

BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Lynnne Melena, BPA President



Time for New Barron Park Traditions?

Barron Park Association sponsors a full calendar of neighborhood social events each year. But, as Doug Moran wrote in the Spring newsletter, these events often depend on just one key person taking making them happen. And sometimes, that key person decides it's time to move on to something else. That is what has happened this year with two beloved Barron Park traditions.

For five years, **Gwen Luce** has produced the Welcoming Gathering in late August, and for 11 years **Don Anderson** has staged the Caroling Parade and Party in December. Both Gwen and Don have decided it is time to give more priority to family—especially in the vacation and holiday period when the events happens.

That doesn't mean these events have to completely fade into memory. Both Don and Gwen are available to provide excellent guidance on how to organize them. Or they could morph into something else that matches someone else's interests. That's how the Green Tour got started. It replaced a long-ago Home and Garden Tour.

How did the Welcoming Gathering and the Holiday Parade and Party get started?

Welcoming Party

When Gwen became a BPA Board member a number of years back, she decided that welcoming newcomers would be her "thing." She started a Welcoming Committee to assemble and deliver Greeting Packets to new neighbors. Now she does the assembly herself, but has recruited a cadre of residents throughout Barron Park to personally greet newcomers and deliver the packets. (Many of us who are long-time residents are probably unaware of this wonderful service.)

Gwen started the Welcoming Gathering with the support of **Mary Jane Leon** (also on the Board at the time). The idea was to greet "new, old and in-between neighbors." When Mary Jane could no longer help, Gwen just kept going on her own, with help from **Gary Brietbard** on music, the Driftwood Deli for ice cream, the **Balloon Lady**, donkey handlers, the parent-child soccer group, **Doug Graham** with his history exhibit and, last year, face-painting by a teen-age baby-sitter. Gwen's key helpers have been her son, **Steve Luce**, **Bud Rubin**, with his truck to bring tables and chairs over to the Bol Park, **Perky Perkins**, who helps clean up, and other neighbors willing to scoop ice cream.

Holiday Parade and Party

The Holiday Party started in 2000. Don Anderson (who had also been a BPA Board member) thought it would be fun to have some kind of neighborhood holiday event featuring Niner and Perry, our neighborhood donkeys. He had worked at his family's Rose Parade float company in Pasadena so, he says, "I was naturally inclined to think about a parade." Since his daughter was in the Gunn Choir at the time, he was able to talk the choir director, Bill Liberatore, into bringing along some of his choir kids to participate, and the "Barron Park Holiday Parade and Party" was born. The party has been held every year since.

Don said he really enjoys the event, "because it definitely has home-grown, small neighborhood production values, and it is entirely a neighborhood effort." The Boy Scouts (Troop 52) helps set up the party and manage traffic during the caroling procession, **Alice Frost** organizes neighborhood seniors to bake cookies for the party, the Palo Alto Fire Department provides a fire truck for pre-parade entertainment, and over the years lots of Barron Parkers have helped with set-up, clean-up and serving food at the party.

As I write this, it appears that the Welcoming Gathering may re-emerge next year in an entirely new format. Stay tuned. And it is not too late to re-start the Caroling Party this year—or maybe something else to replace it. Just give me a call or email me if you are interested.

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EL CAMINO BUSINESS VITALITY

By Bob Moss

There have been a number of new businesses opening along our section of El Camino in the past quarter, plus an unexpected closing. Here are some of the changes since April 2011:

Blockbuster Video closed in April, part of the nationwide store closure when the company declared bankruptcy. This closing left more than half the space in that shopping center vacant. Only Baja Fresh and Jamba Juice are left, and the parking lot is pretty empty most of the time.

Jack-In-The-Box closed very suddenly in mid-June. This was very surprising as they were open as usual on a Wednesday, and closed with no warning and all the signs gone Saturday night. Now the block between Ventura and Curtner that used to have two eating places, Jack-In-The-Box and Compadres which also closed with almost no warning in October 2008, has more vacant space than occupied retail area.

The new Alison Bakery and Frozen Treats opened in the building housing Starbucks on the El Camino Way island in mid-July. The bakery has several small tables for customers to eat their pastries. They are open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays and 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday. They offer bagels and lox and croissants among other things for breakfast. Frozen Treats next door opened in late July. Hours are from noon to 8 p.m. weekdays, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Sunday. Think Tank Learning, a business that offers special training and classes for middle and high school students, is behind the bakery and frozen treats stores along El Camino Way. It opened in late July.

Papa John's Pizza opened in mid-July at 3898 in the strip mall next to Happy Donuts. It is open early. They ran full sheet color inserts in the *Mercury News* recently advertising this new location and low prices for pizza.

The owners of A Little Secret, the women's clothing store that opened recently on Barron just off El Camino, really upgraded the old metal building on that lot. The build-

ing is now a deep red, and flowers have been planted on the perimeter. A couple of women from Barron Park noted they had shopped there and were pleased with both the service and the quality of clothes available. A Little Secret is operated by the woman that owns the tailor shop in the small white building on the corner of the same lot.

On El Camino Way the barber shop and two architect offices recently closed as the site will be converted to an extension of the Palo Alto Commons senior living housing next door.

Total vacancy rate for commercial sites on El Camino from Page Mill to Adobe Creek currently is 7.9%.

On the Barron Park side the vacancy rate is 7.6%, on the Ventura side it is 8.4%.

For comparison, data from previous years are:

January 1992: Total vacancy rate was 2.1%; Barron Park side vacancy was 2.5%, Ventura vacancy was 1.9%.

December 2001: Total vacancy rate was 2.5%; Barron Park side vacancy was 3.4%, Ventura vacancy was 1.8%.

November 2008: Total vacancy rate was 7.4%, Barron Park side vacancy was 8.1%, Ventura vacancy was 6.5%

September 2010: Total vacancy rate was 6.5%; Barron Park side vacancy was 6.0%, Ventura vacancy was 7.1%

When the former site of Carlson Volvo is replaced by the Fisker and McLaren auto dealership in a few months, vacancy rates will decrease to 4.7% on the Barron Park side and 6.2% overall.

