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## Midtown Residents Association Neighborhood Newsletter

### SUMMER 2009

Visit our web site at <http://www.midtownresidents.org/>

#### Midtown Residents Enjoy National Night Out at Hoover Park *by Annette Ashton*

On August 4, Midtown residents came together in Hoover Park and enjoyed a multi-cultural pot luck to celebrate the nationwide event called "National Night Out". This is the fourth year, that the City of Palo Alto has celebrated NNO – an event aimed at building crime-prevention awareness and neighborhood cohesiveness.

Last year, over 37 million people participated in NNO nationwide. It's a great way for neighbors to get to know each other. Studies show that when neighbors know each other communities are safer and crime decreases. Our city had 11 "block" parties, and ours was one of the best. The parties ranged from small backyard BBQs with neighbors to a large downtown event at the Channing House (an upscale retirement Community). I'm not sure how many crimes will be prevented because of the gathering but it was loads of fun on a summer evening.

Midtown had the best food by far. The multi-cultural potluck brought interesting foods and mouth watering smells – a home grown tomato, basil and mozzarella plate, several delicious rice dishes with spices from India and Turkey, cucumber salads, several competing potato salad, a home baked jalapeno bread, raspberry-tart cookies, right out-of-the oven boysenberry pie, chocolate cake and more. All of this quickly disappeared as did the give-aways provided by the City on the table of items and information.

We were green...environmentally conscious...that is. Folks came by bike or walked and many brought plastic plates and cups! Debbie Mytels, Midtown resident and Acterra Program manager shared information about the City of Palo Alto and Acterra's Green@Home program.



The weather was balmy. Geri McGilvray and Mike Belcher serenaded the crowd with folk tunes that brought toe tapping and good memories.

Visitors from various city departments made the evening enjoyable. City Manager Jim Keene and Assistant City Manager Kelly Morariu had a chance to meet and chat with many. We also had visits from Community Services Director, Greg Betts, Division Manager, Open Space and Parks, Don Piana and Park Superintendent Robert Ward. Midtown had the first view of one of the brand new fire engines – so shiny you could see your face in the panels.

Fire Chief Nick Marinaro and Lt. Roger Bloom were on hand to show the large crowd of children the ins-and-outs of their newest pride and joy. Homeland Security Officer, Ken Dueker, was surrounded by our Midtown PANDAs and Block Preparedness Coordinators.

MRA wants to thank everyone who brought treats to share, and the MRA board who made it happen, once again in Hoover Park! We met old friends and made new ones. All in all a great evening, which met the goal of neighbors meeting neighbors. This goes a long way to make Midtown feel like a small town – our town!

#### Get Ready for MRA's 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Ice Cream Social September 13, 1-4pm at Hoover Park

Talk to the City Council and School Board candidates, the new sanitation company and the "green" movement – meet your neighbors and the MRA Steering Committee. Information for adults – games for kids – food, music, fun and ice cream for all.

**Ice Cream \*\* Music \*\* Fun \*\* PA Firefighters' Chili \*\* Council Candidates**



## **The Trees of Palo Alto** by David Dockter, Environmental Planner and Community Forester

**“In Palo Alto, it’s the Trees!”** is a quote often heard describing our fair city by folks visiting from all over the world. Apparently, they are responding to a personally significant impression and often repeated. Of course, it helps that the visual tree canopy drama presented by many of our gateways exists, such as University Avenue, El Camino Real, Middlefield, Sand Hill and Page Mill Roads. Frankly, I think both visitors and residents are envisioning the collective but distinct neighborhoods of Palo Alto.

### **Palo Alto Neighborhoods**

Each neighborhood seems to have a unique character. Other than the roads connecting them, the green tree canopy of the landscape is the dominant feature. Trees can cover the entire street overhead comprising a shaded passageway or they can line the sides of the street creating a remarkable boulevard presence. We have a unique blend of landscape trees. Even the ownership of the trees can be blurred. Is the tree privately owned or publicly owned on city property? You can find out by calling Public Works. If a tree trunk grows across a property line, it becomes the property of both sides, jointly owned under California law.

It would be a good exercise for residents of each neighborhood to collect input on what trees or areas seem to best characterize their neighborhood and would be fun for all. Contact the MRA Tree Committee at [peggywrites@yahoo.com](mailto:peggywrites@yahoo.com) if you’re interested in participating in this activity.

