Congressman Barney Frank and San Lorenzo Valley School District high school government teacher Cindy Martinez, a big fan who asked him to pose with her in the halls of Congress last month. (Full disclosure: She’s my niece.)

Last week I was having lunch in my favorite corner store/cafe in Berkeley when a mother came in with two tiny boys, one about four, the other in a stroller. She herself was a compact person, probably under five feet tall, with big brown eyes and long black hair—she looked like she came from one of the indigenous populations of Mexico or Central America. Altogether, they were a handsome and cheerful family group.

After a bit of consultation in Spanish, the older boy selected a very small bag of pretzels from a rack, paid for them himself with coins his mother provided, and shared them with his baby brother. As an experienced grandmother, I know that pretzels are the whole-some choice—expensive, no high-fructose corn sweetener, no transfats, but just crunchy and salty enough to make kids feel like they’re having a treat. Clearly, an adept parent, with goodhumored and well-brought-up boys.

After they left the proprietor rolled his eyes. “Refugees,” he said. “From Arizona. It’s awful.”

He’s an immigrant himself, from the Middle East, and not just from a single country or from one ethnic group, but with family ties and friends among several. He has strong opinions about right and wrong on the political scene, and has followed with interest and often disgust the Planet’s interactions with those who have tried to suppress points of view on Israel with which they disagree. And as a proud naturalized American citizen, he’s shocked to see refugees in his adopted country.

As a proud native-born American and a long-time Californian, I too am ashamed of Arizona. I’m especially ashamed of California’s Harpy Twins, Meg and Carly, who are eagerly talking out of both sides of their mouths, saying one thing in Spanish-language ads and another in English about the Arizona law which attempts to legalize hunting down anyone suspected of being an immigrant without documentation. Meg was recently caught in the act by a noxious Southern California talk radio show.

This is not an easy problem to solve. As things get worse to the south of us, desperate people will continue to migrate north, despite international borders and perilous journeys. Predictions about the effect of climate change suggest that as the world gets warmer South-North movement will inevitably increase, regardless of legal barriers.

Making intelligent plans for what can be done to handle the situation is much impeded by what appears to be the built-in human tendency to xenophobia, the fear of strangers. Somewhere on my bookshelves is a rudely printed and bound book from the mid-nineteenth century, a compendium of the theory and practice of the Know-Nothings. They were the intellectual ancestors of the kind of people who now call up talk radio to express their fears and prejudices against immigrants, documented or undocumented, Spanish-speaking or otherwise. The designated villains in this scurrilous
piece were some of my family’s ancestors, German and Irish, who were then settling legally in the United States. The tune is familiar, only the words have changed.

It’s disheartening to see Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, who can sometimes pass for a civilized person, calling for repeal of the constitutional provision which grants citizenship to anyone born in the United States. He’s suggesting that we follow the policies of the notorious Prussian-German principle of *Jus sanguinis*, or law of blood, under which people acquire citizenship only if a parent is a citizen, regardless of where they were born.

In modern Germany this has now been somewhat modified, but there’s still a way to go. In Germany Turkish migrants still do much of the hard work without being voters. It’s no accident that the 9/11 plot was hatched in among the disenfranchised in Hamburg’s Islamic neighborhoods.

Americans too have expected the most recently arrived to do jobs they themselves shun. Harriet Martineau, an English visitor to the United States in 1834, noted that the British embassy at the time was forced to hire foreigners to do their domestic work wearing livery, the traditional servants’ uniform:

“One laughable peculiarity at the British legation was the confusion of tongues among the servants, who ask you to take fish, flesh, and fowl in Spanish, Italian, German, Dutch, Irish, or French. No American will wear livery, and there is no reason why any American should. But the British ambassador must have livery servants...[so] he is obliged to pick up his domestic from among foreigners...”

Americans today, including those of us descended from the kind of people who waited on table at the British legation in 1834, still depend on “foreigners” to do our dirty work. This is partly because employers are looking for people who will work cheaply, of course.

A letter writer in this very issue suggests, to the problem usually discussed under the rubric of “jobs”, which is not about just jobs per se, not just any old kind of jobs, but about the lack of solid working-class jobs that can be the basis for family life.

William Gross, a prominent spokesperson for the bond-selling industry, was reported in *Sunday’s New York Times* as believing that “it’s time for the government to spend tens of billions on new infrastructure projects to put people to work and stimulate demand.” His firm is heavily into municipal bonds at the moment, so it’s not surprising he would say that, since bonds are used to fund infrastructure building projects, with profit to the bond-sellers.

But the ecological consequences of adding oceans of new concrete and forests of steel to our environment are serious, and the construction industry’s increasing reliance on imported workers, as our letter writer notes, is another problem. Meanwhile, our schools are laying off teachers and classroom aides at an appalling rate, as well as valuable service workers like police officers and home health aides.

Wouldn’t it be better, instead of paying to build more hard-wired stuff that we really don’t need, to expand people-based jobs that we do need? Instead of building more and more government-funded construction boon-doggles like concrete islands for Bus Rapid Transit, a fourth automobile tunnel through the East Bay hills and environmentally wasteful ferries (which uses more energy per passenger mile than cars) how about just training and hiring more bus drivers so that our transit system will actually work?

How about hiring willing immigrants, people like the mother I saw at my corner store, to help out in class rooms and assist our disabled citizens, who are losing the state subsidy which has paid for their attendants?

In one of the most juvenile and vapid stories I’ve ever heard on the increasingly marginal National Public Radio (“Interrupted Recess Brings Bickering Back To House”), Andrea Seabrook reported that the house is back in session to reconcile a bill passed by the Senate which will fund public service pay by closing some high-end tax loopholes. Or rather, I figured out what’s happening by reading the comments, since as the headline indicates, Seabrook focused on the he-said-she-said stuff as if she were reporting a tennis match instead of on government taking care of business.

It appears that House Democrats, led by often-dissed but frequently effective Speaker Pelosi, are on the right track. Fortunately, I was able to find a relatively intelligent report of what’s actually going on at *TheHill.com* website.

“House Financial Services Chairman Barney Frank (D-Mass.) on Tuesday disputed the rumor that lawmakers were upset by having to return to Washington during their August break to vote on a $26.1 billion state-aid bill. ‘When we heard that the Senate had passed the bill, people were delighted,’ he said Tuesday. ‘It means you’re gonna get funds for states. You’re going to have firefighters, teachers, public works employees back.’

“The bill provides $10 billion to education funding and $16 billion to Medicaid. Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) contends the legislation will save or create 319,000 jobs, which includes teachers, police officers and firefighters.”

One bill won’t do it all, but at least it looks like a step in the right direction. We’ll see if it passes.

P.S. Ms. Martinez, the teacher pictured above with Barney Frank, has informed me that it did indeed pass this afternoon!”

---

**Editor’s Back Fence**

**Subscription Note**

**Tue Aug 10 17:33:00 -0700 2010**

Some subscribers have discovered that their personal letters from the Planet editor sometimes end up in Spam. To prevent this from happening to you, put my email address in your contact list right away. If you aren’t a subscriber but would like to be, write to subscribe@berkeleydailyplanet.com. It’s free, though all it gets you is notification when new or special issues are posted.

**News**

**Candidates File for Berkeley’s November Elections**

*By Becky O’Malley with Charlotte Perry-Houts*

*Mon Aug 09 19:15:00 -0700 2010*

Friday was the last day for candidates for Berkeley city offices to file the requisite paperwork to appear on the November ballot.
In District 1, long-time incumbent Linda Maio will be challenged by Jasper Kingeter, Anthony Di Donato and Merrilie Mitchell.

In District 4, Councilmember Jesse Arreguín, who was elected two years ago after Dona Spring’s death, will be running for a full four year term this time. Challengers include Eric Panzer, Jim Novosel and Bernt Wahl.

Councilmember Kriss Worthington will have a third rematch in District 7 with perennial candidate George Beier, this time joined by newcomer Ces Rosales.

In District 8, two-term incumbent Gordon Wozniak will face Stewart Emmington Jones and Jacquelyn McCormick.

Candidates for Rent Board Commissioner include a tenant-backed slate of incumbents: Dave Blake, Lisa Anne Stephens, Pam Webster, Jesse Townley, Katherine Harr and first-timer Asa Dodsworth. Other candidates are Marcia Levenson, Tamar Larsen and George Perezvelez.

In the Berkeley Unified School district race, Karen Hemphill is running for a second term. New candidates are Joshua R. Daniels, Norma J.F. Harrison, Julie Holcomb, Priscilla Myrick and Leah T. Wilson.

School board candidates have until Wednesday to file, because incumbents Nancy Riddle and Shirley Issel are not running again, which automatically extends the filing period.

Incumbent City Auditor Ann-Marie Hogan is running unopposed for City Auditor.

Several candidates, present at the City Clerk’s office to make sure all went as planned, took the opportunity to make statements for a Planet reporter.

Rent Board member Dave Blake commented that “I’m sure if we all win, the Rent Board will do the best job it’s ever done.”

Asa Dodsworth said that he hopes to be the first Berkeley born and raised elected official.

District 8 Councilmember candidate Stewart Jones hopes to get a chance to fix what he thinks is wrong with the current state of the city: “Unfortunately, city governance is moving in the wrong direction and I believe it is time for new leadership.”

Solar Waste Recycling: Can The Industry Stay Green?

By Erica Gies
Mon Aug 09 18:53:00 -0700 2010

Clean-tech firms seek to reuse a variety of rare, potentially toxic materials. New businesses emerge as manufacturers prepare for modules’ end of life.

In recent years the electronics industry has gained notoriety for creating an endless stream of disposable products that make their way at life’s end to developing countries, where poor people without safety gear cut and burn out valuable materials, spilling contaminants into their water, air and lungs.

Solar modules contain some of the same potentially dangerous materials as electronics, including silicon tetrachloride, cadmium, selenium and sulfur hexafluoride, a potent greenhouse gas. So as solar moves from the fringe to the mainstream, insiders and watchdog groups are beginning to talk about producer responsibility and recycling in an attempt to sidestep the pitfalls of electronic waste and retain the industry’s green credibility.

Solar modules have an expected lifespan of at least 20 years so most have not yet reached the end of their useful lives. But now, before a significant number of dead panels pile up, is the perfect time to implement a responsible program, said Sheila Davis, executive director of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition.

The nonprofit environmental group has been a leader in recognizing the problems of e-waste, including hazardous disposal sites in the Bay Area left by the semiconductor industry. Now it is focused on the solar boom in Silicon Valley. Last year the group published a report calling for a “just and sustainable” solar industry, and this year it issued a scorecard of solar companies. The scorecard evaluates recycling and extended producer responsibility for the product’s end of life, called takeback; supply chain and green jobs; chemical use and lifecycle analysis; and disclosure.

Vastly expanding industry

Solar energy is the most widely available resource we have. Every hour, enough solar energy strikes Earth to meet human energy needs for more than a year, according to NASA. Now the solar industry is poised for huge growth in the United States, thanks to policy changes, incentives, technological improvements and economies of scale. Solar photovoltaics have recently become less expensive than nuclear energy on a per-kilowatt-hour basis, according to a new report from Duke University. Also, solar is widely expected to reach cost parity with fossil fuels in most markets by 2013.

In 2009, Greentech Media estimated that U.S. solar demand will continue to increase about 50 percent annually through 2012. The report said the U.S. capacity installed during 2008 was about 320 megawatts, and it predicted that about 2,000 megawatts would be installed during 2012. Such growth would put U.S. capacity ahead of solar leader Spain and potentially Germany as well.

While most of the new modules will likely have a long, productive life, factory scrap, transport breakages and field failures are ready for recycling now. Jennifer Woolwich is collecting these broken solar modules in a warehouse near Phoenix.

She founded her company PV Recycling in February 2009 after estimating that she could harvest 500 panels a week from these sources. She is not yet collecting at that capacity, nor does she have enough panels to begin recycling them, but she is talking with solar manufacturers in an effort to win their recycling business.

“One of those we interviewed, 100 percent want recycling,” she said. “Eighty percent want an independent third-party doing the recycling.”

Woolwich said she has seen a quick
evolution in solar manufacturers’ attitudes toward recycling: “Last year, there was kind of a ‘wait and see, we’re not sure how this is going to work’ attitude. Over the past 12 months, I’ve seen a 180. I’ve seen companies who are hiring consultants to research their whole value chain to identify waste, including the end of life of modules. We’ve received calls from consumers asking us which companies have takeback programs in place.”

Solar companies tend to be secretive about their product recipes, making some manufacturers cautious about, yet conceptually open to, third-party recycling.

“We guarantee that intellectual property will not be put at risk,” Woolwich said. “We’re not interested in reverse engineering or selling company secrets. We have certificates of destruction that we [will] provide.”

For now, though, some companies are doing their own recycling.

SolarWorld, which received an 88 out of 100 on the toxics coalition’s scorecard, has been recycling its own panels since 2003 at its main factory in Freiberg, Germany. That factory now receives broken panels from its U.S. plants in Cabrillo, Calif., Hillsboro, Ore., and Vancouver, Wash.

“The fact is, there isn’t much to recycle,” said Ben Santarris, a spokesman for SolarWorld. “In the future we might expand recycling to our U.S. plants or contract with a third-party recycler.”

First Solar earned a rating of 67 on the scorecard. Headquartered in Tempe, Ariz., it has recycling facilities at its manufacturing sites in Perrysburg, Ohio; Frankfurt (Oder), Germany; and Kulim, Malaysia. Lisa Krueger, vice president of sustainable development, said that so far the company is primarily recycling manufacturing scrap.

“It’s our intention that there would be other recycling facilities worldwide as you get into those volumes,” she said.

Materials of interest

Solar modules employ a variety of technologies, and even models within the same technology can have different ingredients. These materials may or may not be classified as toxic depending on who is regulating them.

Dustin Mulvaney is a scientist who works on solar issues at the University of California, Berkeley, and serves as a consultant to the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition. He has analyzed solar modules currently on the market and has outlined for each its key ingredients, including potentially toxic elements and materials that would be valuable to recover in recycling.

Used in SolarWorld modules, crystalline photovoltaic is the oldest and most widespread solar technology in the United States, holding 57 percent market share in 2009, according to Greentech Media. “As far as hazardous materials go, you’re primarily talking about lead,” Mulvaney said.

A thin film technology called cadmium telluride makes up about 21 percent of the U.S. market. First Solar panels use this technology.

Cadmium may be carcinogenic. Exposure affects the lungs and kidneys and can be fatal. “It’s gene toxic and a mutagen, so it has the ability to affect DNA, meaning it could affect reproduction and future generations’ DNA,” Mulvaney said.

Cadmium is technically banned by the European Union’s Restriction on Hazardous Substances directive, although the policy currently allows an exemption for its use in solar modules.

Still, there’s not a lot of data about whether cadmium is toxic in the alloy form in which it’s used in thin film. And cadmium isn’t likely to go away anytime soon, as it is uniquely efficient at absorbing light.

Another thin film material, copper indium gallium selenide (CIGS), also has a cadmium layer. Indium is a potentially hazardous substance, too, particularly in the form of indium tin oxide, Mulvaney said. Studies have linked it to pulmonary disease in flat-screen TV recycling facilities. And selenium has been documented to be a hazardous material.

While CIGS currently has a market share of just 6 percent, amorphous silicon, which also has an indium tin oxide layer, holds 16 percent.

California’s Department of Toxic Substances Control has taken note of the European Union’s concern about cadmium and is researching the chemical and physical makeup of various types of modules.

“We think some solar panels, probably the cadmium thin film type, might be hazardous waste when shredded or disposed of in a landfill,” said Charles Corcoran, a hazardous substances scientist at the department.

Only panels classified as hazardous would fall under the jurisdiction of the department. It is considering regulatory options to try to steer end users toward recycling rather than disposal.

“That gets a little complicated because California and U.S. regulations aren’t necessarily in sync,” Corcoran said. “An option might be to transport it out of state where disposal is legal.”

Today California has no solar module recycling facilities. But recycling locally is an important tenet of an ethical, sustainable industry, said the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition’s Davis. Recycling locally reduces the process’ carbon footprint.

“It would also make people more conscious about what goes into the products,” Davis said. “And it would create local jobs.”

Designing with recycling in mind

Extended producer responsibility, including module recycling, is currently an expense rather than a source of profit for companies, including Solar World and First Solar.

“As we get to scale, we hope those costs will come down,” Krueger said.

A dedicated recycler like Woolwich is counting on economies of scale. Her business plan also includes various revenue streams, including reclaiming and selling materials and providing a service of managing manufacturers’ collection and recycling systems.

Davis said recycling costs could be reduced if manufacturers would take the notion of extended producer responsibility to the next level: the design phase.

“If you don’t look at the recycling when you’re designing the product, then it’s really, really difficult to recycle,” Davis said. “But if you know you’re going to have to pay for the recycling at the end of life, you might make the necessary design changes in your product now to reduce that cost.”

Mulvaney said that if the government were to set a price on carbon emissions, that would also help make solar recycling more affordable. Because turning sand into crystals takes 70 to 80 percent of the energy used to make crystalline photovoltaics, he said recycling silicon would “save so much energy in production, it could become a money saver.”

Still, most companies that are beginning recycling programs today are proceeding under the assumption that recycling will be a cost. They are preparing for that expense by creating a variety of funding mechanisms based on the principles of producer responsibility.

Via her surveys, Woolwich has found that solar companies are using an annuity program, escrow, maturity bonds, annual fixed contracts, and pay as you go.