A vacancy rate of 5% or less is considered essentially full occupancy since there are always some businesses coming and going. The highest vacancy rate in the past 19 years was in September 2010 at the tail end of the Great Recession that started in late 2008 and ended in late 2009. El Camino vacancy rates were better than other parts of

town. Late 2010 was a time when commercial vacancy rates in Downtown Palo Alto were close to 10%, compared to less than 4.5% vacancies downtown since 1989.

Overall occupancy of commercial spaces along our section of El Camino has been relatively strong. If one or two of the larger vacant sites gets an occupant commercial vacancy rates should drop below the very healthy 5% level.

BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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EMAIL LISTS

The BPA has four email lists: bpa-news, bpa-issues, bpa-misc and bpa-job-postings. They are hosted at Google Groups. To join bpa-news, go to <http://groups.google.com/group/bpa-news> and click on "Join this group." Similarly for the other lists.

For more information on these email lists, go to the BPA home page—<http://www.bpaonline.org> and click on the button "BPA Email Lists."

Matadero Creek Restoration Project

By Susan Stansbury

Barron Park has a beautiful natural asset, Matadero Creek, flowing in a mostly natural streambed under a predominately oak canopy. Unfortunately, non-native, invasive vegetation grows in many places along the creek and reduces the habitat value of our “riparian corridor.” These invasive plants, including Periwinkle (AKA, Vinca major), Algerian Ivy and Cotoneaster, did not co-evolve with our local wildlife. A close look at the leaves of these plants show that no one is eating them! Native vegetation on the other hand, is usually well nibbled by a wide variety of insects that move the energy from the plants into frogs, birds and other wildlife.

Plans to restore the vegetation in public areas of Matadero Creek are coming to fruition. This project is spearheaded by the Barron Park Green Team in collaboration with the Barron Park Association and restoration experts from the non-profit, Acterra. The Barron Park Green Team decided to adopt the project and launched the effort by walking the creek with staff



Golden Currant

Please join us! You can RSVP at <http://www.eventbrite.com/org/1232645539> and get more details from Susan Stansbury at stansbury-susan@gmail.com.

Volunteers will be removing some of the invasive non-natives and replacing them with native local species such as woodland strawberries, irises, CA hazelnuts and currants. These site-appropriate plants are currently being propagated and nurtured in Acterra’s local native plant nursery. The selection of plants is based upon their suitability for the location, their beauty and their habitat value. The cost of the plants is being covered through a grant from the Women’s Club of Palo Alto and other

support is coming from the Santa Clara Valley Water District.

The workdays were set for early fall to take advantage of the winter rains to get the plants established. The plants will then be monitored to make sure they have enough water, and if needed, will receive extra water until they are self sufficient with the winter rains. After this site is fully established, other public sites along the creek will be considered for future projects.



Woodland Strawberries

In addition, the Green Team will be planning some educational events around the creek. To find out more, visit the Barron Park Green Team’s website at: <http://www.pagreenteams.org/content/barron-park>



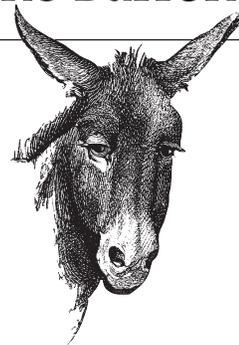
Pacific Coast Iris

from the Santa Clara Valley Water District, Acterra and the City of Palo Alto to identify potential sites. A community meeting followed in June, where over 20 neighbors came together to talk about the project.

After some discussion, a unanimous decision was made to start in Bol Park near the steps that enter the creek. The initial workdays are set for Saturday, October 15th and Saturday, November 5th from 10 am–1 pm.

Help Support the Barron Park Donkeys!

All those who care about Perry and Niner seek to guarantee their proper on-going care and shelter, as well as to ensure that funds will be available for health concerns as the donkeys age. The handlers hope that those generous neighbors who have contributed in the past will consider increasing their support this year. Contributions for the donkeys’ care may be sent to: The Palo Alto Donkey Project, ACTERRA (Action for a Sustain-



able Earth), 3921 East Bayshore Road, Palo Alto, CA 94303-4303. The check must be made out to “ACTERRA-Palo Alto Donkey Fund.” All of the above must be included.

For further information about making a contribution on behalf of the donkeys, or if you would like information about how to become one of the volunteer donkey handlers, please call Bob Frost, 493-8272 or email at bobfrost34@yahoo.com.

Palo Alto's New Bicycle Plan and Its Impact in Barron Park

By Art Liberman



At the end of July the City of Palo Alto released a draft of the 2011 City of Palo Alto Bicycle + Pedestrian Transportation Plan

(BPTP). This is part of the Comprehensive Plan update program in which the City is required to “... periodically update, and implement, a bicycle facilities improvement program that prioritizes critical pedestrian and bicycle links to parks, schools, retail centers, and civic facilities.”

The new plan updates one crafted in 2003, and its objective is to make our city more livable and our environment more sustainable by increasing bicycling and walking in Palo Alto. These are objectives that all of us can embrace.

The plan recognizes the absence of sidewalks and bike lanes on most of our streets. Even though many are narrow, we don't have cross streets with heavy traffic or major arteries. So bicycles are already a popular mode of transportation, and most of the recommendations in the BPTP are aimed at increasing the use of bicycles even further and at bicycle safety.

The BPTP was prepared for the City by a consultant with input from the Palo Alto Bicycle Advisory Committee (PABAC). It examines the current network of shared paths and streets in terms of safety, convenience and accessibility to people of all ages and abilities, and proposes some modifications and extensions. The BPTP is a comprehensive and lengthy document (130 pages plus another 130 page appendix) that deals with issues in all parts of Palo Alto.

BPTP Recommendations

At the end of the report, the top recommendations citywide in various categories (trails, bike lanes, street markings, etc.) are collected and prioritized; Jaime Rodriguez (Chief Transportation Official), said once the BPTP is approved by the

Council, City staff will begin design work within the next year or so on the top 3 priorities in each category, and he expects to address the top 5 within the next 5 years. This article is limited to the Barron Park recommendations in the BPTP.