### **Palo Alto’s Tree Programs**

The community is endowed with a large population of magnificent individual and collective trees giving the broader City a unique visual character. For over 100 years, tree programs have been developing in response to community needs and values. Our basic program consists of the residents with City Council, Canopy (a not for profit organization) and city regulations, administered by Eric Krebs, Managing Arborist for publicly owned trees and Dave Dockter, Community Forester for the protected and commercial property trees. Trees are a source of significant benefits and value. Contrary to old beliefs, the benefits outweigh the cost, whether public or private residential property. Trees pay us back \$2 for every \$1 spent

### **Regulated Trees of Palo Alto**

The Tree Preservation and Management Regulations (Tree Preservation Ordinance) are contained in the Palo Alto Municipal Code, Title 8 (Trees & Vegetation). Regulated trees refers to all trees or groups of trees included in the following three categories: 1) Protected trees, 2) Street trees, and 3) Designated trees.

- Protected Trees are all coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) and valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) 11.5 inches or greater in diameter (36 inches in circumference) and coast redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*) 18 inches or greater in diameter.
- Street trees are all trees growing within the street right-of-way (publicly-owned), outside of private property.
- The Designated Tree category includes all those on commercial or non-residential property, which are part of an approved landscape plan. A designated tree is a tree or tree grouping that have a particular significance because of their function as a unique natural or other feature under the standard findings for review.

The tree preservation ordinance is kept simple; regulations and instructions are carried out through a companion document, the Tree Technical Manual. The manual is free on line or can be purchased for approximately \$20. In the manual are found instructions for protected tree removal, permits, protection during development, how to determine if a tree is dangerous, how to care for mature shade trees, what constitutes a excessive pruning or illegal removal, etc. Activity that violates the ordinance, such as topping of regulated trees, can result in a code enforcement fine or other action.

Neighborhood values and city government go hand-in-hand, and have good potential within community forest and planting care programs. These shady resources continue to need our help and as residents, accept this stewardship with understanding. Our mature attitude about tree stewardship values is a good thing, as opined by a famous man, *“The best friend on Earth of man is the tree. When we use the tree respectfully and economically, we have one of the greatest resources of the Earth”*—Frank Lloyd Wright.

### **Some Useful Resources**

Report code or tree violations	Code Enforcement: 650-329-2276 Report a violation on line at: <a href="http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/depts/pln/code_enforcement.asp">http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/depts/pln/code_enforcement.asp</a>
City Tree Technical Manual	<a href="http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/environment/urban_canopy.asp">http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/environment/urban_canopy.asp</a>
Canopy (helps plant street trees)	<a href="http://www.canopy.org/">http://www.canopy.org/</a> or 650-964-6110

## **Theft and Vandalism at the Midtown Garden** *by Sylvia Gartner*

"On what should have been a beautiful morning in our garden, it was an ugly and horrifying sight to see these living plants strewn about throughout the garden like they were ripped out by a tornado!" Such was the reaction of one of the gardeners upon viewing the destruction of numerous plots at the Midtown Garden located behind the Midtown Shopping Center.

The Midtown Garden (started in 1994 by Bay Area Action when they had office space in Midtown) is a community oasis behind the Midtown shopping area, providing a place for local people to grow their own food. The land is leased from one of the property owners of the Midtown Center, and the Green Fork project (a part of the non-profit group, Conexions) manages it as a model of urban agriculture.



It is meant to be a pleasant place for neighbors to walk through and get respite from the surrounding built environment.

However, there have been a number of disturbing incidents over a period of time at the garden. Tools have been stolen, plots vandalized and trampled, fruit trees dug up and removed. Also, several persons have come more than once into the garden area, bags and baskets in hand, to pick the fruits and vegetables that others have worked so hard to grow. The people who have garden plots there pay for their spaces and use of water and grow the produce there because they do not have space where they live.

The Palo Alto police are working on this case and have also given advice to the gardeners about preventing future occurrences of theft and vandalism. While this news item is not meant to accuse anyone who reads it, the gardeners have asked us to let people know that the plots there are for the use of persons who are paying for them and that picking fruits and vegetables and using the water is not permitted.