Krueger said First Solar uses a trust. “First Solar doesn’t have access to those funds except for collection and recycling,” she said. “It’s designed that way because of the long
product life. If something happens to First Solar, the industry won’t have to deal with orphan waste.”

Some materials in solar modules such as silicon and rare metals could be more valuable in the future, providing an additional incentive to recycle. Material price spikes have caused industry turmoil in recent years. For example, polysilicon shot to $400 per kilogram between 2006 and 2008. It is now down around $55.

Krueger said First Solar currently harvests cadmium and tellurium from its recycling program to use in new modules, even though buying it from a supplier is currently less expensive. She said she expects harvesting costs to come down as recycling scales up.

Mulvaney said that the industry would do well to plan now for the recovery of rare metals such as indium and tellurium.

Of course, materials recovery has an environmental benefit as well. “We’ll be able to reduce impact from mining and other environmental hazards by collecting a lot of the metals and other valuable minerals that are being used in panels,” Davis said.

Being truly sustainable - and maintaining that green credibility - is a powerful motivator for renewable energy companies.

Santarris said the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition’s scorecard was an “important step” toward figuring out which manufacturers are the most environmentally benign.

“There’s not a lot of sophistication in the marketplace to differentiate among products and manufacturers of varying environmental performance,” Santarris said. “Are solar modules all the same? They’re not.”

Solar Waste Recycling: Can the industry stay green?

Picture_1_medium

This piece is made possible by the reporter Erica Gies, the editing of the SF Public Press and funding from Spot.Us. The piece is free to be reprinted but must give credit to all parties.

Clean-tech firms seek to reuse a variety of rare, potentially toxic materials. New businesses emerge as manufacturers prepare for modules’ end of life.

In recent years the electronics industry has gained notoriety for creating an endless stream of disposable products that make their way at life’s end to developing countries, where poor people without safety gear cut and burn out valuable materials, spilling contaminants into their water, air and lungs.

Solar modules contain some of the same potentially dangerous materials as electron-ics, including silicon tetrachloride, cadmium, selenium and sulfur hexafluoride, a potent greenhouse gas. So as solar moves from the fringe to the mainstream, insiders and watchdog groups are beginning to talk about producer responsibility and recycling in an attempt to sidestep the pitfalls of electronic waste and retain the industry’s green credibility.

Solar World - Solar Recycling

Solar modules have an expected lifespan of at least 20 years so most have not yet reached the end of their useful lives. But now, before a significant number of dead panels pile up, is the perfect time to implement a responsible program, said Sheila Davis, executive director of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition.

The nonprofit environmental group has been a leader in recognizing the problems of e-waste, including hazardous disposal sites in the Bay Area left by the semiconductor industry. Now it is focused on the solar boom in Silicon Valley. Last year the group published a report calling for a “just and sustainable” solar industry, and this year it issued a scorecard of solar companies. The scorecard evaluates recycling and extended producer responsibility for the product’s end of life, called takeback; supply chain and green jobs; chemical use and lifecycle analysis; and disclosure.

Solar World - Solar Recycling- Belgische Module

Vastly expanding industry

Solar energy is the most widely available resource we have. Every hour, enough solar energy strikes Earth to meet human energy needs for more than a year, according to NASA. Now the solar industry is poised for huge growth in the United States, thanks to policy changes, incentives, technological improvements and economies of scale.

Solar photovoltaics have recently become less expensive than nuclear energy on a per-kilowatt-hour basis, according to a new report from Duke University. Also, solar is widely expected to reach cost parity with fossil fuels in most markets by 2013.

In 2009, Greentech Media estimated that U.S. solar demand will continue to increase about 50 percent annually through 2012. The report said the U.S. capacity installed during 2008 was about 320 megawatts, and it predicted that about 2,000 megawatts would be installed during 2012. Such growth would put U.S. capacity ahead of solar leader Spain and potentially Germany as well.

While most of the new modules will likely have a long, productive life, factory scrap, transport breakages and field failures are ready for recycling now. Jennifer Woolwich is collecting these broken solar modules in a warehouse near Phoenix.

She founded her company PV Recycling in February 2009 after estimating that she could harvest 500 panels a week from these sources. She is not yet collecting at that capacity, nor does she have enough panels to begin recycling them, but she is talking with solar manufacturers in an effort to win their recycling business.

“Of those we interviewed, 100 percent want recycling,” she said. “Eighty percent want an independent third-party doing the recycling.”

Woolwich said she has seen a quick evolution in solar manufacturers’ attitudes toward recycling: “Last year, there was kind of a ‘wait and see, we’re not sure how this is going to work’ attitude. Over the past 12 months, I’ve seen a 180. I’ve seen companies who are hiring consultants to research their whole value chain to identify waste, including the end of life of modules. We’ve received calls from consumers asking us which companies have takeback programs in place.”

Solar companies tend to be secretive about their product recipes, making some manufacturers cautious about, yet conceptually open to, third-party recycling.

“We guarantee that intellectual property will not be put at risk,” Woolwich said. “We’re not interested in reverse engineering or selling company secrets. We have certificates of destruction that we [will] provide.”

For now, though, some companies are doing their own recycling.

SolarWorld, which received an 88 out of 100 on the toxics coalition’s scorecard, has been recycling its own panels since 2003 at its main factory in Freiberg, Germany. That factory now receives broken panels from its U.S. plants in Cabrillo, Calif., Hillsboro, Ore., and Vancouver, Wash.

“Of those we interviewed, 100 percent want recycling,” said Ben Santarris, a spokesman for SolarWorld. “In the future we might expand recycling to our U.S. plants or contract with a third-party recycler.”

SolarWorld - Recycling

First Solar earned a rating of 67 on the scorecard. Headquartered in Tempe, Ariz., it has recycling facilities at its manufacturing sites in Perrysburg, Ohio; Frankfurt (Oder), Germany; and Kulim, Malaysia. Lisa Krueger, vice president of sustainable development, said that so far the company is primarily recycling manufacturing scrap.

“It’s our intention that there would be
other recycling facilities worldwide as you get into those volumes," she said.

Materials of interest

Solar modules employ a variety of technologies, and even models within the same technology can have different ingredients. These materials may or may not be classified as toxic depending on who is regulating them.

Dustin Mulvaney is a scientist who works on solar issues at the University of California, Berkeley, and serves as a consultant to the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition. He has analyzed solar modules currently on the market and has outlined for each its key ingredients, including potentially toxic elements and materials that would be valuable to recover in recycling.

Used in SolarWorld modules, crystalline photovoltaic is the oldest and most widespread solar technology in the United States, holding 57 percent market share in 2009, according to Greentech Media. “As far as hazardous materials go, you’re primarily talking about lead,” Mulvaney said.

A thin film technology called cadmium telluride makes up about 21 percent of the U.S. market. First Solar panels use this technology.

Cadmium may be carcinogenic. Exposure affects the lungs and kidneys and can be fatal. “It’s gene toxic and a mutagen, so it has the ability to affect DNA, meaning it could affect reproduction and future generations’ DNA,” Mulvaney said.

Cadmium is technically banned by the European Union’s Restriction on Hazardous Substances directive, although the policy currently allows an exemption for its use in solar modules.

Still, there’s not a lot of data about whether cadmium is toxic in the alloy form in which it’s used in thin film. And cadmium isn’t likely to go away anytime soon, as it is uniquely efficient at absorbing light.

SolarWorld - Recycling

Another thin film material, copper indium gallium selenide (CIGS), also has a cadmium layer. Indium is a potentially hazardous substance, too, particularly in the form of indium tin oxide, Mulvaney said. Studies have linked it to pulmonary disease in flat-screen TV recycling facilities. And selenium has been documented to be a hazardous material.

While CIGS currently has a market share of just 6 percent, amorphous silicon, which also has an indium tin oxide layer, holds 16 percent.

California’s Department of Toxic Substances Control has taken note of the European Union’s concern about cadmium and is researching the chemical and physical makeup of various types of modules.

“We think some solar panels, probably the cadmium thin film type, might be hazardous waste when shredded or disposed of in a landfill,” said Charles Corcoran, a hazardous substances scientist at the department.

Only panels classified as hazardous would fall under the jurisdiction of the department. It is considering regulatory options to try to steer end users toward recycling rather than disposal.

“That gets a little complicated because California and U.S. regulations aren’t necessarily in sync,” Corcoran said. “An option might be to transport it out of state where disposal is legal."

Today California has no solar module recycling facilities. But recycling locally is an important tenet of an ethical, sustainable industry, said the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition’s Davis. Recycling locally reduces the process’ carbon footprint.

“It would also make people more conscious about what goes into the products,” Davis said. “And it would create local jobs.”

Designing with recycling in mind

Extended producer responsibility, including module recycling, is currently an expense rather than a source of profit for companies, including Solar World and First Solar.

“As we get to scale, we hope those costs will come down,” Krueger said.

A dedicated recycler like Woolwich is counting on economies of scale. Her business plan also includes various revenue streams, including reclaiming and selling materials and providing a service of managing manufacturers’ collection and recycling systems.

Davis said recycling costs could be reduced if manufacturers would take the notion of extended producer responsibility to the next level: the design phase.

“If you don’t look at the recycling when you’re designing the product, then it’s really, really difficult to recycle,” Davis said. “But if you know you’re going to have to pay for the recycling at the end of life, you might make the necessary design changes in your product now to reduce that cost.”

Mulvaney said that if the government were to set a price on carbon emissions, that would also help make solar recycling more affordable. Because turning sand into crystals takes 70 to 80 percent of the energy used to make crystalline photovoltaics, he said recycling silicon would “save so much energy in production, it could become a money saver.”

Still, most companies that are beginning recycling programs today are proceeding under the assumption that recycling will be a cost. They are preparing for that expense by creating a variety of funding mechanisms based on the principle of producer responsibility.

Via her surveys, Woolwich has found that solar companies are using an annuity program, escrow, maturity bonds, annual fixed contracts, and pay as you go.

Krueger said First Solar uses a trust: “First Solar doesn’t have access to those funds except for collection and recycling,” she said. “It’s designed that way because of the long product life. If something happens to First Solar, the industry won’t have to deal with orphan waste.”

Some materials in solar modules such as silicon and rare metals could be more valuable in the future, providing an additional incentive to recycle. Material price spikes have caused industry turmoil in recent years. For example, polysilicon shot to $400 per kilogram between 2006 and 2008. It is now down around $55.

Krueger said First Solar currently harvests cadmium and tellurium from its recycling program to use in new modules, even though buying it from a supplier is currently less expensive. She said she expects harvesting costs to come down as recycling scales up.

Mulvaney said that the industry would do well to plan now for the recovery of rare metals such as indium and tellurium.

Of course, materials recovery has an environmental benefit as well. “We’ll be able to reduce impact from mining and other environmental hazards by collecting a lot of the metals and other valuable minerals that are being used in panels,” Davis said.

Being truly sustainable - and maintaining that green credibility - is a powerful motivator for renewable energy companies.

Santarris said the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition’s scorecard was an “important step” toward figuring out which manufacturers are the most environmentally benign.

“There’s not a lot of sophistication in the marketplace to differentiate among products and manufacturers of varying environmental performance,” Santarris said. “Are solar modules all the same? They’re not.”

This piece is made possible by the reporter, the editing of the SF Public Press and funding from Spot.Us. This piece is free
Sight on the north side of Dwight between palm in the front yard, and is a well-known sits on a wide lot with a Canary Island date 1545 Dwight Way as a City Landmark. The large yellow painted wooden house

Commission, unanimously voted to desig the August 5, 2010, regular meeting of the town-as the result of efforts of a neighbor

recognizes Dwight Way Victorian

By Steven Finacom
Mon Aug 09 22:00:00 -0700 2010

Steven Finacom The newly landmarked Fish-Clark House stands on the north side of Dwight Way, west of California Street.

Berkeley has one new historic landmark-a 127 year old Victorian house familiar to those who travel through the central part of town-as the result of efforts of a neighbor- hood history group and favorable action at the August 5, 2010, regular meeting of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

After taking public hearing testimony the Commission, unanimously voted to designate 1545 Dwight Way as a City Landmark. The large yellow painted wooden house sits on a wide lot with a Canary Island date palm in the front yard, and is a well-known sight on the north side of Dwight between Spaulding Avenue and California Street.

The building was formally identified in the landmark application as the “Fish-Clark” house. It’s a standard historical usage to call a property by the name of its earliest owner(s) or resident(s). In this case, San Franciscan A.C. Fish, said to be a retired sea captain, commissioned the house in 1883.

The house was constructed by A.H. Broad, who was also one of Berkeley’s first elected Town Trustees. Several other Broad-designed buildings, including the childhood home of David Brower and Broad’s own house on Kittredge Street, are City of Berkeley landmarks.

The Fish-Clark house stands near the southeast corner of the Spaulding Tract, a central Berkeley subdivision originally laid out in the 1870s. The landmark application was prepared by members of the McGee / Spaulding / Hardy Historic Interest Group, a volunteer organization that has researched the history of the neighborhood west of Downtown Berkeley, led walking tours, developed historic plaques, and written historical summaries of the neighborhood.

Two members of the group, Pat Edwards and Lynne Davis, are the authors of record of the landmark application.

Mr. Fish only lived at 1545 Dwight for a short period, and then sold the house to William and Lillie Clark, the former a mattress and furniture manufacturer. The house remained a single-family home through 1919, when it was converted to six apartments.

In the 1960s a series of associations began that connected the house to emerging cultural and social movements in Berkeley. It successively housed: a group that promoted alternative energy; one of the founders of the Community Memory Project (which, in 1973, developed the first “public-access bulletin board” on a computer system); an ecumenical religious group residence called “The Ark”; and a transitional residence for “‘addicts/alcoholics’ in recovery.”

There were four speakers at the Commission’s public hearing regarding the property. J. Michael (Mike) Edwards noted that although the nomination was submitted in the name of two individuals it was a “collective application” representing the work of several people.

The fact that the house was built 127 years ago “makes it pretty old by Berkeley standards” he said, adding that the prominent residence had both historic and educational value.

“This house really helps to define the character of the neighborhood. It would not be the same without it.” The history of the house embodies “the history of land use in the Spaulding Tract”, Edwards said.

The property began as a four-acre, Victorian “mini-farm” carved out of a subdivision, then was further subdivided and built up as development intensified in central Berkeley. It once stood alone on the street frontage of Dwight between California and Spaulding.

John English also spoke in favor of the landmark nomination, noting there were additional designated City landmarks-including the Brower family houses on Haste Street-built by A.H. Broad.

This author also spoke in favor of the nomination, noting that Berkeley has lost most of its large, 19th century, Victorian-era homes and 1545 Dwight is both a rare survivor and a visual landmark already along Dwight Way.

The fourth speaker, a Mr. Davis, introduced himself to the Commission by saying “I am the agent representing the property owners.” He said “they acquired the property through foreclosure in September of 2009,” and the owner’s intent “is to sell the real estate.”

(There is currently a large “For Sale” signboard in the front yard of the house, and a “No Trespassing” sign mounted on the front gate.)

Davis said that the owners would support having the first 40 foot depth designated a landmark, but asked that the portion of the building further back than 40 feet be only “selectively landmarked”.

(Note: it was unclear to this writer whether the request was for the first 40 feet of the house itself, or the first 40 feet of the property, which includes the front of the house).

“The house now consists of approximately 25 rooms”, Davis said, including 17 bedrooms. “This property has been difficult to market.” “The intent is to sell it to a party that would work with adaptive reuse.”

“Landmarking the back of the building is going to make it extremely difficult to get a prospective buyer in there,” Davis said. “The owners are ready to submit blueprints to make the third floor habitable.”

His comments about landmarking only the front portion of the house led to a dialogue with members of the Commission.

Commissioner Robert Johnson said, “It’s not our procedure to landmark part of a building. What we do to accommodate changes is we call out features to be pre-
“A landmarking is a parcel”, said Commissioner Carrie Olson. “But on that parcel there are things you want to preserve and things that shouldn’t be preserved.” She noted, as an example, a garage door that had been inserted into the front facade of the house at the basement level.

“In general, what we care about a lot is what can be seen from the public right of way”, she added.

“It’s not the case that the building gets landmarked and then it’s cast in stone,” Commission Chair Gary Parsons said. “There’s a lot of expertise in this Commission and we try to help you.”

Davis said he was worried that landmarking would reduce the possible resale price of the house. He said in today’s market prospective buyers “are looking for anything that will drop the price, and landmarking can.”

Olson replied, “I can tell you without a doubt that landmarking does not decrease value, it increases value.”

Edwards, who spoke after Davis, said, “We have no disagreement with what Mr. Davis is saying” about emphasizing preservation of the front of the house. “We’d be happy to see the house standing with its elegant facade intact.”

It appeared from initial comments that there was no serious opposition to landmarking the house among the eight Commissioners present (Commissioner Antoinette Peitras was absent from the meeting).

“I walk in Berkeley a lot, and when I come around the corner and see this building, it’s ‘Wow!’” said Commissioner Robert Johnson. “It’s a very striking building. It’s very worthy.”

Discussion focused on the elements of the building to call out in the designation language.

Commissioners initially discussed postponing action for a month while a detailed written list was refined, but then found sufficient material among their handouts to craft a designation motion that was introduced by Commissioner Olson and seconded by Commissioner Anne Wagley.

The motion noted the significance of the building as the first known Berkeley structure built by A.H. Broad, as an example of the stick era of Victorian-style construction, and because of the various people and cultural movements associated with the structure.