I will not discuss the ongoing activity on Arastradero between El Camino to Foothill (these changes were proposed in the 2003 plan and the evaluation is still ongoing) nor a proposal from another study referenced in the BPTP to change El Camino to facilitate Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and provide bicycle lanes through the commercial area between California Avenue and Charleston/Arastradero Roads.

Bol Park Bike Path

The BPTP recognizes the value of the Bol Park Bike Path as a key bicycle and pedestrian corridor for Barron Park residents and those passing through our neighborhood. On any given day, many bicyclists use the Bol Park Bicycle Path on their way to Stanford, companies in the Research Park and the VA, and to classes at Gunn and Terman. The plan makes several recommendations (with my personal comments after each one) to enhance and extend the Bike Path.

1. Remove the barriers at the ends of Bike Path to improve safety and convenience. This recommendation is priority #2 for the *Trails* category. Maybe they can be modified, but it is perhaps inadvisable to remove them completely for several reasons. First, bicyclists must slow down now as they navigate the barriers to enter or exit the path, and for good reason. Without the barriers at the Laguna/Matadero end, bicyclists would likely just speed across the intersection. And since visibility from the roads in all directions is not good, this would put them at serious risk of being struck by cars. Another reason bicyclists need to slow down is for the safety of pedestrians. The Bike Path near Bol Park is heavily used by pedestri-

ans out for a stroll in the morning or early evening with their friends or with pets on a leash or pushing strollers and who may wander as they walk and could be struck by a fast moving bicycle, particularly one coming from behind. The Bol Park Bike Path, in the terminology of Bikeway classification, is a “Multi-User path, for use by both pedestrians and bicyclists,” which requires each party to give due consideration to the interests and safety of the other. Finally, the barriers were put in place originally to prevent motorcycles from using the Bike Path as a short cut from Foothill and Arastradero to the Research Park; removing the barriers might see them return.

2. Add Lighting along the length of the Bike Path to increase its usability and enhance its safety during early morning and evening hours. This recommendation is priority #3 in the *Trails* category. There were no further details of where the lights would be located or drawings of what they would look like. Residents whose homes are in the immediate vicinity of lighting need to be brought into the conversation.

3. Build a crossing of Matadero Creek to connect the Bol Park Bike Path with a private path in the Research Park. This was not included in the BPTP as a solid proposal, but rather as an ‘if feasible in the future’ idea. The new crossing and its route wasn't laid out, but would likely be in the vicinity of the Donkey Pasture. The private path, not specified in the BPTP, is probably one within the Tibco campus that connects with Hillview Ave. Bicyclists who now use the Bike Path to access that part of the Research Park must navigate a steep hill on Hanover St. in front of Lockheed, whereas the new crossing and connection would provide a flat trail to those Research Park locations.

Actually, a much easier way to make a connection to this area of the Research Park would be via the existing road net-

work in the VA campus. The VA rear entrance near the Bike Path is already used by those pedestrians (and some bicyclists) who are willing to cross a drainage ditch and then climb up a short hill. What's needed is for the City and the VA to cooperate and build a ramp and walkway into an upgraded VA rear entrance area. BPA Board Member Doug Moran had asked the City to look into this idea in May 2009 and argued this would also allow wheelchair bound VA patients to have access to Bol Park. But he learned that efforts at the City stopped when some inter-agency issues arose. Still, it is an excellent idea and a much simpler and more practical approach than building a completely new crossing of Matadero Creek.

4. Extend the Bol Park Bike Path to El Camino along the old railroad right of way through the Research Park to Hansen Way. Instead of turning sharply at the 'sound wall' at the edge of the Research Park, the proposed route would extend an arm of the Bol Park Bike Path in a straight line through the Varian parking lot behind the Cooley LLP building to Hansen Way. This proposal was also in the 2003 Bike Plan, but no action has been taken in the interim because the extension would require an easement by private property owners and tenants. However, an opportunity may come to discuss this in the near future as Varian is planning a new building on Hansen Way that is expected to be reviewed by the City's Architectural Review Board in September. Even though the footprint of this building would not impact the path of the proposed bike path extension, some may argue that impacts from construction of the building could be mitigated by Varian agreeing to allow an easement through its property.

Roadway Recommendations

The only way to make roads completely safe for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists is to physically separate the corridors into sidewalks, bicycle lanes and motor ways. But this is just about impossible anywhere in Barron Park. Most of our streets are too narrow for dedicated bicycle lanes and we don't have many sidewalks (the exception being Maybell, a bicycle boulevard that is heavily used by

youngsters in Barron Park and those coming from West Meadow/El Camino Way on their way to Terman and Gunn). So, cars generally must share the road ways with bicyclists and often with pedestrians as well.

Most of the Barron Park roadway improvements called for in the BPTP are pole mounted bikeway route signs and shared roadway markers ('sharrows'—painted roadway markings that have the wide shape of the arrow combined with the bike symbol). Raising the visibility to motorists that the roads are shared would enhance the safety of bicyclists and possibly heighten motorists' awareness that pedestrians may also be on the streets. A map of Barron Park area in the BPTP proposes these markings to be placed on our collector streets: La Donna, Laguna, Los Robles, Amaranta and Matadero, and on Josina and the section of Barron Ave near the school. This recommendation is priority #4 in the *Bike Lane/Sharrows Roadway Striping* category.

The BPTP singles out Matadero, along with Margarita on the other side of El Camino, as part of a proposed new 'bicycle boulevard.' This recommendation is priority #3 in the *Bicycle Boulevards* category. This new bicycle boulevard would connect the Bol Park Bike Path to Park Ave on the new Castelleja-Park-Wilkie corridor, an existing bikeway slated for bicycle boulevard upgrades in 2011. Matadero-Margarita would not be same type of bicycle boulevard. Matadero Avenue is a narrow collector arterial with significant neighborhood traffic while bicycle boulevards are defined in the BPTP as "signed, shared roadways with especially low motor vehicle volume, such that motorists passing bicyclists can use the full width of the roadway." It's not clear what will happen on Matadero—perhaps some additional signage or traffic calming measures, but any decisions will require some discussion with the community.