## **Development Projects** *by Sheri Furman*

### **2995 Middlefield Road--former BP/ARCO gas station**

This site next to the Winter Lodge will be transformed into a 7,000 square-foot, two-story mixed-use retail and office building. Although there are no specific tenants in mind for the property, the intention is to provide office use and ground-floor "neighborhood-serving retail" and second-floor office-space. The project also plans for a LEED silver environmental rating.



When the current owner, Erik Corrigan, purchased the property from BP (and he had to convince them to sell to him) they insisted on an agreement that it not be used for another gas station because of the remediation required to clean up contaminants on the site from the previous two gas stations.

BP is conducting the environmental clean-up of the site, which is why the site is only now being redeveloped.

Mr. Corrigan is actively looking for a restaurant or cafe and one other business for the 3,090 square-foot ground-floor space, as well as businesses for a couple of offices on the 2,423 square-foot second story. He is also working with Winter Lodge on a shared parking plan.

Once the project receives approval from the Architectural Review Board, construction will begin in early 2010.

**East Meadow Circle Study Area Workshop:** The third and final meeting for the East Meadow Circle/San Antonio area is scheduled for September 16, 2009 (location still to be determined) to discuss with the community a preferred overall land use development scenario for the area. This will then be reviewed by the Planning and Transportation Commission and City Council in the fall. More information on the workshops can be found at [www.paloaltocomplan2020.org/](http://www.paloaltocomplan2020.org/).

## **HERE COMES OUR LIBRARY!** *by Sid Espinosa, Palo Alto City Council*

I am very excited that, coming this Spring, the Mitchell Park Library and Community Center will be removed and construction will begin on the first major city project in 30 years. These Midtown facilities are currently cramped, out of compliance with building codes and not able to accommodate our community's needs. Building a new library and community center was a top priority for me when I ran for office, and I am thrilled that it is finally coming to fruition.

The new library will grow from 9,000+ square feet to 36,000, and the community center will grow from 10,000+ square feet to 15,000. The design plans have been shaped by extensive community input and the results are spectacular. A few highlights: greatly expanded library collection; large children's area; exciting teen center; outdoor courtyard for concerts, movies and community events; multipurpose room for weddings and other activities; light-filled, two-story design; the most environmentally responsible building ever built by the city; a café for outdoor seating; numerous classrooms, with one room able to seat 100 people; bike friendly design; no infringement on parkland; and on and on.

On a personal note, libraries have been a family focus for the past several years. While we in Palo Alto were working to get the bond measure passed to rebuild and renovate our libraries, my mom (who is serving in the Peace Corps in Latin America) was working hard to fundraise and construct the first library in her adopted community -- a region that did not understand the concept of "borrowing" books. I am happy to report that her library is now fully functional, and more important, the facility has had an overwhelming positive -- even transformative -- impact on the community. I'm looking forward to seeing the new Mitchell Park Library and Community Center have the same effect here.

If you would like to learn more about this project, the most recent design plans can be found on the city's website, and there will be upcoming forums where you can ask questions and give input. This is an exciting time for the Palo Alto and specifically for Midtown, where the crown jewel of the city's facilities will soon be located.

## **Update on Midtown Parks** *by Greg Betts, Interim Director of Community Services*

**Seale Park:** Following up on the many good suggestions from Midtown residents, City Public Works staff is in the process of finalizing the design for a suitably-sized public restroom that will be built on the edge of the existing concrete basketball court at Seale Park. The restroom is being designed in such a way so that the rear wall of the restroom building can serve as a backboard for folks who would like to play handball at the park. Construction is slated to begin November 2, 2009 and be completed by January 30, 2010.

**Greer Park:** Final design work is also progressing well for the expansion and enhancement of Greer Park. It is anticipated that the contract for construction will go to the City Council for approval on October 19th so that construction can begin on the park and irrigation improvements on November 23rd. The last major event scheduled for Greer Park will be a soccer tournament, November 20th through 22nd. The park, playground and parking lot will be closed for four months during construction and is slated to reopen approximately April 16, 2010, depending on the weather.

Linda Craighead, Director, Division of Arts & Sciences, reports that the art is included in the project. After the renovations are complete, the sculpture Filaree will be moved from its current location at the Municipal Services center on East Bayshore to a sunny location near the park entrance on Amarillo.