The motion passed with no dissent. “The owners are ready to work with you”, Mr. Davis said, before leaving the meeting.

The Fish-Clark House will become City of Berkeley Landmark # 310. Berkeley has an estimated 40,000 buildings.

The Fish-Clark House is only the second building landmarked in Berkeley in 2010. Five structures were designated Landmarks in 2009, two in 2008, and three in 2007, for a total of 12 Landmark designations in the last three and a half years.

The remainder of the Commission agenda was relatively brief.

A second public hearing had been scheduled at the meeting to discuss alterations to the landmark building at 2134 Allston Way, which houses Cancun Restaurant on the ground floor.

However, when only one comment card was submitted-by a speaker on behalf of the applicant-the Commission decided, at Olson’s suggestion, to move the non-controversial item to the Consent Calendar and approve the alterations without further discussion.

Comments were also made by individual Commissioners about subcommittee meetings they had attended. LPC subcommittees generally focus on a single landmark building or project.

Three Commissioners had participated in a subcommittee discussion of changes to the North Branch Berkeley Public Library. In their comments they alternated praise for some of the redesign and renovation plans with concerns about certain other elements.

They said they had suggested that the original light fixture in the library lobby not be encircled by a new modern hanging fixture, asked that a proposed exterior garbage storage area be moved under the building and away from the large chimney on the facade, opposed making the main entrance door asymmetrical on the facade, and asked that any newly created functional artwork be incorporated in the new addition to the building, rather than attached to the older structure.

Commissioner Wagley said that her understanding was that the City had mistakenly not included the City’s requirement that 1.5% of project budget be spent on public art in the ballot wording for the bond issue that funded the branch library renovations.

As a result the City is now rushing to incorporate some public art into the North Branch Library, but also requiring that the art be functional.

Subcommittee Commissioners said they were skeptical of a suggestion that an ornamental railing on front of the old building be created, and suggested instead that a trellis or other features on the rear addition be targeted for the art funding.

Commissioners Parsons and Olson reported their subcommittee had a positive impact working with a contractor at the landmark Grace North Church.

“We’ve taken some builders who were not preservationist by inclination and made them more sensitive to what’s there”, Olson said. The subcommittee had met with the contractors to discuss proposed window replacements, repairs to deteriorated exterior beams, and other alterations.

Commissioner Robert Johnson requested that staff look into asking the owners of the landmark Tupper & Reed building on Shattuck Avenue to trim back an overgrowth of ivy on the ornate facade.

In Commission member comments, Commissioner Olson expressed concern that the Cheese Board on Shattuck Avenue had begun an extensive facade renovation without any City staff reviewing that project sending any information to the LPC. The Cheese Board itself is not in a landmark building, but the structure immediately adjacent to the north is a landmark.

Commission Secretary Jay Claiborne reported that the proposed demolition of the historic West Branch Library is undergoing environmental review.

He discussed having the Commission establish a subcommittee to review public infrastructure projects. This issue arose in recent months when City staff began a repair project on the deteriorated and historic Bancroft Steps southeast of International House. Specifics of a subcommittee will be discussed by the Commission at a later meeting.

Claiborne said he was working to develop a one-time training session for the Commission, probably in September, with a focus on the process of creating and defining historic districts.

He also noted that he receives calls from members of the public asking for advice on renovating historic houses, or asking if the City can regulate people making changes such as unusual paint colors-on other historic structures that are not necessarily landmarked.

Claiborne said, “Ideally we’d have guidelines, we’d have a ‘Rehab Right’ sort of program,” that could help respond to questions of that sort.

He was referring to a popular 1970s publication written by two Berkeley residents, architect Blair Prentice and landscape
architect and historic preservation planner Helaine Kaplan Prentice.

The book provides practical dos and don’ts for the renovation and restoration of older homes in Oakland and is still in use (in fact, this author gave a copy of it just this weekend to a friend with an Oakland house).

“Rehab Right” did not focus on designated landmark properties but more broadly addressed sensitive treatment of specific types of older homes.

Following some other small items of business the Commission adjourned until its September meeting, scheduled for Thursday, September 2. The LPC generally meets at the North Berkeley Senior Center on the first Thursday evening of the month.

The City of Berkeley has a web site for the Landmarks Preservation Commission, with agenda and minutes.

A pdf of the Fish-Clark House landmark nomination is here.

A pdf history of the McGee-Spaulding neighborhood can be found here.

**Assemblaymember Skinner and Officials Celebrate Launch of Fourth Bore Construction**

*By Bay City News Service*  
*Mon Aug 09 23:01:00 -0700 2010*

Public officials switched on a 50-foot long, 130-ton tunnel-boring machine today and made the first grinding cuts into a retaining wall that will eventually become the fourth bore of the Caldecott Tunnel, project spokesman Jeff Weiss said today.

During a commencement of drilling event held on the east side of the tunnel this morning, Federal Highway Administrator Victor Mendez and Caltrans Director Cindy McKim were the first to climb up a ladder and switch on the giant machine, known as a road header.

State Sen. Mark DeSaulnier, state Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner, Metropolitan Transportation Commission Commissioner Amy Worth, Contra Costa Transportation Authority Chair Robert Taylor and Oakland City Councilman Larry Reid also attended the event, Weiss said.

Crews plan to grind about two-thirds of the way through the mountain from the east side and then, early this fall, they will bring in two smaller boring machines and begin drilling through the mountain from the west side as well.

Because the rock is relatively soft, crews will have to stop about every three feet to build support, Weiss said. They expect to be able to drill only about 10 feet a day.

The four-year, $420 million project will alleviate traffic congestion on state Highway 24 between Oakland and Contra Costa County and create more than 5,000 construction jobs. The project is expected to be complete in late 2013 or early 2014.

Nearly half the project, $197.5 million of it, is being funded by money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

**The Other Change of Hobbit Thrives in South Berkeley**

*By Ken Bullock*  
*Tue Aug 10 12:08:00 -0700 2010*

Other Change of Hobbit, Berkeley’s pioneering science fiction-fantasy bookstore, now in spacious new digs at 3264 Adeline Street, between Harmon and Alcatraz, near popular destinations like The Vault and Sweet Adeline’s, has been forced to contemplate the future—the near future—and survival in a gloomy economy.

Dave Nee, co-founder of the store—which goes back as a book service to 1975, with the three original partners “book-running” to local organizations—recounted the saga of its establishment, and its three Berkeley locations.

“We were supplying books to groups like the San Francisco chapter of The Elves, Gnomes & Little Men’s Chowder & Marching Society, founded in 1949, by Anthony Boucher, among others. Three of us shared the organizational duties of supplying and mail order—Tom Whitmore, an old friend since high school in Palo Alto; Debbie Notkin and me. We’ve always been in Fantastic Fiction—Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror ...”

Nee went on: “At the WesterCon—West Coast Convention of Science Fiction and Fantasy fans—in LA, 1976, Sherry Gottlieb of A Change of Hobbit, the Santa Monica bookstore (founded in 1972) came up to our book table and asked if we’d like to open a storefront operation in Berkeley. She kicked us over the edge with the suggestion, and lent us the name, as long as it was a little bit different, ‘So the bills won’t get confused.’

“We tried ‘Son of Change of Hobbit,’” Nee joked, “‘Even ‘Bride of ...’—but finally settled on Other Change of Hobbit, which preserves the pun.”

The partners looked at different potential locations—“a whole lot of spaces”—finally finding “a little hole-in-the-wall under the garage in Sather Gate plaza, where Friends of the Berkeley Library is now. The City was the landlord, looking to fill spaces ...”

The time, Nee recalled, seemed ripe.

“We stumbled into good timing. Everybody seemed interested in reading Science Fiction.” Star Wars opened in theaters the last week of May that spring, and the partners treated themselves to opening night.

“We supplied space for club meetings,” Nee said. “Authors came in. The three of us were known in Science Fiction fandom, so word spread. A community started to form.”

Business slowed in the early 90s. “The first big recession was in the winter of ‘92. That killed A Change of Hobbit in Santa Monica. It certainly was killing us. We tried to renew the lease, but the guy at the City who got us in had died—and the City wasn’t taking care of the property. It was dark in the Mall. And we were tired of it. There were drug deaths in the building. And the City wanted double the rent. We figured for that kind of price, we could get something out on the street.”

Other Change of Hobbit moved in at 2020 Shattuck, near Addison. “It was a step up—longer, deeper, more shelves ... Business went up as much as the linear footage.”

Nee looked back on the long tenancy downtown. “We had a good run for 17 years. Then there were more ups and downs economically. We saw Berkeley’s economy hit the skids again. And had the first of three floods in the building. We’ve been plagued with the curse of water. The landlady tried to plug the leaks, but it never really got resolved. The air conditioner broke down. We tried to change the terms of the lease—and were offered a one year lease with a one year option by the agent! We continued on a month-to-month basis at the same rent, on a hand-shake with the landlady.” For seven years, the agent tried to find a new lessee.

Business kept shrinking for the store. “It was any number of factors overall,” Nee said. “More and more people were turning to online reading and downloading over the last three-plus years. In 2000, all bookstores were hit when the Bush people shut down Alameda Air Station. A 10% hit in sales. The military bases closing, Silicon Valley collapsing ... People were scared, what was expendable income dried up; the arts community, retail were hit ...”

Debbie Notkin had dropped out of the partnership in 1994, the year after the move to Shattuck. Jan Murphy, an investor, came into the corporation and has been work-
we never felt up on Shattuck. Bookstores

of community here,” he said, “which

the new neighborhood.” There’s a real feel

of cupcakes from Sweet Adeline’s.” Nee likes

at the new location. “We commissioned

33rd anniversary in Berkeley May 27th

gasus, they directed them to Amazon!”

a book, they didn’t tell people to go to Pe

the Downtown Business Association cited

plans for a restaurant. The store got an evic

ment notice in February. Scouting around,

looking for a place “near public transporta

tion, with a certain amount of square foot-

age,” Nee first came into his present location

for a meeting of the Adeline-Alcatraz

Merchants Association, while considering

a place around the corner. “It was a very

vibrant, energetic meeting. I sensed things

were happening—and about to happen—down

here. I liked the feel of the space, but wasn’t

sure we could afford it. I may yet be proved

right!”

He also liked Rebecca’s Books next door.

“Nothing better than two bookstores; they

create a synergy...” Rebecca’s Books closed

at the end of July.

Nee looks back on the problems of busi-

ness downtown, even as he hears about

problems in his new neighborhood, which

he feels are often exaggerated—or reflect the

past, not the present.

“There’s parking here. Downtown, we

had the feeling nobody in City government

wanted to hear about anything. And when

the Downtown Business Association cited

a book, they didn’t tell people to go to Pe-

gamus, they directed them to Amazon!”

Other Change of Hobbit celebrated its

33rd anniversary in Berkeley May 27th

at the new location. “We commissioned

cupcakes from Sweet Adeline’s.” Nee likes

the new neighborhood.” There’s a real feel-

ing of community here,” he said, “which

we never felt up on Shattuck. Bookstores

should be community centers, but how can

they survive? Downtown, it was mostly

students, business people, transients. Here,

families come in. I see parents and grand-

parents coming in with children” (The front

of the store has a section for young read-

ers.) “Up Shattuck, our clientele was getting

older—no new readers came in. And our

regular customers from the campus—not just

students, but faculty and staff—have been

hit by Schwarzenegger’s payroll cuts and

furloughs. I went to The Vault for brunch,

and looked around. A lot of their customers

were our customers. And our old ones, some

of them who stopped coming downtown due
to parking, have seen us driving by, and are

very supportive.”

With 30,000 new titles—and much more in

used book—Other Change of Hobbit’s a land-

mark by any bookstore—any retail-standard.

But times have changed. “In 1977, Berkeley

had the heaviest density of booksellers in

the world—except maybe Oakland! In those
days—within three miles of campus. We’ve

watched it all disappear.” Nee’s featuring a

new special accounts service; for a sum in

advance, all titles are 20% off, with open

special ordering for members.

But “I know people’s budgets are tight. I

feel something’s happening here. How long
to hang on is the big question. If each person

who buys a book bought a second one—or

sent in a friend—we’d be fine.”

Other Change of Hobbit 3264 Adeline

Street, 843-0413 otherechangeofhobbit.com

(hours: noon to 7, Monday-Friday; Satur-

day, 10-6; Sunday, 11-5.

Reader Opinion

Unconscious racism? “Re-

vitalizing Bart Plaza to wel-

come bigger and more diverse
groups of people??”

By Anamaria Sanchez Romero

Mon Aug 09 20:06:00 -0700 2010

In the online BERKELEYSIDE, Aug. 4th,

2010, Frances Dinkelspiel writes of a $2.25

million budget for the city to make over the
downtown “Bart Plaza to become an inviting

spot.” A City planner has the audacity to
say the Plaza is worn and outdated, and “It is
to really exciting to think we will have a space

people will feel really good about being in

and using.... The goal is to create a space

that is more welcoming to bigger and more
diverse groups of people”.

To deconstruct the framework: is there a

racial animus behind the statements of busi-

ness leaders and white planners who feel the

area is uninviting? Is DIVERSITY of “big-
ger groups” of people now used to recast
development projects as race-neutral?

Which groups of people are they talk-

king about? The tone of the article and the

writer’s selection of quotes implies people
do not feel good at the Plaza, thus they claim

that few people go there as if it is uninviting.

and dismisses the vibrancy of people using

the space—most of us are people of color.

For years my relatives and friends and many

locals feel welcome to be with people of our

communities at the mellow Plaza—and to be

entertained at no cost!

The principle of EQUITY to more fairly

allocate resources for minority groups and
to involve ethnic and class minorities to
advise decision makers is missing here. In

this planner “visioning” of bigger groups,
“diversity” is fronted to cover over the years of human rights struggles for equity, inclusion and now, social justice.

Is not the Bart Plaza a friendly public space already shared by DIVERSE groups of people? No mention of the locals (most are people of color) who congregate there in good weather filling up the seating or the vendors who sell jewelry, crafts, incense, the break dancers, skaters, musical groups from classical violins to rap to jazz, etc.

Some people say in tearing it up for months of construction, displacing users is part of a strategy of domination by upscale groups. An obvious discriminatory intent lurks behind-avoiding avoiding any acknowledgment of the current Plaza groups as community member stakeholders who deserve to be asked how they would redesign the Plaza. Instead, planners blot out their existence to be replaced by “more diverse groups of people.” Diversity sounds race-neutral!

Some folks deconstruct this segment of city “planning” of the downtown as heralding a new era of segregation where differences in economic class and income function as a stand-in for race, recasting the framework to be “race-neutral”. Thus, by “profiling”-using class, a class bias can stand out front and race profiling can become subtle lurking beneath unconscious racism.

It follows that newcomers with higher incomes who can afford to buy food and drinks at outdoor tables where the proprietors extend their commercial space outside into a newly landscaped PUBLIC space, may indeed, cumulatively “improve” and “revitalize” the Bart Plaza. The presumption is that this little area (hardly the size of a European plaza) will help draw more business sites. It is PUBLIC SPACE for all of us; not to be privatized to benefit a few businesses and, a number of planners and consultants.

Is this small Plaza to be a front yard for high rise tenants who will soon move in? Will the tables lining the public sidewalk be fenced in for private businesses? Where will the others of the uninvited public-the present locals-go? Where will the entertainers go to? We will lose some of our local artistic culture.

Is there any effort in the Planning Division to listen to people of color to listen to people of lower incomes? Do we have to start again-workshops for unlearning racism so our city officials can confront and become conscious of the sophisticated versions of race/class discrimination that show up over and over in planners’ visions? Some decision makers use planners to advocate for dispersal, displacement and removal of groups to “ETHNICALLY CLEANSE” public spaces claimed by the more affluent?

Again, how can we confront and overcome such race/class discrimination so the human environment is sustainable for all of us in Berkeley?

The Factious and Insular Nature of the Muslim World

By Rizwan Rahmani
Tue Aug 10 11:53:00 -0700 2010

There are roughly one and a half billion Muslims living on this planet, and it is a very heterogeneous group. It is fragmented and disparate, communal and even tribal in some parts of the Middle East, Pakistan, Africa, and Afghanistan. I know of no other community of this proportion that is politically so disorganized, and communally this incoherent.

The most glaring chasm in this community is that of the Shiites and the Sunnis, which I will address in detail later. For a community as large as this, it is disquietingly silent against its slanders who are harming its image. It has been made to cower in a crouch by its detractors, and it has little or no commanding platform on the world stage. There are some oil-rich countries with a modicum of control over the petroleum spigot empowered by OPEC, but the cartel can also be rather ingratiating. This complete lack of cultural cohesiveness and a tendency to puerile political babbling has resulted in a loss of the public relations war around the globe, and subsequently its goodwill. As a cultural bloc, this group has not been able to further any secular agenda for its community: they have allowed fringe groups to set the tenor of their cultural ideology. This passivity has let the media - who swim the waters of news like ravenous sharks ready to feed on any item Muslim and negative - define them through crude extrapolations and brazen hearsay. The media has caricatured this group, and portrayed their religion and culture as synonymous with terrorism. While the percentage of Muslims who align themselves with terrorists is probably a fraction of one percent, the larger Muslim community has not provided an alternative portrait.