Matadero also has a poor connection across El Camino Real to Margarita. The BPTP recommends intersection changes that would assist bicycle and pedestrian crossing traffic. But El Camino is a state

highway so any changes must be approved by Cal Trans. Early this year Cal Trans, after being asked by the City to change the crosswalks (following a request by Barron Park resident Doug Hebbel), agreed to a) install a "NO RIGHT TURN ON RED" sign for northbound El Camino traffic at the existing crosswalk (no right turn on red onto Margarita), b) initiate a project to replace the existing pedestrian signal indications with countdown pedestrian signals, and c) remove the existing pedestrian push button in the median on the north side. The timetable for these changes was not defined as the work depends upon obtaining funds from the severely stressed State budget.

The BPTP recommends restriping several other El Camino crosswalks to make them more visible and to add other roadway markings to increase the visibility of bicyclists, in particular at the Los Robles - El Camino intersection. There is a reason why this intersection is specifically mentioned; the BPTP listed the intersections with the highest pedestrian and bicycle collisions in Palo Alto between 2004 and 2009, and only one of these intersections, with 8 bicycle collisions, is in Barron Park : at Los Robles at El Camino. This recommendation is priority #1 for *Intersection Improvements*.

What's Next: City Review and Actions

The Planning & Transportation Commission is scheduled to discuss the BPTP at its September 14th meeting, and the City Council at its October 17th meeting. It is important to remember this is just a plan, and that concrete action on any of the recommendations will not happen immediately. Each recommendation will require further Staff work, meetings with residents and affected community representatives, coordination with other City Departments (particularly Public Works, since a high priority is to place new street markings on new roadway surfaces) and identification of sources of funding. The Arastradero roadway changes now underway were proposed in the 2003 plan. A new pedestrian-bike overpass of Route 101 near Adobe Creek was also proposed in the 2003 plan and is now just being designed.

Palo Alto's Low-income Utility Discount and Energy Saving Home Improvements HELP MAKE OUR CITY GREEN—IT'S FREE!

By Nancy Hamilton

I was told that the work crew has about 200 homes left on the low-income sign-ups to do, then they'll start on the middle-income group. So don't delay if you might qualify. Or you have a friend or neighbor who may.



Until recently, I was unaware of The City of Palo Alto's low income discount of approximately 20% from utility bills.

About a year ago I signed up. Then came a letter from the City telling me that to continue to receive the discount, I had to allow an inspection of my home. This was for diagnosing energy-wasting appliances and home insulation needs, but it frightened me.

I wanted no one telling me I needed new wiring, new appliances, a new furnace, or forcing other things on me that I didn't want. But I called them. A pleasant gentleman set up an appointment with me, then diagnosed my house. He was only interested in replacing things I agreed to, and quickly eased my fears.

After waiting for about a month, an articulate young man came to my house. He replaced only light bulbs that I agreed to throughout the house, which sometimes included new fixtures, outdoor fixtures and bulbs as well. I was given a choice of color surrounding the fixtures, and he patiently explained in detail how differently each lighting source appears in daylight or darkness. A plus of the outdoor lights is that they only work when the sun goes down, then they shut off in daylight. Wow, an automatic timer if I ever get away!

He caulked under my sinks so bugs wouldn't get in, and offered a new hand-held shower nozzle, or a dual outlet which would accommodate both my

regular overhead shower nozzle and a hand-held one. After replacing the aerating filter on my kitchen faucet with one that worked the same as my old one, but also pulled down into a "shower" mode, he promised to come back three days later (when it was more convenient for me) to weather-strip all of my doors, and mend large gaps underneath a few that the north wind used to blow through during storms.

They also replaced my attic insulation which was very flat after 30 years of hot summers and cold nights.

After all of this work was completed, they checked for gas leaks in my furnaces and stove. They found none, but if they had, there are services available for low-income households to remedy the situation with no or little cost.

Feeling guilty about receiving all of this for free, I mentioned it to Mr. Smith, who originally diagnosed my problems. He told me, "You've paid into this fund every year you've paid your Palo Alto Utilities bill. See the line which says: Public Benefits? That's the fund we're tapping to help make our community green."

To qualify for this benefit, contact the City of Palo Alto Utilities at (650) 329-2161. You'll receive a form where you're not asked the value of your property or how much money you have in savings, only about your monthly/yearly income level and the number of persons in your household. You might be surprised that you qualify. It's NOT charity! It might apply to renters as well as homeowners.

I'm very thankful, and wanted to share this with other seniors on fixed incomes as well as out-of-work folks or people who just aren't making much money. I can't guarantee that the city's contractor will have or offer everything I've mentioned above, but please don't fear assistance. You've been paying for it!

BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION

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BPA meetings are held the 3rd

Tuesday of most months at 7:15 p.m.

Call Lynnne Melena for location: 493-2135

www.bpaonline.org

BARRON PARK EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS: A personal perspective on a bit of history and a bit of philosophy

By Douglas Moran



In Palo Alto, much of the push for Emergency Preparedness (E-prep) has come from the neighborhood associations, especially Barron Park and

Midtown. The BPA's involvement goes back at least to the early 1980s—see Inge Harding-Barlow's article in the previous BPA Newsletter (Summer 2011).

My perspective on E-prep is different from many of the other volunteers because it is a blend of several of the perspectives that you find in these groups. First, I was a victim in one of the hardest hit areas of the 1972 hurricane Agnes which produced flooding similar to that of hurricane Katrina (2005, New Orleans). Second, my professional background is Information Technology, and a substantial portion of my career involved advanced prototypes sponsored by the military. The ability to act and react faster is one of the US military's key advantages over opponents, and how it *handles* information is central to this capability. It is not enough to just have better information, you need to push it out faster to the people who need it, and in a form that they can readily use. When I moved on to Computer Security, I found that most of the people developing systems and procedures had no sense of the urgency and constraints imposed on someone in the middle of a cyber-attack. These experiences put me at odds with many of the other people working on E-prep in how we should approach the chaos inherent in a disaster. Third, Information Technology has shaped my approach to civics and *vice versa*: A large neighborhood is far more diverse in many ways than the typical online community, and accentuates various problems.

