension payments to public employees from four-fifths to three-fifths of their annual salary, would increase the retirement age from 55 to 60, and would require a popular vote for any future increase in pension benefits.

Henry Riggs, one of the leaders of the initiative drive, said the group had expected resistance from employee unions from the beginning. "To be honest, so far this looks to me pretty light," he said. "I'm expecting more drama, not less. ... We've talked about it, and have been prepared (for resistance) since the time we said, 'OK, we're gonna do this.'"

■ MENLO PARK

The group is in the process of gathering signatures to qualify the initiative for the November ballot. It's on target for its goal of 2,400 signatures by its deadline of early May, according to Mr. Riggs.

He said that his group plans to campaign in support of the initiative until November, assuming it makes the ballot.

"There's no 15-word blurb that addresses what we're trying to do," Mr. Riggs said. "The alternative points of view will be disseminated thoroughly, whereas we will be lucky to knock on the doors of 20 percent of voters."


The fact that the poll is being conducted could be a boon to proponents of the initiative, some of whom have sought to cast themselves as grassroots advocates standing up to well-funded special interests. In an e-mail to supporters, Ms. Duboc said that she anticipated a "shoot the messenger" campaign from opponents of the initiative drive. She is involved in the effort, but is not its public face.

"The unions will spare no effort or expense in attempting to derail" the pension initiative, she wrote in a January e-mail.

John Kadvan, a member of Menlo Park's Planning Commission, provided The Almanac with detailed notes he took when contacted in the survey. According to Mr. Kadvan, the caller asked several times whether he would support the initiative, testing the effectiveness of various arguments in favor of and in opposition to it. It asked for respondents' reaction to several names, including those of Ms. Duboc and Ms. Winkler, the "pension reform" group, the Tea Party movement, CalPERS (the state pension fund), and SEIU (the employee union).



According to Mr. Kadvan, the

interlocutor asked whether he would support the initiative if he knew it would apply to road workers and librarians, and if he knew that public employees do not receive Social Security. He was also asked whether he would be persuaded by arguments that the city needs to stand up to the unions, and that the initiative drive represents a mean-spirited attack by Tea Party activists. ■



EYE CARE NEWS

**Presented by
Mark Schmidt
Licensed Optician**

HOW SHARP IS YOUR VISION?

To determine visual acuity, a person must sit 20 feet in front of a Snellen Chart ("E Chart") and read the printed letters. The distance of 20 feet is used for testing purposes because, at that distance, the eye is relaxed and its lens is in a neutral position (not trying to focus). At 20 feet, those with normal visual acuity can clearly read three-eighths-inch letters. They are said to have "20/20 vision" because at 20 feet from the chart, they see what a normally sighted person sees at

20 feet. When a person's visual acuity is worse than normal, the second number will be larger than 20. Visual acuity is only one factor used to determine overall visual ability.

There are many new styles in eyewear on the market today. If you have not had an opportunity to see these styles first hand, please visit MENLO OPTICAL at 1166 University Drive, on the corner of Oak Grove Avenue and University Drive. We carry a wide selection of eye-catching designer frames in several sizes, colors, and materials. Please call us at 322-3900 if you have any questions about this week's column. We work with several ophthalmologists in the area and can recommend one to you.

P.S. A person with 20/40 vision can see at 20 feet what a normally sighted person sees at 40 feet.

Mark Schmidt is an American Board of Opticianry and National Contact Lens Examiners Certified Optician licensed by the Medical Board of California. He can be easily reached at Menlo Optical, 1166 University Drive, Menlo Park. 650-322-3900.



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