Some of this lack of unity arises from the fact that it is a huge group both geographically and culturally, stretching from the Philippines to Northwest Africa and northward to the central Asia (not taking into account the recent migrations). The differences between Muslims aren’t just skin deep: they are quite stark-even between the Muslims of India and Pakistan. These differences are economical, cultural, and sociological. Yet invariably all Muslims look to the Middle East with awe for their spiritual and cultural inspiration: the Middle East, which is now, and has been for some time, devoid of any exemplary nation, intellectual figure, philosopher, or political stalwart. The last political figure of some caliber in the region was Gamal Abdel Nasser, and even he wasn’t selected democratically the first time. But he was an anti-royalist, anti-colonialist, and a secularist who had some insight into what it took to build a modern state. He founded the short-lived United Arab Republic, and was an avid advocate of Pan-Arabism. He defied the British, French, and Israelis by blockading them in Suez Canal: eventually they had to cede control of the Canal. Nasser brought Egypt out of its colonial shackles, and changed much of its old laissez-faire economic practices, educational institutions,
and archaic justice system. He changed Al-Azhar University’s age old policy of Sunni only enrollment. Despite his foibles, he certainly had more fortitude than the current assortment of tyrants and royalists, who are of the invertebrate ilk, busily leeching riches off their countries or exploiting their immigrant populations: their vision of the Muslim world is myopic and effectively confined within their own borders.

A lack of oversight and hierarchy in Islamic religious structure leaves the Ulamas (religious scholars) and Imams free to spout their own ideologies. Sharia (Islamic Laws) and Hadith (a collection of instructive anecdotes of the prophet’s life) get reinterpreted frequently and are often regional, but always within the confines of its original text, leaving little or no consideration for the modern culture or sensibilities which are evolving at breakneck speed in an increasingly shrinking world. There are six accepted versions of the Hadith (incidentally the Shiites have four books of their own), each claiming to be the most definitive, which are interpreted by religious scholars, who are often culturally isolated older men completely out of touch with the concept of ‘greater Muslim community’ (Ummah). The imams usually regurgitate these interpretations, sometimes adulterated, from their high ‘Manbars’ (the sermon pulpit of the mosque) unscathed. These imams cannot even decide when to commence or end the month of Ramadan because by an archaic religious ‘law’ the new moon must be sighted by the naked eye—a practice which may have been the best option fourteen hundred years ago but is largely moot since an Arab astronomer and mathematician (Al Battani, after whom the moon crater Albategnius is named) calculated the solar year to the accuracy of a few seconds over nine hundred years ago! As a result of this often arbitrary but more fallible decision by humans (while a higher truth in the heavens exists) when there is no sighting possible (cloudy skies, e.g.), the most important lunar month for the Muslim world (Ramadan) doesn’t commence or end on the same date globally: this hardly fosters greater unity among Muslim people around the world.

While Catholics have the Vatican, Protestants have Synod, Anglicans have Canterbury, and eastern orthodoxies have their patriarch, Muslims really don’t have any such central institution that oversees their smaller local chapters: the chief imam of the grand mosque in Mecca isn’t followed universally among the Muslims. Islam is somewhat akin to Quakers or Presbyterians (though even they have elders) in this regard, and Quakers have a system of quasi-democratic debate before any action is undertaken; even a single dissenter can veto a decision. Local mosques are the only institutions that faintly resemble a community center, but their scope is provincial, dogmatic, and limited. The mosque is not a community-based chapter of a greater organization, but rather an independent entity, managed mostly by community-appointed imams who run their own show under a religious mandate: their decisions are seldom challenged. They are not answerable to any sort of district center or higher organizational head that oversees the local chapters. This lack of hierarchical organization by its very nature leads to a general state of chaos and disunity, and subsequently renders the Muslim community weak and less coalesced.

The tribal gestalt of pre-Islamic early Meccan society pervades the Arabian Peninsula. This mindset also permeates other parts of the Muslim world as well: Afghanistan is a prime example, where inter-tribe enmities are widespread and inter-generational. I am leery about giving any credence to David Lean and his writing team for insight into the Arab psyche, but when Omar Sharif’s character kills T.E. Lawrence’s guide, and upon protest Sharif Ali says, “He was nothing, the well is everything; the Hazimi may not drink at our well, he knew that”, it is not too far fetched judging from the rural Arabia I saw in and around Oman thirty five years ago. The Arabia of today is indeed more modernized, but much of the modernization is superficial. Islam tried to do away with tribalism by advocating the concept of Ummah (the greater Muslim community as one): unfortunately this concept never really took deep root. The failure of this became apparent after the third Caliph, Uthman Bin Affan, took the reigns: after a decent run, towards the end of his caliphate he faced a rebellion which ended him and his reign because of his questionable management style and nepotism. His death caused further problems to follow.

Disunity worsened into civil war during the reign of the fourth Caliph, Ali Bin Abu Talib. Today, the tribal makeup of Arabia manifests in a different form: the smaller sheikhdoms, emirates, and monarchies of Arabia are feudalistic and self-serving despite all the riches they have acquired from petroleum - at least it is true of the peninsular nations (Yemen being the poorest nation among these). They treat other Muslims, from poorer countries, disdainfully while proffering reverential treatment on their colonial masters: yet the very people they discriminate against are culturally and religiously much more like them. A white western citizen with the same qualification as a Muslim from the subcontinent or North Africa stands to earn twice or thrice the salary, and in some cases several times more. Hypocritically, Arab nations bewail the plight of the Palestinians but they do politically and financially (lip service and token monies are paid) little to ameliorate their anguish; Palestinians are not treated very well in some of these nations and are often treated as second class citizens. While Jordan has integrated its Palestinian population quite well, after sixty years Lebanon still treats its Palestinian refugees as just that: refugees.

Despite these atrocities perpetrated against Muslims by rich Arab countries, there exists an inexplicable fascination with these Arab nations among Muslim communities around the globe due simply to the custodial role of Arabia as the geographic location of some holy Muslim sites. The reason for this misplaced obsequiousness to the Arabian Peninsula is obvious: the prophet was from there, and the four holiest sites for Muslims are in Middle East (including Karbala, one of the holiest sites for Shiites).

Notable historical events have fragmented Islam in its infancy-most damaging among them, the friction over the right to the caliphate which ensued after the death of the prophet. By not designating a clear successor—at least in writing or by a call for a committee to appoint one—the prophet left the door wide open for Machiavellian maneuvering and political infighting in the future: an extreme political obtuseness that sabotaged Muslim unity forever after, in my humble opinion. Shiites disagree with the assertion that a successor wasn’t named, as they believe the prophet did name Ali Bin Abu Talib, if not explicitly, to be his successor. This different interpretation of his intent is the main cause for the great rift between the two factions (Shia & Sunni). Shiias only believe in Caliphs from the prophet’s true blood lineage or ‘sang real’ (and in Arabic, Ahl Al-Bayt): they prefer to call these leaders imams. Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq, who was the prophet’s father-in-law, managed to corral enough support from the prophet’s closest cohorts to be chosen the next caliph: these cohorts (Majlis Al-Shura) didn’t even consider Ali Bin Abu Talib’s candidacy. Ali Bin Abu Talib was the cousin of the Prophet, grew up in the same household, was his confidante, son-in-law, and was alongside him in almost all the campaigns: naturally he should have been one of the candidates for caliph in spite of the final choice, and he himself believed that to be the case. After
this event, there was a marked estrangement of Ali Bin Abu Talib from the greater Islamic cause: inglorious treatment at the hands of the new caliphate didn’t help to mend the bridges. Ali Bin Abu Talib withdrew from political life and devoted much of his time to his family and social work, digging wells around Medina. He would eventually relent and return to the Islamic cause after the death of his wife Fatima Bint Muhammad (Prophet’s daughter), and pledge his allegiance.

Despite these contentions, Muslims did garner a huge empire in a very short time. But by the time Ali Bin Abu Talib finally became caliph (fourth in succession after Aba Bakr, Omar, and Uthman), the damage was done. There were already disagreements over the legitimacy of his caliph status by the Bani Umayya branch of Qurais tribe. Ali Bin Abu Talib and his allies (one of the caliphs most despised by Shiites) was the governor of Syria with a sizable army. He used the death of his cousin (the 3rd caliph) to launch an attack of his own aspirations: the fight ended up in a stalemate with neither side a clear winner. Mu’awiyah Ibn Abu Sufiyan was a staunch enemy of early Islamic groups: he was dealt a defeat at the Battle of Badr, and Mecca fell to the Muslims. He later converted to Islam, and became part of this early Islamic movement (a conversion Shias question).

He was later appointed the governor of Syria by caliph Umar Bin Khattab. The third Caliph Uthman Bin Affan allotted more territories under his control: they were from the same tribe and related. He became quite powerful during his governorship in true Julian fashion by fighting the Byzantines, and as a result he came to command a huge army. His power and his army became a threat to Ali’s caliphate. He wanted to contain Mu’awiyah’s power and force his allegiance when he assumed the caliphate. After the long Battle of Siffin interestingly across the Euphrates River, some of Ali bin Abu Talib’s army were tricked with a deceptive prop and refused to take up the fight against Mu’awiyah who was on the verge of defeat. Ali Bin Abu Talib agreed to arbitration by independently appointed persons, but this caused more problems for him as some of his followers were angered. They aban-

doned him for this compromise and deemed him unfit to rule. He now had a new rebellion on his hands, and had to quell them as well: this small group of people (the Kharijites) later plotted against him and others, but succeeded in assassinated him. His son Hasan Bin Ali took over the caliphate but was also opposed by Mu’awiyah. They were a few inconclusive skirmishes, and finally Hasan Ibn Ali agreed to a peace treaty whereby he would give up the caliphate for the greater good of the Ummah, and Mu’awiyah would relinquish his caliphate back to the Ummah. The killing of Ali’s second son Hussein Ibn Ali agreed to a peace treaty whereby he would give up the caliphate for the greater good of the Ummah, and Mu’awiyah would relinquish his caliphate back to the Ummah. Hasand would regain the caliphate in the event that Mu’awiyah died. Mu’awiyah Ibn Abu Sufiyan gained the caliphate by military might against the prophet’s grandson, and he also appointed his own son as his successor by breaking a treaty he had forged with Hasan Bin Ali. After the death of Hasan Bin Ali by poison (something by most accounts Mu’awiyah had a hand in, seeing Hasan Bin Ali as an obstacle to his caliphate), the Sunni/Shia divide became more deeply furrowed. But it fractured completely after the killing of Ali’s second son Hussein Ibn Ali at the Battle of Karbala by the army of Yazid bin Mu’awiyah (Mu’awiyah’s son). The bifurcation of these groups will be non-convergent from here on, with no love lost between them.

The Shiites have a quasi hierarchical religious structure which culminates in the Ayatollah (literally ‘the sign of god’) who is supposed to be an authority on religious matter and jurisprudence. These Ayatollahs have lower ranking leaders who are allowed to talk on religious matters to the general public. There are a few sub-factions of Islam that do have community centers that serve both a sacred and secular role. The Ismailis have Jama’at Khana, and the Baha’i’s have lower ranking leaders who are allowed to share or promote other aspects of their identity, whether cultural, artistic, literary, philosophical, or musical: and thus the voice of moderation–if there is any–is drowned under a voluminous religious chorus.

Diversity in the Muslim world is not something I am against: diversity can be the source of immense potential strength, if it avoids the trap of factious tribalism and instead uses it as a great reservoir of resources. As W.H. Auden said, “Civilizations should be measured by the degree of diversity attained and the degree of unity retained”. The acceptance of diversity during its inception was one of the main reasons Islam gained widespread acceptance in a very short time. It was Umar Bin Khattab who allowed the Jews to come back to Jerusalem to practice their faith in peace after being banished from the city for centuries. He also signed a treaty with Christians to protect their churches and let them practice their faith under Arab rule. After the conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders, the Muslim and Jewish populations were massacred en masse, and they fled the city. When Salahuddin Ayyubi defeated the Crusaders and took back Jerusalem, the Jewish population was allowed back to the city along with the Muslims.

But with diversity pulling today’s Muslim community in opposing directions like some medieval public capital punishment spectacle, the community is weakened, each part of its whole left lifelessly isolated. Ummah (‘greater Muslim community’) is more than
an idealized vision: it is incumbent on the community to strive towards this greater goal for its survival. Without some sort of non-sectarian politically organized and stratified global body to oversee the affairs of this large community, it will never better its status in a diverse world that must, with a rainbow of religions, interact secularly.

What the Express Left Out of the West Berkeley Story

By John Curl and Rick Auerbach

Tue Aug 10 11:01:00 -0700 2010

Several weeks ago the Express published a front page article (“Factories for the Future...momentum shifts toward preservation of land suitable for light manufacturing”) describing how Oakland and other East Bay cities are now realizing the value of maintaining their industrial production lands for the important goods, services, and jobs the companies that occupy these lands provide.

In previous Express articles, another writer unfairly attacked WEBAIC and its efforts to do just exactly what this more recent article lauds. We say “unfairly” because for both of the two articles in which WEBAIC was singled out, the writer never made any effort to contact us to get our positions straight, and subsequently portrayed our positions 180 degrees from what they are. Even though the recent article didn’t mention what is happening with the City’s West Berkeley Project and WEBAIC’s efforts, which are the most important industrial retention efforts currently taking place in the East Bay (and likely the entire Bay), WEBAIC appreciates the Express’ acknowledgement of the enlightened direction this important issue is moving.

Attached is WEBAIC’s letter to the Express editor that was published in response to the latest article. WEBAIC understands the need to edit letters for clarity and brevity in print newspapers, but we found it interesting that the sections edited out of this letter (in italics in the attached document) and the sections edited out of a previously published WEBAIC steering committee member’s letter were almost all the references pertaining to the environmentally beneficial effects of maintaining a production economy and the negative environmental consequences of forcing this economy out of the area.

The Express is widely read by the local populace, and thus an important venue of information. Feel free to write them, help them to get the story right, and join in the dialogue on this important topic.

Letter to East Bay Express

7/21/2010

The West Berkeley Artisans & Industrial Companies (WEBAIC) was gratified to see the Express front page article, “Factories for the Future”, acknowledging the value of manufacturing in today’s society. While other cities are now energized to reinvigorate their manufacturing base, Berkeley’s farsighted, community driven, West Berkeley Plan implemented industrial protection policies in the 90’s that have assured the present, successful mixed-use economy and culture in West Berkeley. By providing an adequate and affordable land base for the industrial production, distribution, and repair (PDR) sectors, the industrial protection policies addressed the three components of true sustainability - economy, environment, and equity - through: 1.) Contributing mightily to local economies through taxes and the deeply interconnected network supply chains, 2.) Providing the bulk of family-wage jobs to those without a college education (23% of all jobs in East Bayshore cities), and 3.) Providing valuable goods and services (bakeries, recycling, food & produce distribution, building and solar contractors, printers, auto repair, machine shops, cabinet makers, engravers, scientific glass blowers, caterers, etc., etc.) to the local and regional populace.

With about half of West Berkeley employment in the industrial and arts sectors and the other half in scientific, technical, professional, service, and retail, the success of this envisioned mixed-use policy is revealed. Not mentioned in the Express article, but highly relevant to the topic, is the ongoing multi-year community effort in Berkeley, initiated by WEBAIC, to maintain West Berkeley’s successful industrial protection zoning policies in the face of forces seeking their dismantling.

Hausrath Economics’ 2008 report commissioned by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, Goods Movement/Land Use Project For The San Francisco Bay Area, quantified in detail the projected growth of these industrial production, distribution, and repair (PDR) activities, the growing demand for these “goods movement” lands, and the serious, negative consequences to the economy, environment, and equity of the region resulting from East Bay shore cities not preserving this land.

The study’s central conclusion is: Due to local municipalities allowing their industrial “goods movement” PDR lands to be converted to more highly capitalized housing, office, retail, and R&D uses, the industrial companies that depend on these lands are either being forced out of business or pushed over the passes into the Central Valley, resulting in: “87,100 fewer goods movement industry jobs in East Bay shore cities by 2035; fewer good-paying blue/green collar jobs in proximity to the urban workforce residing in the central Bay Area, particularly jobs for workers with less than college educations; an additional 347,900 truck vehicle miles traveled per day on regional highways in 2035; higher emissions of greenhouse gases and criteria pollutants, including VOCs, CO, NOx, SO2, PM2.5, and PM10; greater auto-truck interactions; increased health risks in the I-580 corridor; higher costs of goods and higher cost of living overall in Bay Area; greater pressures on agricultural lands; and fewer opportunities to work near places of residence.” The Report concludes with a request for “initiatives to support industry’s role in more balanced smart growth” due to “a dispersed goods movement/industrial land use pattern being contrary to the region’s Smart Growth Vision.”

As even in this downturn Berkeley has the second lowest aggregate vacancy rate for manufacturing and warehouse space (lower than office) among the seven cities from Richmond to Fremont, and as we still have over 320 PDR companies providing close to 7000 family-wage jobs in West Berkeley, the effort here is centered on expanding and keeping what we have while at the same time assuring adequate space for new, clean tech R&D, particularly Lawrence Berkeley Lab spin-offs.

To accommodate these hoped-for uses, WEBAIC has proposed opening up protections on at least 28 acres to provide millions of square feet for R&D, while keeping protections on land outside these large sites where most companies with green and blue collar jobs now live. This balanced proposal facilitates both green tech and green collar, fulfilling the mission of the Green Corridor and assuring space for the “cradle to scale” strategy described by Green Corridor director Carla Din in the Express article.