This article mentions a variety of difficulties that we have had working with the City over the years in this area. The intent is not to criticize individuals or groups, but to highlight issues of organizational culture and dynamics. I could have been much more effective if someone had given me a *heads-up* in this area. Understanding the implicit limits on where and how the

City is effective demonstrates the critical role of volunteers, both in pushing the City and in doing tasks that the City cannot be expected to perform.

The modern era of E-prep in Palo Alto

On May 17th 2004, a mountain lion had wandered deep into Palo Alto, northeast of Middlefield and Embarcadero, and was eventually shot. Although this had occurred near several elementary schools and included the time that children were walking to school, the City did not issue an alert to residents. Then, on June 6th in late morning, a bobcat was sighted first on Hubbart Drive (below Gunn) and then in Bol Park. It was probably the bobcat that had frequently been seen in the pre-dawn hours on Roble Ridge. On this day, it may have been delayed getting home to bed, or may have been flushed from its bed. However, because of the earlier incident, this bobcat was reported as being a mountain lion. This time the City used its Teleminder telephone-based alerting system.

When I received the alert several hours later, I pushed it out to the BPA email list because I knew how slow the Teleminder system was. Back on the afternoon of Saturday July 31 1999, a walker on the bike path behind Gunn High School was attacked (weapon was a hammer), but I didn't receive the Teleminder alert until late Tuesday. Fortunately, one of the people who had witnessed the attack and intervened to drive off the attacker had then used the BPA email list to alert the neighborhood. *Aside*: At that time, the existence and use of a neighborhood email list had enough novelty that it made local TV news (KPIX, Channel 5).

The responses to my email indicated that there were much bigger problems with the Teleminder system than just it being very slow: Some residents didn't get the alert and others got garbled or incomplete messages. I reported this to BPA E-Prep chair Patrick Muffler and he, being a scientist, had the same reaction that I did: "We need to get data on this." He did an email survey of the neighborhood and sent the

results to the City. The problems turned out to be even bigger than we imagined.

In pursuing these problems with the City, we discovered that there were problems not just with the technology, but with the policy. First, the policy for when to use the alerting system was so highly restrictive that it was very rarely used, and thus during the heat of the situation, the police didn't remember that it was available. Second, the policy had a Catch-22: Reports by residents had to wait to be confirmed by a biologist from the state Department of Fish and Game, which would typically take several hours, but if a sighting was several hours old, it no longer qualified as urgent enough to justify an alert. As demonstrated by the episode with the misidentified bobcat, wanting confirmation was not unreasonable, but there needed to be a better balance between certainty and timeliness.

Because of constant agitation by the neighborhoods, it took only three years to get a replacement for the Teleminder system. That system, the *Community Alerting and Notification System (CANS)*, has since been merged into AlertSCC, the county-wide version of that system. (Aside: I was responsible for the CANS acronym and associated logo). However, we failed to get the City to put in place interim measures, and that failure carries important lessons.

This effort was led by the co-chairs of Palo Alto Neighborhoods (PAN), the umbrella group for Palo Alto's neighborhood associations, plus Patrick Muffler (BPA E-prep). Those co-chairs were Annette Glanckopf Ashton of Midtown (and later Sheri Furman), Karen White of Duveneck/St. Francis, and me. As an interim measure, we offered to the City the use of the neighborhood email lists, both for a duplicate copy of alerts being sent by Teleminder and to allow for the sending of notifications that did not qualify for Teleminder (intrusive telephone call). In rejecting our repeated offers, the City said that: (1) because not all residents used email, it was unfair to send emails to anyone, and (2) people who did use email may not want to sign up for one of the neighborhood email lists. We offered to set up a separate email

list exclusively for alerts for such people, but the City rejected this. While the City's concern about equitable treatment is virtuous in most circumstances, here it resulted in paralysis. It even extended to situations that appeared to be insignificant: While the City didn't object to individual residents redistributing alerts to the various email lists, the City refused to facilitate this by putting such people at the top of the list when alerts were sent out (a feature built into the alerting software).

This process forcefully reminded me of the warped incentives—positive and negative—that government staff work under. In a normal collaboration, you want to make sure that the other parties get appropriate credit for the achievements. Yet in my dealings with a range of government agencies, not just the City, I have gotten blank stares when I raised this. Blame is another matter. A seemingly endless series of seemingly technical objections to using email made no sense to me until I realized that using email lists run by volunteers meant that the City staff would have little control but would retain responsibility, and thus would likely be doubly blamed for less-than-perfect results. On the other hand, remember that this was being proposed as an interim measure at a time the City had no viable alternative (other than hope that Teleminder didn't malfunction too badly).

There were also fundamental differences between the "government culture" and the "techie culture" on how best to handle a disaster, with the former heavily focused on top-down management and control, and the reliability of individual components. In contrast, one of the first things you learn as an engineer is how to build a more reliable system out of less reliable components. You also learn that failures are inevitable and to try to constrain them to manageable levels. For example, my sense was that another part of the reason the City didn't want to use multiple existing email lists for alerting was that they saw multiple lists as requiring more management, more control and more opportunities for something to go wrong, and that that was worth the costs of people having to subscribe to a new list, especially the "cost" of people not getting alerts because they didn't sign up. We techies saw the multiple lists as redundancy, such that the failure of any one of them would be mitigated by many of its subscribers getting the alert indirectly through people on the other lists.

As a techie and Silicon Valley denizen, I continue to be surprised by how little the concepts and attitudes underlying the Internet have penetrated the world of E-prep. After all, its core design principle was survivability and resilience (to Global Thermonuclear War), and its success is due to how easily you can add to it.

Now that we have an alerting system, use it

The City is haltingly moving away from its old policy of using the alerting system only in the most extreme situations and trying to find the right balance. But there have been situations that were serious enough for nearby schools to be locked down where the immediate neighbors were not alerted. For example, a resident saw the police searching her backyard and sent a query to the neighborhood email list, and found out from another resident who had gotten a text message from her daughter at a locked-down school that there was an armed robber on the loose. The alerting system should have been used to tell residents in the immediate area of this threat, to stay inside and lock their doors. Furthermore the police could have made use of the eyes and ears of those residents by telling them what to be looking for.