More about the sculpture of Filaree: Gene Montez Flores is a nationally recognized artist who has worked fabricating metals--steel, stainless steel, and bronze, for almost 50 years. Born in 1935, in San Bernardino, CA, he studied architecture at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. Gene Flores' early studios were on the West Coast, including a pivotal four years in the Tehachapi Mountains. Since 1979 he and his family have lived on the East Coast in the Berkshire Mountains of Western Mass. His work is represented in many public collections that include the University of Michigan; National Institute of Health, Bethesda, MD; Colorado Springs Art Museum; Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe; Sunnyvale Civic Center; United Savings Bank; and IBM.



Jill Matzke, MRA Membership Chair

## What's Up With the Midtown Real Estate Market?

*An interview with Tim & Tom Foy, Midtown Realty by Peggy Kenny*

You know the saying in real estate "location, location, location." Well, in Palo Alto, it's more precisely "schools, schools, schools!" So while many things have changed in real estate recently, one thing hasn't – the desire to own a home and live in Midtown.

That's according to Tim Foy, Broker of Midtown Realty. Tim and his dad, Tom Foy, have been active in the Midtown real estate market for over 40 years, giving them a unique perspective on recent developments. Tim, who carefully tracks local market trends, has seen no drop-off in demand throughout the recent 18 month economic downturn. On the other hand, buying activity and home prices have definitely seen some churn in that time.

A marked drop-off in home sales occurred at the end of 2008 when lenders tightened down on credit and buyers faced drastic losses in stock portfolios – a common source of down-payment funds. Since that time, however, sales activity has actually recovered to near-normal levels. This recovery has been accompanied by a drop-off in home prices according to Tim's analysis. Zillow.com puts this figure at an average 11% drop for Midtown Palo Alto since the recent peak in mid-2008.

As for the future? While sales volume has been stronger, the number of listings has been a bit thin – an environment that should lead to stabilization, if not growth in home prices in Tim's view. And the draw of our schools will feed a steady demand for family homes in midtown. "Anyone looking back 5 years from now will see this period as an extraordinary buying opportunity," Tim says.

## Traffic Tidbits *by Sheri Furman*

**Oregon Expressway Improvements Project:** On August 26, 2009, the Planning & Transportation Commission will consider the recommendations of Santa Clara County to modify portions of Oregon Expressway to provide for safety and capacity improvements. After the Commission reviews the recommendations, the City Council will review the plans and make its recommendations to the County. Information on the project, including the traffic study and the latest plans, is available at: <http://www.oregonexpressway.info/>.

The County is also connecting the walking paths on the south side of Oregon.



**Highway 101 Auxiliary Lanes:** Installation of auxiliary lanes is planned on Highway 101 from Embarcadero Road to Highway 85. Final approval of the Environmental Document for the project approval is expected by fall of 2009 with design to begin soon thereafter and construction beginning in 2011.

**Highway 101 Ramp Metering:** Metering on the southbound on-ramps to Highway 101 from the San Mateo County line to De La Cruz Blvd in San Jose is tentatively scheduled to be turned on by fall 2009.

## I'D LIKE TO HELP SUPPORT MRA

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Phone (home) \_\_\_\_\_ (cell) \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Add me to enews (email required) ☐ Yes

Areas I'd like to become involved in:

☐ Traffic ☐ Schools ☐ Events ☐ Membership ☐ Parks ☐ Public Art

☐ Working with Midtown Merchants ☐ Newsletter ☐ Zoning/Developments

== == Send your \$15 membership payment to Sylvia Gartner, 824 Moreno, Palo Alto 94303 == ==

## Upcoming Events and Meetings

- **Eleventh Annual MRA Ice Cream Social – September 13**  
Hoover Park — 2901 Cowper — 1:00-4:00 PM
- **East Meadow Circle Study Area Workshop – September 16**  
Location to be announced — 7:00 PM
- **Palo Alto Neighborhoods City Council Candidate Forum – October 7**  
Palo Alto Art Center — 1313 Newell — 7:00 – 9:00 PM

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**Your financial support enables us to pay for the modest expenses of MRA: postage, events, etc.**

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If by check (\$15): make your check out to MRA, and send to our treasurer Sylvia Gartner, at 824 Moreno, Palo Alto,