Forces within Berkeley City government together with developers seek to limit this capacity by opening up not just large sites, but all West Berkeley industrially-protected land to uses able to pay much more for space than protected uses. This radical proposal that would displace long-contributing companies and important jobs, particularly for those who’ve taken the brunt of regres-
sive federal economic policies over the last several decades, would strike a blow against our City’s and region’s economic and ethnic diversity and would set back efforts to create a truly sustainable, local serving economy.

WEBAIC believes that ultimately the citizenry and decision-makers will see the folly of this approach and take the hopeful path forward laid out in the Express article “Factories for the Future...momentum shifts towards preservation of land suitable for light manufacturing”.

John Curl, WEBAIC chair
Rick Auerbach, WEBAIC staff

Weak Links Heighten Loss in Berkeley

By Ted Friedman
Tue Aug 10 16:15:00 -0700 2010

Weak links in a chain often break and that’s just what happened in the loss of the U.C. theater a decade ago and now Reel Video, both killed off by their parents.

These were both going concerns, although Landmark cited falling receipts at the U.C. And Barnes & Noble may also have succumbed to the corporate bottom line.

So where does that leave us now? And when will the second, third, or fourth shoes fall? Is Berkeley having the future rubbed in its face? Where is Stewart Brand when we need him?

We still have video stores somewhere, but not in south Berkeley which also has lost Vidiots in the Elmwood.

Blockbusters, despite its jumbo name, is far from a jumbo video store. Although comparing Blockbusters to Reel may be applying too high a standard, it would be fair to say that it is barely sufficient. Is this a trend for Berkeley to lose its good stuff and be left some bare minimum?

We have excellent boutique bookstores, off-beat clothing stores, etc.; we just don’t have Reel, U.C Theater’s jumbo screen, Cody’s, Black Oaks Northside, (Black Oaks] new location far from the Northside is a work in progress) a major department store, or even a minor one like Ross, which has departed.

The loss of authors’ talks is still haunting us as we have to turn to “educational” T.V. for this. It’s true that smaller stores than Cody’s or the previous Black Oaks have poetry and fiction readings by authors, but the days of a weekly stream of well-known non-fiction writers at Cody’s or Black Oaks are kaput.

Our stuff keeps slip-sliding away. Can we dudes abide?

Who knows? But when the going gets rough, the rough find rough alternatives.

Netflix has its advantages, but being able to stumble on a rarity on VHS is not one of them. The Pacific Film Archive screens two films daily (art-house, exploitation, even mainstream). This is an enormous undertaking requiring multiple programmers. The PFA is concluding a three month Kurosawa centennial retrospective, while concurrently covering the works of Francesco Rosi. This is perhaps enough to console if not distract from the erosion of our reel worlds. Amoeba and Rasputin’s offer a deep collection of DVDs which can be “rented.” It is some kind of a secret that the Berkeley Public Library and its branches have quietly assembled an important DVD collection over the years.

Sometimes you get lucky and can cop a glance at text on Amazon, or read public domain classics on your computer. But glancing at shelves, leafing through books, is generally only available for used or remainders.

Cody’s magazine section as well as Dave’s International, and Barnes and Noble’s magazines cannot be replaced. But if you don’t mind openly reading magazines at BPL central without that warm feeling of ignoring a “no browsing” sign, you will find highly specialized mags.

Here is a partial list of what we still have. Enough restaurants, coffee houses, pizza stands, and farmer’s markets to plotz over.

Clothing and shoes you won’t find at the mall, specialty book stores, led by Moe’s the vast emporium of used (and some new) books, followed by the amazing University Press Books (mostly academic press books); Mrs.Dalloway’s has added a section of “new” books.

What more could we ask? A thin voice replies, “turn back the clock” even if only a little.

If this were a Coen Brothers Film, you might see visions of floating shoes waiting to fall, but until that time, be guided by those Rolling Stones gurus: “You can’t always get what you want, but if you try real hard, you may get what you need.

The trying just got really harder.

Ted Friedman is a forty-year resident of Berkeley

Letters to the Editor

Where Are the Black American Men?

Ex-H-P CEO Mark Hurd; Libraries and the Proposed Changes; RPP Renewals; Truth Will Out; “Most Americans seem to view those who are mentally ill as a bit less than real human beings”; Jack Bragen on Schizophrenia

Where Are the Black American Men?

I wonder if anyone else has noticed, especially in Berkeley of all of the road construction and property construction going on within the past year, the workers have not been the men of the Berkeley community, specifically Black American men, but foreigners, specifically Mexican men. Why is this?

Sure, economically, things are bad for people, but why in your own city a Black man who is more than qualified can’t work on the same roads they drive and walk on and work in the buildings that they pass everyday?

Just recently, I was watching several visible, experienced, unemployed Black men standing on Sacramento St and Ashby Ave watching an outside contractor (white) with his foreign (non-English speaking) construction workers repaving Sacramento Street.

Why?

WAKE-UP MY PEOPLE, WAKE UP!

Robynn Ways

***

Ex-H-P CEO Mark Hurd

Wow, a $28 million severance package for ex-Hewlett-Packard CEO Mark Hurd, who was ousted for sexual harassment and falsifying expense accounts and other documents. Who says bad conduct doesn’t pay and pay big? I wonder if the H-P stockholders feel outrage?

Ralph E. Stone

***

Libraries and the Proposed Changes

There have been several commentaries raising questions about changes to the branch libraries. So far the questions posed by Peter Warfield and BAHA are unanswered. There is a fundamental problem in reducing book space for computer space. Unless we change the definition of libraries, they exist for making books available to would-be readers. If they are going to also be computer centers, then the public needs to get into this conversation and consider where the funding for that addition will come from. Books and computers can...
enhance the nature of each “technology”, but not if one has to be diminished. My next question is, if two library branches really have to be demolished where does the money come from to do that? Not Library Bond Measure FF.

_Elise White_

***

_RPP Renewals_

I don’t understand why, every single year, the Department of Finance is caught unawares that RPP renewals have to be processed, and extensions are granted. (Becky, sorry about your ticket.) Are they surprised? Does no one know that RPPs come up for renewal every year at the same time?

A couple of decades ago, California automobile registration was due on every car in the state on the same date - I think it was November 1. Then, the DMV smartened up (!!) and instituted the monthly renewal system we have now, so that there was no longer the huge wave of renewals. Maybe, just maybe, Berkeley could do the same. “A” could be renewed in January, “B” in February, etc. Why not? Maybe, just maybe, some folks in the Finance Department have to work a lot of overtime to process all of the renewals. Maybe, just maybe, they like the extra money from the overtime.

_Peter Shetlon_

***

_Truth Will Out_

I was quite dismayed when I read in the July 20 article about the Berkeley City Council District 7 race a statement made by George Beier that is quite simply not true. This is the quote: “There was a murder in the Ana Head parking lot, no mention of that” at the July City Council meeting.

If one watches the video of that meeting one can clearly observe Councilmember Kriss Worthington mentioning this in quite a bit of detail. He asked for the meeting to be adjourned in memory of Nicholas Bailey, the victim, a Sacramento State student and athlete. Worthington also spoke of his efforts to ensure that the Berkeley Police Department would put extra effort into investigating this case, along with the UC Police, who are the primary contacts since the body was found on UC property.

Councilmember Worthington also mentioned attending the funeral and his being touched by the overflow crowd at the cemetery and by the deep feelings expressed by Nick’s friends. Furthermore, Worthington talked of his conversation with the family of the victim about working together to ensure true justice for Nicholas Bailey. He also stated that he has received assurances from the Berkeley City Manager that the city government will stay on top of this investigation.

This a far cry, to say the least, from Beier’s claiming “no mention” of the murder. I am appalled that this tragedy could be politicized in this way and that anything other than the truth is being stated regarding it. As a 32 year resident of District 7, I urge all candidates to maintain a dignified campaign, and to speak only the truth about issues and about each other.

_David Joseph_

***

“Most Americans seem to view those who are mentally ill as a bit less than real human beings.”

Well now...

It is difficult to speak for most Americans, but I think you err. Most of us are pretty darn nice folk. I will agree with you to this degree: We tend to find some language and stick to it well past its actual lifetime. Your article was actually not about “us,” “the” mentally ill, it was about a picture of “us” that remains very entertaining. I do not know your age, but you might want to visit one of the Marx Brothers’ movies, where you will see an illustration of “the” Blacks that is equally “entertaining.” Well, no, it is not. Not any longer.

No I am not offended by the “picture” you presented, I accept that it is your view, but I was not offended by the one the Marx Brothers presented in their movie. Late in life I learned how false it was, how much harm it had done. Then I was offended. Don’t wait that long.

Those of us who have a mental illness (“have” is accurate), are a varied as those of you who do not. I am sure you know that, your words simply do not accurately reflect your knowledge.

_Harold A. Maio, retired Mental Health Editor_

_Ft Myers, Florida_

***

_Jack Bragen on Schizophrenia_

Jack Bragen on schizophrenia is one of the invaluable voices that are a gift to us from the BDP. We all squirm with discomfort and sometimes irrational fear when we see and hear a mentally ill street person, or when we read that one result of de-institutionalization has been the in-and-out occupancy of jail cells by sick people. Good liberals all, we don’t want to lock sick people up or force mind-numbing “treatment” on them, but we don’t want to witness or think about an illness that exhibits itself as unattractive behavior. In some cases, we blame alcoholism, when it may just be that many ill people find self-medicating with alcohol preferable to the ghastly side effects and deeper numbing of prescription drugs.

Throughout human history (according to what little I’ve read) about one percent of human beings world wide (and that’s a lot of people) have suffered from mental illness that is labeled (and the labels change all the time: dementia praecox becomes schizophrenia; manic depressives becomes bi-polar disorder) but not diagnosed--as if we were labeling a disease “spots all over” instead of diagnosing measles, chicken-pox, or an allergy.

Occasionally a drug, or a period of talk therapy, or a stay in a hospital, or a change of diet or job or surroundings, or something else, may alleviate or end symptoms, but we don’t really know much about cause or cure. Mr. Bragen probably represents the majority of the chronically mentally ill, who get by, and carefully hide out during occasional flare-ups. For good reasons, both social and economic, these people rarely have the courage to speak out so clearly and rationally and honestly about their episodes of delusion. (If you’re like me, you always checked the NO box on the job application, never mentioning the occasional three a.m. insomniac thoughts about whether life was worth the trouble. And if you ever spent a week in a psychiatric facility, you’d keep that as secret from your employer as you would a criminal conviction.)

Of course, we will tolerate the occasional brain storms of Virginia Woolfe or Van Gogh--even accept them as part of their genius. But you shouldn’t have to be a genius to be accepted despite a chronic illness. Mr. Bragen educates us by writing clearly, cogently, and very well indeed about a health problem he suffers from, now and then, yet, like many people, evidently manages to cope with pretty well in a world where few “normal” people enjoy clear sailing.

_Dorothy Bryant_

---

Columnists

**Blogbeat: Are Student Gene Tests Science or Market Research?**

_by Thomas Lord_

Mon Aug 09 17:53:00 -0700 2010

This week’s theme: UC Berkeley asked incoming freshmen to volunteer for genetic
tests this year. The program was met with accusations that it is bad science. Some have also charged that the program is the corrupt product of commercial and personal conflicts of interest. We examine the arguments for these accusations by examining source materials found on the Internet.

Welcome Freshmen: May We Have Some Skin from Inside Your Mouth?

UC Berkeley will be performing genetic tests on some incoming freshmen this year. Freshmen have been invited to volunteer for the testing as part of the "On the Same Page: Bring Your Genes to Cal" orientation program.

The project, led by Professor Jasper Rine, "[explores] the theme of Personalized Medicine - the set of emerging technologies that promises to transform our ability to predict, diagnose, and treat human disease."

In the experiment, volunteer students will submit mouth swabs which the university itself will then test for three particular genetic variations. One variation is present in the approximately 80 to 90% of people who, in adult life, become lactose intolerant. Another test reveals the presence or absence of a low ability to metabolize alcohol without certain side effects. The third test looks for variations which reduce the body’s ability to metabolize the vitamin folic acid.

Cal offers some health advice: (1) Make sure you get enough calcium and vitamin D even if you are lactose intolerant; (2) Most freshmen are under 21 and so you shouldn’t be drinking anyway; (3) If you have trouble processing folic acid, consider eating lots of leafy greens or taking a supplement.

Controversy: Is This Bad Science? The specific kinds of advice that Cal is offering is what is known, these days, as “nutritional genomics”. That field explores the hypothesis that by looking at genetic variations like the three Cal will be examined, customized dietary advice can be offered which, if followed, leads to better longer term health.

The three genetic variations tested in this experiment are not controversial. One really does indicate lactose intolerance, the other problems in metabolizing alcohol, the third problems in metabolizing folic acid. There is no controversy over the interpretation of the tests to that extent. Where controversy arises in the leap from those observations to detailed dietary advice.

Nutritional genomics is not without its critics. At this point, the notion of devising a diet for better long term health based on a few genetic tests is, in the view of critics, an interesting but unproven hypothesis - nothing more. They are concerned that the rapid push to commercialize nutritional genomics is just another form of snake-oil quackery, as likely to do harm as good. Here is how Pantelis Konstantoulakis (University of Westminster) and Andreas Zourdos sum it up after surveying the literature: "In the name of genetics from now on, nutritional advice has a whole new different meaning, since it carries the potential to manipulate one’s genes! How can one not stand in awe? Time now for a reality check: the evidence for the effectiveness of 'nutritional genomics' is non-existent, just like the regulation and laws on these matters. It is pretty fair to say that this story is more science fiction than science based. Pompous scientific terminology is not evidence. The truth is that 'nutritional genomics' is the answer to an irrelevant question."

The discussion resulting from that scathing review spread over to another blog called Nutritional Blogma. In the comments that follow the post “Does nutrition need a new research paradigm?” Zourdos dukes it out with some of the researchers that he’s criticized. He defends his case well.

Controversy: Is This Bad Science, Part 2?

On July 14, 2010, UC Berkeley’s Dr. Mark Shissel (Dean of Biological Sciences, College of Letters and Science at Berkeley) spoke briefly with National Public Radio’s program All Things Considered. He remarked: “[W]e purposefully chose three genes that are not disease associated.”

On August 5, Livescience.com reported:

“His statements puzzled Dr. David Goldman, section chief of the human neurogenetics lab at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (NIAAA)

‘He said it [the genetic testing] just has interesting social complications, but in fact he’s completely wrong,’ Goldman said.

‘There are two important medical implications for the test.’"

Of the test related to alcohol metabolism Goldman remarked that one possible outcome of the test indicates a significant risk for esophageal cancer, compounded by greater capacity for alcohol abuse.

Another of the tests - the test folic acid metabolism - drew a comment from Eva Mergen on the NPR story:

“I am a obstetric medical transcriptionist and I type consultation reports on pregnant women who have the MTHFR mutation. The fact that folic acid is not properly metabolized can cause severe birth defects in the fetus if the mother does not take extra folic acid supplementation from very early in the pregnancy. Additionally, if you have a certain combination of copies of this mutation it can lead to a higher homocystine level, which can lead to a slightly higher risk for blood clots. Some women even take prophylactic anticoagulation during pregnancy, because pregnant women are already at increased risk for blood clots. “

Her particular observation about folic acid health risks is particularly interesting in light of the controversy over possible conflicts of interest:

Controversy: Is the Experiment the Result of Conflicts of Interest? The web site for the “Bring Your Genes to Cal” program contains an FAQ (a list of frequently asked questions provided with their answers). It contains a curious question:

“Does Professor Rine have any potential conflicts of interest between his role as the main speaker in this program and his involvement with biotechnology companies?”

The answer begins:

“No. Professor Rine and the other organizers of this program do not have any conflicts of interest with regard to this project. The genes we are testing are different from the genes Professor Rine studies in his lab, his lab will not be performing the genetic tests, and neither he nor the other organizers will personally profit from this program in any way.”

The answer goes on to point out that Rine is one of the founders of Vitapath Genetics and describes that firm as “trying to find the genetic basis of neural tube defects (NTDs), a common and often severe type of birth defect, which his lab is also studying.”

If your eyes glaze up at that description of Vitapath, perhaps that’s the point:

An example of an NTD is Spina Bifida, a birth defect that can be largely prevented by appropriate doses of folic acid during pregnancy. As Mergen remarked in her comment to NPR, one of the three genetic tests being given by Cal is very relevant to that folic acid preventative.

That may seem a tangential connection to Vitapath’s work but for another recent announcement. On the 30th of July, Vitapath Genetics issued a joint press release, with the Spina Bifida Association and the National Council on Folic Acid. VitaPath was releasing a new (free) iPhone application - the VitaTrack Folate Tracker.

The program “allows women to track their daily intake of folate and folic acid.”

Of course, presumably a genetic test - such as the one offered to incoming Cal students - would arguably make such a
program more useful by (hypothetically) helping to establish what level of folate and folic acid intake is ideal. Vitapath says of their science:

“At VitaPath Genetics, our research programs were established to broadly investigate how vitamin and cofactor utilization is influenced by genetics. In developing our Technology Platforms, we assembled best-in-class technology components from modern molecular biology, model system genetics and statistical analysis.

“Our mission is to focus only on genetic mutations that are shown to be biologically functional and that can be remediated with minimal risk. In doing so, we can improve the quality of life for our customers and reduce the overall cost of healthcare.”

In no small part, that means they look at your genes and suggest what you ought to be eating, according to their theories.