An E-Prep Dilemma

These incidents show one of the core dilemmas of E-prep: Emergencies are very special events and as such seem to call for special measures and equipment, but the experience has been that too often those preparations fail. Sometimes stuff works in small scale drills and tests, but doesn't scale up to full usage. Sometimes it is equipment overheating when it is in continuous use, or the equivalent for the people operating the equipment (expecting them to go without bathroom breaks or sleep). When there isn't a budget to periodically test equipment, the natural deterioration that comes with age can go unnoticed. Or it can be that the assumptions underlying the design no longer are valid. For example, the basic design of the telephone alerting systems that I have seen assumes that a household has a single telephone, and it is a landline. While these systems then cobbled on some acknowledgment of cell phones, Internet phones (VoIP), Text Messaging and email as alternatives to the landline, the design has *not* shifted to treating these devices as belonging to individuals who move around, rather than

a household at a geographic location.

These problems are compounded by the human part of the equation. People sometimes simply forget about the special procedures, as in the mountain lion incident. Other times, they simply decide not to use these special procedures because the cost/benefit ratio is too high: working through an unfamiliar procedure takes too much of one's mental budget relative to what it might achieve. When people are overwhelmed by the number of decisions that they need to make, they try to cope by budgeting their mental resources by not thinking as carefully as they normally would. And mental stress compounds the problem by reducing the mental energy you have to apply to decision-making. Most of us refer to situations where we are "over budget" as *mental exhaustion*, but researchers also refer to it by terms such as *decision fatigue* and *ego depletion* (for those who want to pursue this topic).

Priority: Reduce the mental deficit

In a disaster, there is inevitably going to be great stress and confusion. One important way to help people be more effective is reduce their mental deficits, thereby leaving them more energy to invest in the important decisions that they will need to make.

The first part of this is to *reduce* the two major sources of energy-sapping stress: uncertainty and a sense of loss of control. It is quite common to see disaster victims reduced to a near vegetative state because no one is telling them what is going on or what they can do to help. Improving Palo Alto's alerting system was an entry point into addressing this larger problem.

The second part is to reduce the *number* and *difficulty* of decisions you need to make. For example, how are you going to contact your family when the phone system is overwhelmed? And what are you going to eat, and how are you going to prepare it? If some of these predictable problems are addressed in advance, you will be able to focus more on the important things that inevitably pop up. One of easiest ways to reduce the load is to work cooperatively with the people around you. Not only can you spread out the decision-making, but the various people can contribute materials and ideas that reduce how much effort you have to dedicate to figuring out work-arounds. Conventional e-prep focuses on families in isolation from the communities around them. A major push of the current

efforts is to make the community a significant part of the preparations.

The third part is to avoid the trap of special equipment and measures that won't be used. Instead you want to see where you can blend what will be important in emergency operations into your day-to-day operations as a way to keep people trained. Although the first impression is that this is adding an unnecessary burden to normal operations, such a review can reveal problems, inefficiencies and poor priorities in those normal operations, leading to improvements.

Improving communications with the community

Much of the City's communications with residents is a legacy of the days when they FAXed a press release to the newspapers, with the public reading a rehash days later. The adoption of email for distribution has been slow and erratic. The first came with a few individuals who were managing construction projects in Public Works and in Utilities: They found that certain neighborhood email lists could be a valuable supplement to the hardcopy notices they were required to put on doorsteps. This occurred primarily in Barron Park because of lobbying and prompting by me, and also because so many of the residents were on the list that notifications there had visible impacts were visibly appreciated.

The first City department to make use of the neighborhood email lists as a matter of practice was Planning, under its current Director Curtis Williams. The City Clerk has recently started making use of these lists.

One of the persistent problems is that the formatting of most of these emails is still stuck in the days of FAXes: logos and boilerplate at the top, and text whose layout is best suited for a sheet of paper. I and other list managers often reformat these messages to be more suitable to how email is read, especially on mobile devices. The people sending these messages don't know, or remember, that some cell phones cannot handle the PDF or MS-Word formats, and that messages in these formats can be tens to hundreds of times larger than they need be. This will be an important consideration when the cell networks are overloaded, as in a disaster. Although people understand the problem, they don't see the need to change in advance: They believe that they will remember to do such, and that there

will be no glitches. My professional experience is very much to the contrary, but we don't have space for my "war stories".

Changing attitudes: We're not a bunch of YOYO's

Part of our agenda in getting the City to send more and better messages to residents is to help change attitudes about the role of residents, especially as it would play out in a disaster. In 2004, the City's E-prep presentation was typical of most government agencies: *In a disaster, we will be so overwhelmed that you should not expect to see us for days.* This position even has a name: *You're On Your Own (YOYO).* Although a number of our City leaders were uncomfortable with this, recognizing it as an abrogation of government's basic responsibilities to its citizens, it wasn't until PAN started pushing on this that it began to change.

In conventional disaster plans, residents are viewed as little more than inanimate objects, to be gotten out of the way, and then warehoused or exported. In contrast, the common experience, including mine, is that people come together in these situations. Not only are they valuable resources, but being able to help during a disaster is important for their mental health.

The Red Ribbon Task Force

Palo Alto had a forum for the various E-prep groups called the *Citizen Corps Council (CCC)*, but this had largely degenerated into representatives of the various groups explaining to each other what their organizations would do in the event of a disaster. Most were local units of national organizations that had long-established goals and practices, and this both focused and limited what they would do. Various of the representatives who had worked in actual disasters acknowledged that while consistency was a virtue that helped you be more efficient and effective, there often was an inflexibility in both their own organization and others that crossed the line into being a "foolish consistency" that impaired their effectiveness, both in their own activities and what could be done through *ad hoc* cooperation.

One of the key complaints I heard from various members of the CCC was that its structure didn't facilitate getting to the level of detail that would identify these problems, and thereby encourage bridging the gaps between organizations. They were very aware of this problem because

they would occasionally stumble upon instances of disconnects. For example, the hospitals and major clinics thought that the County Health Department maintained stockpiles of critical medical supplies for a disaster, and that they could easily draw upon these. Consequently, their inventories of those supplies were suitable for their normal use, and not what would be needed in a disaster. However, County Health had only a small inventory of such supplies and its disaster plan was to manage the redistribution of the (non-existent) stockpiled surpluses between hospitals. The supposition is that at one point both County Health and the hospitals had such stockpiles, but with the improved reliability of the supply chain in normal times and with budget cuts, each decided, without consulting the other, that their stockpile was redundant and could therefore be reduced. *Aside:* That CCC has since been disbanded and a similar organization bearing that same name has been created.

When Judy Kleinberg became mayor in 2006, her long-term interest in E-prep led her to create the *Red Ribbon Task Force (RRTF)*, with it intended to be a results-oriented variant of the CCC. Unfortunately this was not to be. Because a mayor serves for only a year, the plan of action needs to be effectively completed before the Council break in August to allow enough time for implementation. This precluded a phased scaling up of the RRTF, resulting in too many people thrown together at one time, and it proved impossible to get past the talking phase.

The RRTF did have limited successes. First, it significantly raised the profile of E-prep. Second, it broadened the range of groups participating in E-prep, and introduced the new participants to the established organizations. For me, the critical achievement of the RRTF was that it legitimized the participation of residents in E-prep activities at the City level, with multiple neighborhood representatives being invited members of this group. The neighborhood representatives were among the most active participants of the RRTF, becoming the majority of the Executive Committee selected by Mayor Kleinberg. This was partly because we weren't constrained by a pre-defined role, but largely because our focus was on the practical questions of what residents could actually expect from these organizations during a disaster and what could be done to improve the situation.

In an unusual measure, the RRTF was extended for an additional year. It decided to have as its focus a state-wide disaster preparedness exercise (“*Golden Guardian*”, November 2007). The local portion of the drill was a bio-terror attack at a concert in San Jose that would not be detected until after attendees had left the event, thereby spreading the disease regionally. The City of Palo Alto considered playing a tiny role, practicing setting up a station to distribute medication to residents and testing it with a few dozen volunteers. However, it would be several more years before this could be demonstrated.

The neighborhoods took a two-pronged approach to participating. The first was the beginning of the Block Preparedness Coordinator (BPC) system, and was intentionally designed to not require any participation from the City or the other disaster response organizations, but it left open the possibility for them. However, only the California Avenue Area Development Association (CAADA) joined in this and subsequent exercises. Unfortunately, their driving force, Ronna Devincenzi, resigned as chair in 2010 in the aftermath of the City cutting down trees in the shopping district.

The second prong was to use this exercise as a vehicle to test the City’s newly installed alerting system (CANS, now AlertSCC). Remembering the problems with the Teleminder system, the primary goal was to confirm not just that the calls were being placed, but that the *message* was actually being received and understood. Secondly, the exercise would allow the system operators to practice with various aspects of the system in non-trivial situations, and would allow them to identify problems that actual residents might have in following the instructions in the messages. However, the person in charge of the system (now retired) was averse to testing the system, so this didn’t occur.

PAN E-prep Committee

As the RRTF was winding down, the neighborhood representatives created their own committee under the auspices of Palo Alto Neighborhoods (PAN) and chaired by Annette Glanckopf Ashton of Midtown. This committee gradually grew to include representatives of many of neighborhoods and neighborhood-like groups, such as Channing House (a neighborhood in a single large building). And other groups, such as the Red Cross and Palo Alto Medi-

cal Foundation, have participated at times.

At first, many of the members of the committee argued that the primary focus should be on activities to get individual households better prepared for a disaster. I argued long and hard against this, and eventually prevailed, mostly. My argument was that such activities had been going on for decades, and were past the point of *diminishing returns*, that while there was still a need to do some of this, the effort invested should be geared to the expected small improvements. Countering the argument “*But this time it will be different!*”, I couldn’t resist quoting Einstein “*Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.*” I also pointed out that there were many established organizations already doing this, and asked if we would have any special advantage (we didn’t) and what was to be gained by replicating those efforts.

Although this argument quickly resonated with some, it was a difficult argument for many to accept because it required a radical shift in thinking. The standard E-prep plan begins with “*Every family must be prepared to survive on their own for 72 hours,*” and anyone interested in E-prep has heard this mantra countless times. Also many of the people involved in E-prep are there because they are convinced it is very important, and thus they can have a hard time understanding why such preparations weren’t a priority for everyone else.

This mantra is not only unrealistic, but has pernicious effects on disaster planning. First, it encourages the planners to make unrealistic assumptions, grossly underestimating the assistance that residents will need, and thereby encouraging them to neglect this aspect of a disaster. Second, it often inhibits measures that could reduce the very problem. A routine accompaniment of the mantra is that people who have supplies also need to be prepared to fight off their neighbors who will attempt to forcibly take those supplies for themselves (echoing the days of the family fallout shelter in the early 1960s). In real disasters, people don’t isolate themselves but come together and work cooperatively, but a lot of supplies and opportunities are wasted because people are too frazzled to carefully think through plans on the spot. For example, during a power outage, an *unopened* refrigerator or freezer can be effective for up to several days depending on various factors (keeping food safe enough

to be cooked, but *not* to go back to being stored). A group of families can reduce waste by opening their refrigerators one at a time, sharing among them the contents of each.

One of the problems with today’s highly reliable technology is that it encourages people to become highly dependent on it while depriving them of the experience of what to do when it fails. For example, when blizzards in the eastern US knocked out electrical power for days, people were complaining about the problems of not being able to charge their cell phones. Yet they didn’t think to use their cars as rechargers, both when driving around and from the battery (*caution*: current automotive batteries typically don’t have as much reserve power as in days of yore).

I have argued that preparing such advice should be a major focus for PAN E-prep Committee because the Block Preparedness Coordinator (BPC) program would be one of the best distribution channels during a disaster. Little has been done on this because most of the effort is being put into establishing the basic BPC program, but volunteers interested in this could easily work in parallel.