Whether by intent or not, the Cal experiment on freshmen will certainly lead to (confirmatory) quantitative data about the presence of the folic acid mutation. Since the experiment is often presented as an example of nutritional genomics, it will effectively advertise for the VitaTrack iPhone application. And while it is certainly true that VitaPath charges no money for that application, the application does create enhanced awareness of VitaPath’s brand and likely eventual products - all in the context of creating a population of experiment subjects with heightened anxiety about their genetic make-up.

Head in the Sand?

On July 13, Rine made his “first blog entry ever” on the official blog for the “Bring Your Genes to Cal” program. He begins: “To the 2010 entering class of the College of Letters and Science, welcome [...]”. By now you certainly are aware that the topic of this year’s program is Personalized Medicine. [...]”

After explaining the scientific and technical context he says: “You may have noticed in the press that our project has gained a lot of attention and stimulated some controversy. Indeed, one could never expect any advances with the potential of personalized medicine and personal genetic information to not be surrounded by controversy. The year-long events associated with the On the Same Page program are designed to explore these controversies.”

He moves on to name two aspects to the controversy: concerns about privacy and concerns about discrimination. There is no mention made about the quality of the science and the health recommendations, nor about the perceived conflicts of interest.

Those omissions seem like gaps Rine will eventually have to fill more directly.

Until next week, do be in touch: lord@emf.net

Dispatches From The Edge: Behind The Colombia/Venezuela Tension

_By Conn Hallinan
Mon Aug 09 18:06:00 -0700 2010_

If you want to understand what’s behind the recent tension between Colombia and Venezuela, think “smokescreen,” and then go back several months to some sick children in the Department of Meta, just south of Bogota. The children fell ill after drinking from a local stream, a stream contaminated by the bodies of more than 2,000 people, secretly buried by the Colombian military.

According to the Colombian high command, the mass grave just outside the army base at La Macarena contains the bodies of guerrilla fighters killed between 2002 and 2009 in that country’s long-running civil war. But given the army’s involvement in the so-called “false positive” scandal, human rights groups are highly skeptical that the dead are members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the National Liberation Army, the two insurgent groups fighting the central government.

“False positive” is the name given to the Colombian armed forces operation that murdered civilians and then dressed them up in insurgent uniforms in order to demonstrate the success of the army’s counterinsurgency strategy, thus winning more aid from the U.S. According to the human rights organizations Comision de Derechos Humanos del Bajo Ariari and Colectivo Orlando Fals Borda, some 2,000 civilians have been murdered under the program.

The bodies at La Macarena have not been identified yet, but suspicion is that they represent victims of the “false-positive” program, as well as rural activists and trade unionists. The incoming Colombian president, Juan Manuel Santos, was defense secretary when the murders were taking place. Santos also oversaw a brief invasion of Ecuador in 2008 that reportedly killed a number of insurgents. The invasion was widely condemned throughout Latin America.

Diverting attention is what outgoing Colombian President Alvaro Uribe is all about. While his foreign minister, Luis Alfonso Hoyos, was laying out photos and intelligece claiming that Venezuela was hosting upwards of 1500 Colombian insurgents, a group of Latin American NGOs were uncovering a vast scheme by Uribe’s Department of Administrative Security (DAS) to sabotage the activities of journalists, judges, NGOs, international organizations and political opponents. Some of these “dirty tricks” included death threats.

Because the U.S. -which has pumped more than $7 billion in military aid to Colombia- supplies the DAS with sophisticated surveillance technology, Washington may end up implicated in the scandal.

The U.S. may also be tarred with the murder of Colombian trade unionists. According to Kelly Nichollas of the U.S. Office on Colombia, testimony at the trial of former DAS director Jorge Noguera indicated that the U.S. trained a special Colombian intelligence unit that tracked trade unionists.

Colombia is currently the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists. According to the International Trade Union Confederation’s (ITUC) Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights, out of the 101 unionists murdered in 2009, 48 were in Colombia. So far, 20 more Colombian trade unionists have been murdered in 2010. In the case of Herman Abdiel Ordonez, treasurer of the prison worker’s union, who had complained about corruption, the government refused to provide him security in spite of receiving numerous death threats. He was gunned down by assassins on a motorcycle.

“Colombia was once again the country where standing up for fundamental rights of workers is more likely than anywhere else to mean a death sentence, despite the Colombian government’s public relations campaign,” said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder.

“The Colombian authorities must take urgent and effective measures to guarantee the physical integrity of Colombian trade unionists.”

Uribe certainly has reason to shift the attention away from Colombia and toward Venezuela. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is pressing its investigation of the “false-positives” murders, and Uribe’s brother has been accused of working with death squads. Santiago Canton, an Argentinean and former head of the rights commission, said “If you put all this together, the extrajudicial executions, the espionage of human rights defenders, it’s all really consistent over the years.”

And where was the Obama Administration in all this? Firmly supporting Uribe, railing against Venezuela’s suspension of diplomacy with Bogota, and, according to an
investigation by the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), secretly funneling money to the media operations of Chavez’s right-wing opponents. Right-wingers in Bolivia and Nicaragua are also receiving money.

“Between 2007 and 2009, the State Department’s little known Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor channeled at least $4 million to journalists in Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela through the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF),” says NACLA’s Jeremy Bigwood. In doing this, the State Department violated its own rules requiring that “all publications” receiving money “acknowledge that support.” According to Bigwood, the U.S. waived that requirement for PADF.

Colombia is Washington’s closest ally in the region, so it hardly surprising that Uribe’s right-wing government and Washington’s visceral hatred of Chavez should find common ground. But the attack on Chavez is also a proxy assault on the newly formed, 32-member Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the first regional organization not to include the U.S., Canada, or European countries.

Meeting in Caracas this past July, CELAC selected Chavez and the newly elected conservative president of Chile, Sebastian Pinera, as co-chairs of the forum that will draft statutes for the organization. While it seems like an odd pairing, the U.S. media’s cartoonish characterization of Chavez is not shared widely in Latin America. “Chavez... has shown himself adaptable to making major compromises in order to further Latin American and regional integration,” says Alexander Main of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, D.C.

And while Pinera is very conservative, according to Main, “his toned down approach to international relations indicates that he too is prepared to act pragmatically.”

The Caracas meeting called for “political, economic, social and cultural integration” and affirmed the right of “each state to constitute its own political system free of threats, aggressions and unilateral coercive measures.” Tellingly, there was no mention of “free trade” or “open markets,” the so-called “Washington consensus” that characterized U.S. economic doctrine in the region over the past several decades.

As Latin America grows in economic strength and political independence, U.S. policy seems locked into a previous century when it was the major power in the region. Rather than retooling its diplomatic approach to fit the new reality in Latin America, Washington is expanding its military footprint.

It is will soon be operating out of seven military bases in Colombia and has reactivated its 4th Fleet, both highly unpopular moves in Latin America. Rather than taking the advice of countries in the region to demilitarize its war on drugs, the U.S. recently announced it is deploying 46 warships and 7,000 soldiers to Costa Rica to “interdict” drug traffic and money laundering. From 2000 to 2009, less than 40 percent of U.S. aid to the region went to Latin America’s militaries and police. The Obama Administration has raised that figure to 47 percent.

Washington and Bogota may try to demonize Venezuela, but they are playing to a very small audience, and one that grows smaller-and more irrelevant-by the day.

Conn Hallinan’s essays can be read at: http://www.dispatchesfromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com

The Public Eye: Obama’s Failure to Communicate

By Bob Burnett
Fri Aug 06 16:29:00 -0700 2010

Three months before the mid-term elections, Americans are angry. As a result, it’s likely that Democrats will lose control of either the House or Senate. While the negative political trends can be attributed to the stagnant economy or ruthless Republican neoliberalism, the primary culprit is the White House: Barack Obama has failed to communicate the accomplishments of his Administration.

While some of the political anger is unavoidable - the economy has structural problems because of the excesses of the Bush Administration - much of it could have been avoided if the Obama White House had done a better job communicating the positive steps they have taken to protect working Americans.

A prime example is the economic stimulus package. Enacted in February of 2009, the $787 Billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act received no Republican votes in the House and only 3 in the Senate (Collins, Snowe, and Specter). Out of the gates, the GOP condemned it - they favored tax cuts for the wealthy, supporting the discredited “rising tide lifts all boats” economic policies that have (mis)guided Republican Presidents since Reagan. For eighteen months, Republicans have dogmatically attacked the stimulus claiming either that it hasn’t worked - they seize on high unemploy ment as evidence - or that the funds have been misallocated - GOP Senators Coburn and McCain released a flawed report supposedly specifying waste.

The truth is the stimulus package has been a huge success. On July 27th, economists Alan Blinder and Mark Zandi reported the government’s intervention “helped avert a second Depression.” (Blinder is a Princeton professor and former Fed vice chairman; Zandi is chief economist at Moody’s and former McCain adviser.) They stated that without the Obama stimulus package and related policies US “GDP in 2010 would be about 6 1/2% lower, payroll employment would be less by some 8 1/2 million jobs, and the nation would now be experiencing deflation.”

Nonetheless, public perception of the stimulus package is negative. According to a Pew Research poll Americans believe the stimulus did NOT help “keep unemployment from getting even worse” or help “state and local governments avoid layoffs and budget cuts,” even though there is ample evidence to the contrary. 66 percent of poll respondents felt the primary impact of the stimulus package was to increase the budget deficit.

2008’s Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) has fared even worse in terms of public opinion. Widely decried as a half-witted “bailout” program that benefited behemoth banks and financial institutions at the expense of working folks, having voted for TARP has become a congressional badge of dishonor. Public opinion quickly turned against TARP.

Once again, the reality is the TARP program worked. According to economists Blinder and Zandi, “the real GDP is almost $800 billion (6 percent) higher because of [TARP-related] policies, and the unemployment rate is almost 3 percentage points lower.” Early in June, to almost no political acknowledgement, the Treasury Department announced that the TARP loans had been repaid.

Now the Obama Administration is locked into a deadly economic debate with Republicans. The White House wisely advocates policies that create jobs, even if this means temporarily increasing the Federal deficit and (gasp) increasing taxes for millionaires. Republicans evidently don’t care about real job creation as they emphasize both deficit reduction and continuing the Bush-era tax cuts for millionaires - the fact that these are contradictory objectives makes no difference to GOP politicians (consistency has never been their strong suit).

As might be expected, given the recent
This is not a Bay Area story, at least not yet. But I couldn’t resist writing about one of the coolest pieces of research I’m read about in a very long time.

It’s about the spotted sandpiper (Ambystoma maculatum), a terrestrial amphibian that’s fairly common in eastern North America. Females lay their clusters of gelatinous eggs in water. The salamander was known to have a symbiotic relationship with a single-called alga called *Oophila* (“egg-lover”) *amblystomatis* that lives in the egg jelly wherein the algae provide oxygen to the salamander embryos and the embryos reciprocate with nitrogen-rich waste that the algae feed on.

But the symbiosis turns out to be much more intimate than that. Ryan Kerney at Nova Scotia’s Dalhousie University has discovered that the alga is not just present in the jelly. He also found it in the embryonic salamanders’ cells. Algae, like true plants, generate oxygen and carbohydrates through photosynthesis, building food from sunlight. *Oophila* appears to be photosynthesizing inside its host, and may be passing along some of the resulting nutrients.

Kerney’s evidence for some kind of internal nutrient transfer involves the mitochondria, structures found in all animal cells that use oxygen and a glucose product to manufacture ATP, which stores chemical energy. He found that the mitochondria in the salamander cells were clustered around the algal cells, possibly absorbing the carbohydrates and oxygen the alga bring in.

The idea of a vertebrate partially powered by sunlight is pretty extraordinary. Similar kinds of relationships between animals and single-celled algae have been documented for coral and for a handful of flatworm and clam species—much simpler organisms than salamanders. Vertebrate immune systems are vigilant about keeping foreign biological material out of cells. Is the alga somehow bypassing the sentries, or has the salamander turned its immune system off? In either case, how would that work?

Kerney is now trying to figure out when and how the algae enter the salamander cells. Work by Roger Hangarter at Indiana University suggests that this occurs as the embryos’ nervous systems start to form. It’s not clear from what I’ve read so far, but the inference is that the symbiosis is limited to the salamander embryo’s time in the egg. Adult female spotted sandpipers have been found to have algae in their oviducts, likely where the eggs pick them up, but apparently not in the rest of their bodies.

This system seems a step beyond the common relationship between, say, termites and their gut flora. It reminds me a bit of the sharpshooters—the group containing the vineyard-pest glassy-winged sharpshooter—and their symbiotic bacteria, which are housed in special organs in the insect’s body and passed on from mother to offspring. The research prompted an interesting response from UC emeritus professor David Wake, a salamander authority. “I wonder if algae could be getting into the germ cells,” Wake told a reporter for *Nature*. “That would really challenge the dogma. But why not?” Germ cells are sex cells—gametes. Would this mean that algal genes have become part of the salamander’s genome? That would suggest horizontal gene transfer, a rare process in multicellular organisms, had been at work.

Horizontal gene transfer is a matter of genes being exchanged between two different biological species. Bacteria are notorious for this; people who work with bacteria like to say that the iconic Tree of Life is beginning to look more like a net, or a web, with all kinds of cross-connections between evolutionary lineages. The process is also believed to have occurred between unrelated species of plants; also between a fungus and the order of plants that includes beets and cacti, a fungus and a species of aphid, and an alga and a sea slug. Viruses, which are good at freighting bits of genetic material around, may be involved in the process.

Even if the spotted salamander hasn’t taken algal genes on board, the phenomenon Kerney describes is remarkable enough. You have to wonder how old this partnership is, and whether it involves other salamander species related to the eastern spotted, including our local western tiger and long-toed salamanders. I assume someone is looking into it.

---

**Odd Couples: The Salamander and the Alga**

*Joe Eaton*

**Senior Power: Women and Aging**

*By Helen Ripper Wheeler*

**Odd Couples: The Salamander and the Alga**

*Joe Eaton*

Mon Aug 09 23:46:00 -0700 2010

*Odd Couples: The Salamander and the Alga*  

**Senior Power: Women and Aging**

*By Helen Ripper Wheeler*  

Mon Aug 09 21:56:00 -0700 2010

Age discrimination is a real and growing problem. ... Age discrimination attacks a person’s sense of self-worth in much the same fashion as race or sex discrimination.” (August 3, 1998 letter) --Dion Louise Aroner (1944 - )

August 26th is designated as Women’s Equality Day to commemorate passage of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which provided American women with full voting rights. Women’s Equality Day was instituted by Congres-
ional Representative Bella Abzug when she was 60 years old. (She died of breast cancer and heart disease in 1998.) Fifty years after all American men were enabled to vote, women finally got a piece of the action in 1920.

Women’s Equality Day is officially proclaimed in some locales. A “celebration of woman suffrage and a protest of Meg Whitman whose voting record dishonors that tradition” will be held on Thursday, August 26th on the Capitol West Steps, Sacramento, from 4-6 P.M. (For more information contact Bonnie Castillo, RN (916)-446-5019.)

There will be no international Women’s Equality Day celebration. Not this year or next. As of May 2010, the CEDAW Women’s Rights Treaty, formally known as the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, has been ratified by 185 nations, including all industrialized nations except the United States. Adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, it has been described as an international bill of rights for women.

CEDAW was signed by President Carter. Thirty years later, the Senate continues to drag its feet. Apparently, they actually believe that CEDAW would impose policies on the U.S. that would legalize prostitution, force abortions, harm families. President Obama supports CEDAW but has not thrown the weight of his presidency behind it. Many cities, including San Francisco, have adopted resolutions calling on the Senate to ratify CEDAW. A coalition of over 190 U.S. religious, civic, and community organizations remains committed to supporting ratification. They include AARP, American Nurses Association, National Education Association, National Coalition of Catholic Nuns, the American Bar Association, the United Methodist Church, YWCA, and Amnesty International.

The older woman is all of us. The older woman is all of us. Why not healthily and forthrightly refer to an “old woman” and to an “old man” and to “old people”?

When I was young, a typical student referred to Miss Wheeler; when I became middle-aged, they shifted to Mrs. Wheeler. Throughout, they referred to and addressed men faculty as Professor (an academic rank) or Doctor (an academic degree), regardless of vintage.

The double double standard requires that a woman should be (1) young, and (2) younger than a man. My favorite reading on the subject is Susan Sontag’s classic “The Double Standard of Aging.” (September 23, 1972 Saturday Review.) Sontag, who died of cancer at the age of 71, declared that “Getting older is less profoundly winding for a man, for in addition to the propaganda for youth that puts both men and women on the defensive as they age, there is a double standard about aging that denounces women with special severity.”

The 2005 White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA) was the fifth in history. It takes place every decade to make aging policy recommendations to the President, who did not attend the 2005 Conference, and Congress and to assist the public and private sectors in promoting dignity, health, independence and economic security of current and future generations of older persons. The next one may take place in 2015; its theme is “The Shape of Things to Come.”

Consideration of women in plans for the 1981 WHCoA had been rejected, which led to a White House Mini-Conference on Older Women, attended by 400 delegates. Two hundred stayed on to form the Older Women’s League (OWL). “Growing Numbers, Growing Force: A Report from the White House Mini-Conference on Older Women” was published by the OWL Educational Fund and the Western Gerontological Society, coordinated by Tish Sommers (1914-1985), with cartoons by Bulbul. It is in the library collections of San Jose and San Diego State Universities and can be borrowed without charge by your public library for you through the LINK system.

Sommers and Laurie Shields (1922-1989) recognized and defined the need for older women to organize nationally and become advocates for change in public policy. Their 1987 book, “Women take care; The consequences of caregiving in today’s society,” was published by the OWL Task Force on Caregivers. Sommers, who had regularized the disabled housewife term, and Shields spent their final years together in the grand old Oakland house which they regarded as OWL headquarters. Both died of cancer.

The national office of OWL - The Voice of Midlife and Older Women is located in Washington, D.C., and the state office is in Sacramento. California chapters include Ohlone/East Bay. OWL’s Gray Paper series and Mother’s Day Reports have been notable.

Do you enjoy fiction that relies on humor at women’s expense and unnecessary references to “old”? Two fictional, seventy-year old nuns attend an “Older Women’s League convention” and attempt to solve the mystery of an old friend’s disappearance. The San Francisco Sunday Examiner & Chronicle avoided critiquing “The missing madonna” (1988) by resorting to cuteness - it’s about “a nun with an unusual habit of solving murders.” Chuckle chuckle. Carol Anne O’Marie’s mysteries are in the collection of the Berkeley Public library in standard and large print versions.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION:

The California Alliance for Retired Americans (CARA) is holding its 7th Annual Convention, “Taking Back the State in 2010,” October 12-13, in Oakland.

###

SINGLE PAYER, UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE IN CALIFORNIA!

Helen Ripper Wheeler can be reached at pen136@dslextreme.com .

No email attachments; use “Senior Power” for subject.

Restoration Comedy:
Perhaps They Should Change the Name To HAMPer

By Jane Powell

Aug 10 10:43:00 -0700 2010

After my trip to Washington DC, and the promise that there might be a reply from Fannie Mae regarding my loan modification in as little as a week, what have I heard? Nothing. Well, not entirely nothing. A letter arrived from GMAC requesting letters from all my tenants detailing how much they pay me and how often. I guess the signed rental agreements that contain this exact same information were not sufficient. So they all wrote the letters, and I faxed them to every fax number I had- the one in the letter, the one I had for the representative I talked to in DC, as well as to NACA. No doubt they will have claimed to have never received them. Probably I should FEDEX them so some one will actually have to sign. Not that they
wouldn’t “lose” them after that.

There had been two e-mails from the representative, saying she needed to talk to me. I called and left a voicemail. I called her cell, but that mailbox was full. She never called back, nor did she respond to my email. So much for the advantage of having an actual person.

In the meantime I’ve been reading more of the HAMP fine print. It’s astounding how it was written to help the banks and not the homeowner. For instance, if by some miracle you actually get a permanent modification, it will come with an escrow account for taxes and insurance, because you are obviously a deadbeat who can’t be trusted with money.

In the same way that withholding taxes from your paycheck (assuming you are one of the lucky ones who still has a paycheck) allows the government the use of your money all year until you maybe get some of it back after April 15, an escrow account requires you to pay monthly for things which are only due once or twice a year, so the bank gets the use of that money in the meantime. This might even be okay if they only collected the actual amount of the taxes and insurance, but no, they collect more. Escrow accounts are a profit center for the banks.

Furthermore, although the lender collects the money and is supposed to pay the taxes and insurance when they come due, it remains your responsibility to pay them, and unless you keep on top of the lender, they often fail to do so or pay them late, and who pays the penalty for that? Yup, the homeowner.

Meanwhile, I decided to rent out another room— the spare bedroom where I store my tools and equipment, since I don’t have a garage, and only a partial basement. So the tools and supplies are now in the basement, on shelves which have to be raised up on bricks since the basement gets wet in the winter. To say I’m a little cranky about this would be rather an understatement.

There’s a rumor going around via Reut- ters that the White House will order Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to forgive part of the mortgages they hold. Supposedly there’s a meeting at Treasury on August 17th regarding Fannie and Freddie— Treasury has basically promised them unlimited money. It would be lovely if this turned out to be true, but then, we were promised other things— you know, a public option, closing of Guantanamo, suspension of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, re-regulation of the financial system... and none of that has come to pass. Let’s just say I’ll believe in the “Principal Forgiveness Sparkle Pony” when it waltzes into my living room in all its rainbow-haired glory. And a signed and notarized document in my hand.

Jane Powell writes for the Planet when- ever she feels like it, and perhaps someday she will go back to writing about old houses and such. She can be reached at hsedressing@ aol.com, and catch her in person next weekend at the SF Arts and Crafts Show at the Concourse (8th and Brannan).

Arts & Entertainment

Theatre Review: Giddy Trilogy in Summer Rep at Shotgun: Table Manners, (Part One of The Norman Conquests)

by John A. McMullen II
Fri Aug 06 16:28:00 -0700 2010

Richard Reinholdt as Norman, surrounded by the ladies who portray his Conquests: Sarah Mitchell, Zehra Berkman, and Kendra Lee Oberhauser

Alan Ayckbourn wrote 1970’s British domestic comedy in the midst of the Sexual (pronounce it seks-yoo-all) Revolution, the UK having gone in a decade from “No Sex Please, We’re British,” to a middle-class revisiting of Restoration bawdiness—just like in America. His plays must have been outrageous when first produced. That this form should have recaptured the Tony for best revival of a play last year is odd to me but attests to its durability

TABLE MANNERS is the first episode of his notable trilogy NORMAN CONQUESTS now playing in rep at SHOTGUN PLAYERS. It is a family weekend (pronounce it week-END) with three siblings, two spouses, and a diffident boyfriend dining on scant victuals and attacking one another’s habits and character.

Where does the Norman in THE NOR-
The set by Nina Ball is appropriately middle-class shabby as a family home assumedly decorated by mum decades before, replete with mahogany wainscoting, yellow wallpaper, 20 framed prints featuring a Georgian horseshow, a china closet full of willow pattern. Stage center is a window overlooking and unseen garden (the next installment is “Round and Round the Garden”) from which see which a gray English sky. The window and window seat are surround by well-worn sheer draperies. The centerpiece is the dining table around which the consternation occurs. Details like unmatched wine glasses resonate realistically.

The costumes by Valera Coble are very 70’s with double breasted jackets and wide ties with tie tacks, plaid pants, baggy sweaters, old military uniforms, corals and blue prints and chiffons for the ladies; the hairdos alone will transport you in time.

The expository first scene is bit static in its staging, thus slow to jumpstart the comedy. Once out of the starting block, the play is astonishingly well directed by Joy Carlin. A lifelong actress, Ms. Carlin is able to get exceptional acting from these exceptional actors. Every beat and intention is clear, there is moment-to-moment real interaction, the temps of the scenes are distinct and apt. The director has led the actors to grand discoveries in the difficult terrain of putting an super-realistic spin on the foibles of domesticity and thereby making it funnier than the usual enacting. Details such as having the table set in fits and starts throughout the first act rather than as one action are inspired. My compliments to her funny twist on the scene change: my hackles arose when a young blonde woman in black tech-wear and head-set entered in low light to change the set; however, her antics in changing the set brought laughter and applause.

All three chapters of this trilogy are being played in repertory through September 5 with the same cast. It’s a worthwhile venture that leaves you a little giddy and wanting to know what happens next.

THE NORMAN CONQUESTS: Table Manners

Presented by Shotgun Players, Patrick Dooley, artistic director

At Ashby Stage, 1901 Ashby Ave., Berkeley (at Martin Luther King Jr. Way) across from Ashby BART station.

TABLE MANNERS plays Aug 21 @ 4pm, Aug 25 @ 8pm, Aug 28 @ 4pm, Aug 29 @ 1pm, Sep 1 @ 8pm, Sep 4 @ 4pm, and Sep 5 @ 1pm. Entire trilogy in repertory through September 5.

Tickets/info www.shotgunplayers.org or 510-841-6500 ext. 303.

Written by Alan Ayckbourn, directed by Joy Carlin, set by Nina Ball, costumes by Valera Coble, sound by Madeline Oldham, and lighting by Masha Tsimring.

With: Zahra Berkman (Annie), Sarah Mitchell (Ruth), Mick Mize (Reg), Kendra Lee Oberhauser (Sarah), Josiah Polhemus (Tom), and Richard Reinholdt (Norman).

Mountain Music Berkeley Style at the 8th Annual Berkeley Old Time Music Convention

From Suzy Thompson
Mon Aug 09 18:09:00 -0700 2010

Fiddles, banjos, ancient ballads and square dancing will take over Berkeley this September, at the Berkeley Old Time Music Convention, with headliners including West Virginia fiddler Jimmy Tripllett (former drummer with jam band Donna the Buffalo); 86-year-old mandolin player Kenny Hall in a one-time-only reunion with the Sweets Mill String Band; award-winning North Carolina ballad singer and storyteller Bobby McMillon; resonator guitar goddess Del Rey; and many others. The centerpiece of the festival is the Farmers Market String Band Contest, a free event in Civic Center Park featuring more than 20 different string bands.

Now in its eighth year, the Berkeley Old Time Music Convention has blossomed into a 5-day festival with activities all over Berkeley, including square dances, concerts, films, workshops and other activities, some geared especially towards kids and their families. Pickers, singers and fans of old-time music travel from all over the U.S. for this small, homegrown urban get-together; some have come from as far away as Japan and New Zealand!

This year the convention opens on Weds. Sept. 8 with a square dance at the Niebyl-Proctor Marxist library. Thursday and Friday nights feature concerts at the Freight & Salvage; musicians are invited to show up early for jamming in the lobby. Thursday’s show features West Virginia musicians Jimmy Tripllett, Scott Prouty and Andy FitzGibbon; Northwest ukelele whiz Del Rey. On Friday evening at the Freight, the BOTMC presents the Central Valley’s musical treasure, mandolin master Kenny Hall, accompanied by the musicians who played on his classic early recordings, the Sweets Mill String Band; ballad singing and storytelling by North Carolina’s Bobby McMillon, in his California debut; and the Macrae Sisters, three young women from Portland, Oregon who are expert singers and pickers. On Friday afternoon, a panel discussion at U.C. Berkeley’s Music Building will include three generations of old-time musicians.

On Saturday, free daytime activities include a family concert at the Berkeley Main Branch Library, followed by the youth showcase and string band contest in nearby Civic Center Park. This contest is a low-stress affair—the only real rule is that bands must have at least two members and at least one fiddle or banjo—that’s sponsored by and set up adjacent to the Berkeley Farmer’s Market in Civic Center Park. Winners get handfuls of “wooden nickels” redeemable for fresh organic peaches and heirloom tomatoes. The tunes are traditional, but can come from any place on the globe. A multitude of fiddle-banjo bands crank out the purest of hoedowns, but entrants have also played swing, Greek rembetika, Tex-Mex polka, bluegrass, and pan-ethnic political satire - all including at least one fiddle or banjo, of course! The Youth Showcase for the under-18 set gives awards to all the participants, and there are plenty of jam sessions around Civic Center Park where the contest takes place. At 4:00 P.M., the action moves to Pacific Film Archive, with a double feature: the Berkeley premiere of “I Hear What You See”, a documentary film about Kenny Hall by Chris Simon (with live music by Kenny and his band) and “Sprout Wings and Fly”, Les Blank’s 1983 film about the legendary Appalachian musician Tommy Jarrell. In the evening, there’s a rollicking square dance party at Ashkenaz, with a welcoming wood-floored hall for all ages, and three bands; all the dances are taught from scratch.

Sunday features master classes taught by the convention’s performers at the Jazzschool, a family dance at Ashkenaz and another free event, the sign-yourself-up “cabaret” at Jupiter, a terraced beer garden and pizzeria.

The 2010 Berkeley Old Time Music Convention runs Wednesday September 8 through Sunday, September 12. For more information, including details on entering the contest and signing up for the cabaret, go to www.berkelevoldtimemusic.org.
Exhibit: Echoes and Fragments by Rene Powell

By Peter Selz
Mon Aug 09 19:23:00 -0700 2010

A small group of innovators in the 1950s in California--Peter Voulkos, John Mason, Paul Soldner, Kenneth Price, Robert Arneson and Stephen de Staebler--began using clay no longer for its utilitarian function, but as a medium to create abstract or figurative sculpture. Called the Clay Revolution. It did not extend to ceramic tiles, which remained in the purely decorative realm.

Rene Powell has done pioneering work in a narrative use of clay tiles in a show currently on view at the Doug Adams Gallery in the Bade Museum on the campus of the Graduate Theological Union. Called ECHOES AND FRAGMENTS, they deal with the Holocaust as personal experience.

Powell’s tiles tell the stories of her father, who was rescued from Germany in a British children’s transport during the War, while her grandparents were last seen in the Jewish ghetto of Lodz, Poland. Searching for more documents in Washington’s Holocaust Museum, Rene learned that they were killed. Where, we don’t know.

Using both stoneware clay and paper clay which were fired in wood, raku or gas-fired kilns, she produced compelling tiles which show demolished torah scrolls, Jewish prayer shawls, Stars of David in broken glass. The artist fired the clay at very high temperature, causing it to warp and crack, shards creating metaphors for the literal brokenness, the destruction of the Jews. We see a tile of a fractured glass with the caption “Judenein” (free of Jews). Another tile, called Grandpa’s Treasure shows the menorah which her father carefully packed when boarding the last train leaving Germany after the Kristallnacht. A large ceramic, of a railroad track stands for the cattle cars in which Jews were transported to--or ejected from--the trip to the death camps. A length of actual barbed wire is part of the work which includes clay predatory birds, swastikas, stars of David, and dismembered parts of bodies which were as sculpted, fired, and then welded together, creating a painful work. These are ceramic tiles of deep sorrow, commemorating the Shoah, which the artist made with innovative skill.

Theater Review: Broadway Bound at Chanticleers Theatre

By Ken Bullock
Mon Aug 09 20:11:00 -0700 2010

“God, tell me an idea that makes you laugh ...”--Patrick Baresi as Stanley Jerome, is down on his knees, praying for a joke, a funny idea for a sketch that may propel him and his brother Eugene (Brady Woolery) out of the family home at Brighton Beach to Manhattan, a few miles away, and success in that new fount of entertainment, television. Or radio, at least ...

But it’s at home where the brothers pick up the comedy, from their straight-faced extended family-mother Kate (Sue Trigg), seldom-seen father Jack (Chris Chapman) and grandfather Ben (Kip Wixson) and the family’s on the verge of scattering, too, in Neil Simon’s semi-autobiographical play, Broadway Bound, going into its final weekend at Chanticleers Theatre in Castro Valley, just a few miles away, over the hill... The Chanticleers production’s been selling out, and it’s easy to see why.

Director Marty Nemko of Oakland, UC Berkeley grad and former faculty member, has declared Broadway Bound his favorite play. Nemko played the father in a San Francisco production just a few years back. Concentrating on the life of the family as expressed by each of the five family members--as well as Kate’s sister, Ben’s other daughter Blanche (Karol Stremke)--the show reveals their different perspectives and different humors-moving from comedy to seriousness, and back to amusement briskly.

The Jerome’s are coming apart at the seams. Grandfather Ben, an old socialist, lives apart from his wife, preferring to be alone in his room, contemplating Trotsky. Blanche, who’s married up to Park Avenue, tries to reunite her parents-in-retirement in Florida. And Kate and Ben hardly speak, Kate suspecting Ben of having an affair.

Meanwhile, Stanley and Eugene plot their success-and their escape-while reacting archly to family life, mining it for its idiosyncratic, unintentional humor all the while.

Chris Chapman and Sue Trigg (who directed several of Altarena Playhouse’s and the Bay Area’s best shows in the past few years) are, in real life, husband and wife. Their scenes together are close studies of cannibal understanding and misunderstanding, tension and directness. Alone with other family members, the tension and the directness take on a different character. A high point’s Kate’s umpty-umph recital, this time acted out in full, of her great triumph, having danced one night with George Raft. Eugene, who narrates the play straight across to the audience, is her instigator and accomplice, revealing a touching moment amid the war of attrition.

Kip Wixson puts in a great turn as old Ben, playing the curmudgeon, but still the heart and soul of the family’s humanity, its ethical arbiter.

Marty Nemko’s direction brings out the tenderness as well as the domestic madness of these real characters, in the vernacular sense of the word. He also regales the audience before the show with a set on piano: “My Funny Valentine,” “The A Train,” even a Joan Castle tribute. Marty’s even got a mean pitch-but enough of that ...

This is top notch community theater, a bargain ($15-$18) for an evening out, with a production featuring a fine ensemble, good production values (costumes by Lisa Danz, lighting design by Rob Ramsey and Kayvon Haghighi, set and theatrical consultation by John McMullen, who also reviews for the Planet), and a homey atmosphere, a delightful break from business—even show business—usually.

Chanticleers Theatre: 3983 Quail Ave., in Castro Valley Community Park, off Lake Chabot Drive, Castro Valley, (510) 733-5483; www.chanticleers.org

Don’t Miss This: The Rap Scene Squared

By Dorothy Snodgrass
Tue Aug 10 10:56:00 -0700 2010

As a living personification of the term “Square”, I’m understandably not a devotee of rap music. Nonetheless, I’m endlessly fascinated by the highly imaginative and fanciful names of these musical groups. Most of my scholarly research on this academic subject is derived from the East Bay Express, which I pick up every Wednesday from a nearby news rack that stands next to the empty, greatly lamented Berkeley Daily Planet news rack.

Leafing through the Express, I catch up on such groups as the Mighty Underdogs, The Gift of Gab, The Memphis Murdermen and the Oakland Faders. To my disappointment I discover that the above musicians, sponsored by Amoeba Music, performed this past weekend at Jack London Square Waterfront. Likewise, I missed the Stripmall Architecture (no, that’s not a misspelling)
and the Heavenly States at the Uptown on Telegraph Avenue.