The PAN E-prep committee has become too large and unwieldy to take direct action, although occasionally we forget this. Instead, it is a good venue to bring ideas to see if there is enough city-wide applicability and interest to be worth pursuing, and to recruit the necessary range of volunteers. The committee has a very diverse range of perspectives and expertise and can provide valuable critiquing and other feedback: People enthusiastic enough to pursue an idea often fail to ask the hard questions of themselves. A common situation is that people identify information that would be good to have when a disaster occurs, and focus on collecting it, but forget that it needs to be maintained so that it is reasonably up-to-date when needed. And they forget to consider whether it will be in a form that can easily be given to those that need it. These sorts of questions are a reflex for me because of professional experience. My most memorable variant of this problem was encountered in the 1980s: The US Navy would send out long-range anti-submarine patrol aircraft with highly detailed forecasts of ocean conditions, but these were often obsolete by the time the aircraft arrived in the patrol area, and with no updating capability, the crews had

to proceed on their intuitions. One crew member stated that much of the paper this was printed on wound up being used only for toilet paper, and they would have greatly preferred the real thing.

The PAN Block Preparedness Coordinator (BPC) program

In the major disaster I was in, teenage boys played an outsized role, and it was their *geographically-based* social network that was more important than their muscles. Within a neighborhood, they had established social and working relationships that made it easy to assemble teams that were immediately cohesive. And they knew the leaders in other neighborhoods, both near and far, facilitating larger scale cooperation and coordination. Although adults often wound up leading these larger groups, it was often the sons who were largely responsible for assembling them.

But this was a different time and place: That was almost 40 years ago—I was 21 at the time. The primary goal of the BPC program is to have social networks here that could fulfill this role in a disaster. The BPCs would be on a priority list for receiving information from the City to redistribute to residents. And they would help get information from the residents to the City and other disaster response organizations: They would know, or be told, what information needed to be collected, whom best to send it to, and how to format it so that it could readily be acted on. Most importantly, because they had already established contact with the households in their area, this would help them facilitate getting people to work together, both by encouragement and by providing suggestions on what to do. Although other leaders may well emerge on the block during a disaster, the BPC's leadership during the initial period has the important role of minimizing the social awkwardness that often stymies effective action while a group is forming.

The ideal BPC would actually be a couple that was at home most of the time (so they would be there when the disaster struck). One of them would be highly social, for example, spending lots of time gardening in the front yard, and would know and be known by the neighbors. The other half of the couple would be interested in the details of E-prep.

PAN BPCs and CERTs

Since the beginning of the BPC program there has been confusion with the CERT

program, and questions why the BPC program should not just be part of the CERT program. Until recently, the CERTs (Community Emergency Response Teams) were called PANDAs (Palo Alto Neighborhood Disaster Activity). They are residents who have taken a series of courses that will allow them to assist the Fire Department, for example, walking an area and reporting preliminary damage assessments. During an emergency, they are to report to their assigned fire station and would be sent to where they are most needed.

In contrast, the BPCs are expected to stay on their blocks and provide coverage there. Additionally, although there is some overlap in the training for CERTs and BPCs, requiring the BPCs to have the irrelevant portions of the CERT training could be a significant impediment to recruiting appropriate BPCs.

Although the BPC program benefits from endorsement and support by the City, it is better as a grassroots program, maintaining the flexibility to adapt to what the volunteers are willing and capable of doing, rather than being constrained by a balky official decision-making process.

Historical aside: Barron Park residents played a significant role in the creation of the PAN-DA program in the mid-1990s and were a substantial portion of the first class (Art Bayce, Katie Edwards, Inge Harding-Barlow, Jack Paddock, and “Perky” Perkins).

Exercises

Exercises are important for testing your plans, finding what works and what needs to be fixed. A good exercise is designed to blend both success and failure. There are portions that you are confident will work, and are intended to provide training and practice. Then there are portions that you hope will work, but need to be tested. These inevitable reveal substantial flaws and false assumptions, and importantly serve to deflate hubris. Finally, there are the experiments that you fully expect to fail, but in instructive ways that simplify creating first drafts of plans for them.

Some exercises are focused on your own plans; others focus on testing the interaction with other groups.

Historical aside: In 1987, the BPA E-prep Committee worked with the City to conduct an evacuation drill in part of neighborhood (led by Inge Harding-Barlow). One of the problems highlighted was that

the loudspeakers on the fire trucks were not heard by many residents, but this problem went unaddressed, occurring for real ten years later during flooding from San Francisquito Creek.

City's Pending Revision of Disaster Plans

One of the problems with the typical disaster plan is that it plans to fail: It starts off with the stated expectation that the organization's normal resources and procedures will be inadequate to handle the demand created in a disaster, and then goes on to try to determine how to select and respond to the cases that it will handle, and thereby implicitly accepting that it will badly fail to meet its mission for the majority of cases. Rarely is there any attempt to think how they might quickly scale-up their capacity to better meet demand, recruiting and quickly training people and getting them resources.

For example, during a talk by a member of a medical unit sent to help after Hurricane Katrina, the speaker showed pictures of long corridors at the New Orleans basketball arena filled with people on stretchers with *no* attendants in sight. He said that people probably died from lack of simple attention. I asked if they had attempted to recruit locals to help with this, and pointed out that a few hundred feet away at the Superdome there were probably many such attendants, people who worked in nursing homes, hospitals and home care. His response was that his unit didn't try because their procedures had no provision for such. He mentioned that they wouldn't be able to verify the qualifications of the volunteers, another apparent example of how governmental concern about liability issues requires a level of perfection that isn't practical.

One example of scaling up would be that when traffic lights aren't functioning during a power outage to use people to direct traffic rather than have 4-way stops. My experience having done such was that an ordinary resident in good physical condition can be quite effective with only a short briefing. And having people directing traffic greatly reduces congestion, speeds emergency vehicles to their destinations, simplifies getting relief supplies in, and helps ordinary people get home. Police Chief Burns has said that he is considering how best to do this, but there are undoubtedly many more such tasks.

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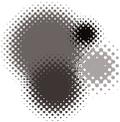
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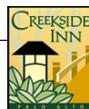
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