Not to worry -- I can still catch The Grouch on August 12th at Shattuck Down Low in downtown Berkeley. And, happily, there’s the 10th Anniversary Oakland Showcase on August 21 and 22, featuring the very popular musicians John Handy and Pete Escovedo. For this you have to pay admission: $10 for adults, $5 for seniors/youths. Money well spent.

Not forgetting the LGBTQ Oakland Pride program on September 5th, there’ll be all kinds of hip-hop, R&B, Jazz, Electronic and more. This Diversity in Action show will take place on Labor Day Weekend at the Uptown, 19th and Franklin Streets.

Another treat for Rap and R&B fans is the Outside Lands Program in Golden Gate Park this Saturday and Sunday, August 14-15, which will be reigned over by Kings of Leon and other groups such as Stoopid, Social Distortion and The Temper Trap. These programs will be shown on four different stages: Lands End, Sutro, Panhandle Solar and Twin Peaks. Public transportation is advised; take Muni #28 to 19th Avenue at the Park.

With such a wealth of Rap music opportunities, it’s obvious that summer in the Bay Area is going out with a bang!

Home & Garden

Berkeley’s Historic Thorsen House, Now A Fraternity, Open To View on Saturday

By Steven Finacom
Mon Aug 09 22:55:00 -0700 2010

Though far apart geographically, Berkeley and Pasadena have some interesting commonalities. Both are home to gigantic early 20th century football stadiums where UC teams play, both have a long history of distinguished community theater, and are known for the quality of their residential neighborhoods.

In addition, each town has a lavish Arts & Crafts home, a so-called “ultimate bungalow”, designed by the Greene Brothers in the early 20th century. Although Pasadena’s bungalow, the Gamble House, is better known, Berkeley’s counterpart, the Thorsen House, is pretty darn nice on its own and is also the larger of the two.

The brown shingle Thorsen House stands at 2307 Piedmont Avenue at Bancroft Way, right across the street from International House.

This coming Saturday, August 14, 2010, from 5 to 9 pm, a fundraising event gives the public the opportunity to see the inside of this remarkable structure and hear two leading Arts & Crafts scholars speak about the history and context. There will be wine and food and the opportunity to look around the house.

The event is coordinated with the 16th Annual San Francisco Arts & Crafts Exhibition, taking place the same weekend.

The Thorsen House was designed and built in 1908 by Henry Mather Greene and Charles Summer Greene who had a Southern California design firm famous for its lavish interpretation and execution of the Arts & Crafts aesthetic.

The clients, wealthy lumberman William Thorsen and his wife, selected a site on Piedmont Way (now Avenue) in what was then a fashionable district of large private homes interspersed with privately operated student residences. When the Thorsen House was built, the neighborhood was a relatively quiet upscale enclave.

Piedmont ended a block north of the house-Gayley Road did not yet directly extend across the UC campus to Northside-the campus itself was a block to the northwest, and Memorial Stadium and International House had not yet been built. There were no UC residence halls, and the fraternities and sororities which now densely populate the neighborhood were, in that era, more dispersed and intermixed with family homes on both north and south sides of the campus.

For years the Thorsens were prominent in local civic and social affairs. Their home was a setting for receptions, weddings, and club meetings, and the Society pages of the local papers were full of the memberships, activities, affiliations, and doings of the Thorsens.

The Thorsen House still exudes a single-family residential feel, with a manicured landscape, two iron entry arches, and curved brick staircases ascending through the front garden to a wide front porch and what may be the most magnificent door ensemble in Berkeley, an intricate mix of art glass and glowing wood.

The interior of the house also gleams with beautiful woodwork, built with the skill and detail usually devoted to a fine piece of hand-made furniture. There are Japanese overtones in both the style and execution of the woodwork. The large rooms spill into each other and out into a rear garden enfolded by the “L” shaped structure.

It is one of the most beautiful and impressive residential interiors in Berkeley.

The Sigma Phi fraternity-originally located a half block down Bancroft Way, where the Law School complex now stands-bought the Thorsen House in 1942 and has used the house ever since. The fraternity chapter is
closely attached to the building; members regularly work on restoration projects, and the building is kept in immaculate condition inside and out.

Many upgrades have been accomplished in recent years. There are, however, major renovations still needed, including seismic strengthening.

The event this Saturday-described as an “open house and evening social”—will raise some immediate funds for those future projects and also launch what Sigma Phi hopes will be a successful “Save The Thorsen House” restoration campaign.

The event features two speakers, who will start their remarks around 6:00 PM.

Robert Judson Clark is a gem of an architectural scholar. Retired from the faculty at Princeton University and a long time resident of the Bay Area, he’s a font of information on art as well as California architectural movements and an expert at relating our local trends—from Berkeley brown shingle to Beaux Arts UC campus buildings—to broader traditions.

Edward “Ted” Bosley is the Director of the Gamble House in Pasadena, and thus one of the more experienced and knowledgeable experts on Greene & Greene. He’s also closely connected to the Thorsen House. He discovered the Greenes when he was a student at Cal and lived in the building.

In 1996 he organized a summer exhibit at the Thorsen House that temporarily brought back some of the original, custom-designed furnishings, now owned by USC, and displayed them in situ for visitors.

There are a limited number of tickets available for this Saturday’s event. The minimum donation requested is $30 per person. View the invitation and the instructions for purchasing a ticket [here](http://www.themarsh.org). The Thorsen House also has a general website.

As of Monday, spaces were still available but James Dong, one of the organizers, tells me that people should sign up soon. You can do so through the website.

If you are driving, Sunday parking is free at street meters and curbside in the vicinity, but the streets are usually parked up. The closest parking in UC lots is two blocks down Bancroft Way beneath tennis courts across from the Art Museum, or further uphill, behind the Law School.

Access the latter by driving to the north end of Piedmont Avenue adjacent to Memorial Stadium, making a “U” turn around the median island then a sharp right turn into the campus, and another immediate left turn into a downhill roadway past a cylindrical build-

ing (Calvin Laboratory).

In both UC lots make sure to watch for special parking signs and restrictions and purchase a parking pass at one of the pedestrian ticket vending machines.

If you come to the event on Saturday and park in that lot behind the Law School, you’ll probably walk by a nearby brown shingle house—now 2234 Piedmont—that has a curious relationship to the Thorsen House.

About the same time the Thorsen House was being designed and built, William C. Hays, a member of the Architecture faculty at Cal, was designing a shingle-style home for Dr. Benjamin P. Wall just two doors north of it on the same side of Piedmont Avenue.

The Wall House stood where the front steps and lobby of International House are located today, just a stone’s throw north of the corner where the Thorsen House stands. While I-House now occupies the site, the Wall House itself survives, half a block north and on the other side of the street on what is now the central campus of the University.

When the University bought the I-House site for development in the late 1920s Dr. Wall apparently negotiated an intriguing solution to the pending loss of his home. His house was not demolished but, instead, moved up the street and onto a vacant lot at the 2234 address; he seems to have continued living there until his death.

Perhaps because it was a long narrow structure being moved along a curved street, or maybe to spare the cost of building a large new basement under the ‘wrong’ end of the house on the sloping site, the Wall House was not turned around when it reached its new lot but inserted “backwards”. That is, the west facade that once faced Piedmont Avenue and the magnificent view down Bancroft Way now faces downhill into the UC campus. The old dining room and kitchen, once at the rear of the house, now adjoin the street.

After Dr. Wall died, the house served as the home and studio of Mrs. Florida Parrish Hoyle, a noted music teacher. After she died, her daughter moved to the house with her husband, William Denny, a Cal music professor. They lived there with their family, renting from the University, until 1958 until they were asked to leave and the building was converted to office uses; it remains University offices today.

The Thorsen House and Wall House have several similarities: both two stories but still largely horizontal / linear in character, both intricately shingled and with extensive interior woodwork, both resolutely Arts & Crafts in style, and both with distinctive second floor bedroom balconies perched on top of first floor window bays.

Did Hays and the Greene Brothers have any interaction during the design process for the two houses? Or were they simply talented designers working coincidently near each other in a then-popular style? Did the Thorsens know Dr. Wall, their neighbor on Piedmont? Intriguing questions that add some texture to the already rich story of the Thorsen House.

For more information on Greene & Greene, see the Greene & Greene virtual archive.

### Arts & Events Listings

**Stage-San Francisco Through August 22**

**ACTORS THEATRE OF SAN FRANCISCO**


**COUNTERPULSE**

“*Skin Tight,*” through Aug. 28, Thursday-Saturday, 8 p.m. Rapid Descent Physical Performance Company presents their debut production of a New Zealand play, featuring three performers, two actor/dancers, and a trumpeter. $20-$35. 1310 Mission St., San Francisco. (415) 626-2060, [www.counterpulse.org](http://www.counterpulse.org).<

**EXIT THEATRE**


“*Agnes the Barbarian,*” by Jason Harding, through Aug. 14, Thursday-Sunday, 8 p.m. Thunderbird Theatre Company presents an original play that is part homage, part lampoon of the sword and sorcery genre. $20-$25. 156 Eddy St., San Francisco. (415) 673-3847, [www.thetheatexit.org](http://www.thetheatexit.org).<

**THE MARSH**

“*The Mock Cafe,*” Stand-up comedy performances. Saturday, 10 p.m. $7.

“*The Monday Night Marsh,*” An ongoing series of works-in-progress. Monday, 8 p.m. $7.

**EXTENDED -- “The Real Americans,”** by Dan Hoyle, through Sept. 25, Thursday and Friday, 8 p.m.; Saturday, 5 p.m.; Sunday, 3 p.m. Hoyle connects liberal city life with small-town America. $20-$50. 1062 Valencia St., San Francisco. (415) 826-5750, [www.themarsh.org](http://www.themarsh.org).<

**OFF-MARKET THEATER**

---

<http://www.themarsh.org>
“City Solo,” through Aug. 22, Sunday, 7 p.m.


965 Mission St., San Francisco. <

OUR LITTLE THEATER

“What Mama Said About Down There,” through Aug. 28, Thursday-Saturday, 8 p.m. An “educational show” for ages 18 and up. $15.

287 Ellis St., San Francisco. (415) 928-4060.<

PHOENIX THEATRE

“This World Is Good,” by J.C. Lee, through Aug. 28, Thursday-Saturday, 8 p.m. Sleepwalkers Theatre presents part one of their three-part apocalypse series. $18-$24.


SHELTON THEATER


Big City Improv. Friday, 10 p.m. $20. (510) 595-5597, www.bigcityimprov.com.


STAGE WERX THEATRE

“Nymph O’ Mania,” by Morgan Ludlow, through Aug. 15, Thursday-Saturday, 8 p.m. Willy West Productions presents a modern twist on “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” $12-$24.

“Disoriented,” Aug. 19, 8 p.m. Three women--one Iranian, one Vietnamese, and one Japanese--aim to dis-orient themselves from external stereotypes and internal expectations. $20.

533 Sutter Street, San Francisco.<

VICTORIA THEATRE

OPENING -- “Sex Tapes for Seniors,” by Mario Cossa, through Aug. 22, August and September: Friday, 8 p.m., Saturday, 7 p.m. A group of retirees produces educational sex videos for seniors despite protests from their families and the community.


Stage-East Bay Through August 22

ASHBY STAGE


1901 Ashby Ave., Berkeley. <

LIVE OAK THEATRE

“Blithe Spirit,” by Noel Coward, through Aug. 21, 8 p.m. A medium and his two wives vie for his attention. $12-$15.

1301 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley. (510) 841-5580.<

Readings-East Bay Through August 22

A GREAT GOOD PLACE FOR BOOKS

Mary Roach, Aug. 13, 7 p.m. The author discusses “Packing for Mars: The Curious Science of Life in the Void.”

Shawna Yang Ryan, Aug. 16, 7 p.m. The author discusses “Water Ghosts.”

Jack Boulware, Aug. 18, 7 p.m. The author discusses “Gimme Something Better: The Profound, Progressive, and Occasionally Pointless History of Bay Area Punk from Dead Kennedys to Green Day.”


BOOKS INC., BERKELEY

Mark Elkin, Aug. 19, 4 p.m. The author discusses “Samuel’s Baby.”


MOE’S BOOKS

Neal Pollack, Aug. 20, 7:30 p.m. The author discusses his memoir “Stretch: The Unlikely Making of a Yoga Dude.”


MRS. DALLOWAY’S

Laura Glen Louis, Aug. 19, 7:30 p.m. The author reads from her poetry volume “Some, Like Elephants.”

Mary Roach, Aug. 20, 7:30 p.m. The author discusses “Packing For Mars: The Curious Science of Life in the Void.”

2904 College Avenue, Berkeley. (510) 704-8222.<

Professional Dance-San Francisco Through August 22

ODC DANCE COMMONS PERFORMANCE ART COMPLEX

“Triple Bill of World Premiers,” Aug. 21, 8 p.m. New works from Tania Santiago, Jesselito Bie and Pearl Ubungen. $15.

351 Shotwell St. (between 17th and 18th streets), San Francisco. (415) 863-6606, www.odctheater.org.<

PENA PACHAMAMA

“Flamenco Thursdays!” with Carola Zertuche, Thursdays, 8:30 p.m. Music and dance with performers of traditional flamenco. $10.

Georges Lammam Ensemble, Sundays, 8:30 p.m. Event features music and dancing from the Middle East. $10.


Galleries-East Bay Through August 22

COMPOUND GALLERY


CRAFT AND CULTURAL ARTS GALLERY

“Celebration of Life,” through Aug. 27. Works by Michael Griebich.


FLOAT

“Jabberwocky,” through Sept. 18. Works by Cheryl Finfrock and Liz Mamorsky. Opening reception, August 14, 6-9 p.m.

Free. Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-10 p.m.; by appointment. 1091 Calcoat Place, Unit 116, Oakland. (510) 535-1702, www.thefloatcenter.com.<

MERCURY 20 GALLERY


ROWAN MORRISON GALLERY


TRAYWICK CONTEMPORARY


895 Colusa Ave., Berkeley. (510) 527-1214.<

Classical Music-East Bay Through August 22

JOHN HINKEL PARK

Mozart’s “Don Giovanni,” through Aug. 8 and Aug. 14 through Aug. 8, 3 p.m. Open Opera presents Mozart’s classic opera work. Free.

2 Southampton Ave., John Hinkel Park, Berkeley.<

Highlights-East Bay Through August 22

“BRAINWASH MOVIE FESTIVAL,” -- through Aug. 14. A festival showcasing unique, independent movies from around the world, 22 shorts and one feature. Festival takes place at Mandela Village Arts Center, 1357 5th St., Oakland.

“DOWNTOWN BERKELEY MUSICFEST,” -- Aug. 20 through Aug. 29. More than 50 performances will take place at 11 different venues across Berkeley’s Downtown Arts District, with bands and artists such as The Blast- ers, Terence Brewer Trio, Dawn Drake, Turtle Island Quartet, Mark Hummel and more. Visit website for complete lineup and locations.


ZELLERBACH HALL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
Orquesta Aragon, Aug. 13, 8 p.m. $35-$65. UC Berkeley campus, Bancroft Way and Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley. (510) 642-9988.<

Exhibits-East Bay Through August 22

DAVID BROWER CENTER
“Water, Rivers and People/Agua, Rios y Pueblos,” through Aug. 31. Exhibition depicts those who are fighting to defend rivers and the people who depend on them.
2150 Allston Way, Berkeley. <

JOHANSSON PROJECTS

RICHMOND ART CENTER

Contents

Becky O’Malley: Creating the Jobs We All Need Now
Becky O’Malley with Charlotte Perry-Houts: Candidates File for Berkeley’s November Elections
Erica Gies: Solar Waste Recycling: Can The Industry Stay Green?
Steven Finacom: Landmarks Commission Recognizes Dwight Way Victorian
Assemblymember Skinner and Officials Celebrate Launch of Fourth Bore Construction
Ken Bullock: The Other Change of Hobbit Thrives in South Berkeley
Dan O’Neill: Odd Bodkins: The 21st Century
Anamaria Sanchez Romero: Unconscious racism?

“Revitalizing Bart Plaza to welcome bigger and more diverse groups of people??”

Rizwan Rahmani: The Factious and Insular Nature of the Muslim World
John Curl and Rick Auerbach: What the Express Left Out of the West Berkeley Story
Ted Friedman: Weak Links Heighten Loss in Berkeley

Letters to the Editor

Thomas Lord: Blogbeat: Are Student Gene Tests Science or Market Research?
Conn Hallinan: Dispatches From The Edge: Behind The Colombia/Venezuela Tension
Bob Burnett: The Public Eye: Obama’s Failure to Communicate

Joe Eaton: Odd Couples: The Salamander and the Alga
Helen Rippier Wheeler: Senior Power: Women and Aging
Jane Powell: Restoration Comedy: Perhaps They Should Change the Name To HAMPer

John A. McMullen II: Theatre Review: Giddy Trilogy in Summer Rep at Shotgun:
Table Manners, (Part One of The Norman Conquests)

From Suzy Thompson: Mountain Music Berkeley Style

at the 8th Annual Berkeley Old Time Music Convention

Peter Selz: Exhibit: Echoes and Fragments by Rene Powell

Ken Bullock: Theater Review: Broadway Bound at Chanticleers Theatre

Dorothy Snodgrass: Don’t Miss This: The Rap Scene Squared

Steven Finacom: Berkeley’s Historic Thorsen House, Now A Fraternity,

Open To View on Saturday