

BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

MAY FETE 2012 WAS A HUGE SUCCESS!



Photo by Doug Moran

[S T O R Y A N D M O R E P H O T O E S O N P A G E 2]

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MAY FETE 2012 WAS A HUGE SUCCESS!

By John King



The weather was the best in many years. The dancers and kids around the May Pole were perfectly coordinated by the annual dance coordinator and founder of the May Fete, Paul Edwards. A big thank you to our coordinators Larry Breed for the May Pole and Gary Breitbard for the musicians and dancers. Our event coordinator, Sarah Van Zanten, enlisted the help of her family and many friends to set up and run the event. The event was supported by a number of advertisers including, McLaren Fiskar who displayed their very cool car, Gwen Luce Realtor, John St. Clair and Lydia Kou Realtors, Ernie's Wines, Jim Davis Auto, John W. King Realtor, Driftwood Market, Carlsen Volvo, Mike's Cleaners, Classic Pet Grooming, Ace of Sandwiches and Subway. Thank you to the Palo Alto Police and Fire Departments for their presence, Copy Factory for programs and Barron Park Florist for the May Pole flowers. Also a thank you to the numerous other volunteers for handling the booths as well. I had the pleasure of handling the grill again this year.

Thanks for a great event. See you next year!



Photos by Doug Moran



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Lynnne Melena, BPA President

The Importance of Building Community



Why do some people put so much time and effort into the Barron Park Association? Why do they

spend hours on the May Fete, emergency preparedness, the newsletter, welcoming packet, organizing neighbors to resolve zoning issues? The list goes on. I ask myself that as I spend time week in and week out managing the flow of emails, setting up Board agendas, responding to questions from neighbors and outsiders and more.

I think the answer is that we believe in the value of "community." Sure, we have our personal interests—issues that we want to work on, but in the end it is because we believe our neighborhood is more than a collection of houses here in the southwestern quadrant of Palo Alto. We are a neighborhood with a name and a reputation. We are respected by City leaders. We have a genuine belief that we belong to something larger than a house on a street in Palo Alto. We belong to a community and we have to keep working at "building community."

A while ago, Lydia Kou wrote this essay below that speaks to the importance of belonging to a community. She was inspired by *The Different Drum* by M. Scott Peck, M.D.

What Does "Community" Mean to You?

By Lydia Kou

"Community." The word is used quite liberally and applied to almost any collection of individuals – a town, a church, a synagogue, a fraternal organization, an apartment complex, a professional association, neighborhood associations, PTAs, choir groups, and on and on.

So...What does "community" look like? How does "community" function? What is the true definition of "community"?

Unfortunately, the lack of community is often the norm today. As other cultures bring in their traditions and cultures, exclusion becomes the norm. If the word "community" is to be used meaningfully, then the facets of community have to be interconnected, profoundly interrelated. One cannot exist without the other. They create each other, make each other possible.

Community is commitment—the willingness to coexist with people with different views and opinions is crucial. Community requires that we hang in there.

Because a community includes members with many different points of view and

the freedom to express them, it comes to appreciate the whole of a situation far better than an individual, couple, or ordinary group can. With so many frames of reference, it approaches reality more and more closely. Realistic decisions, consequently, are more often guaranteed in community than in any other human environment.

While rugged individualism predisposes one to arrogance, the "soft" individualism of community leads to humility. Begin to appreciate each other's gifts, and you begin to appreciate your own limitations. Witness others sharing their brokenness, and you will become able to accept your own inadequacy and imperfection. Be fully aware of human variety, and you will recognize the interdependence of humanity.

The community-building process requires self-examination from the beginning. And as the members become thoughtful about themselves, they also learn to become increasingly thoughtful about the "community." No community can expect to be in perpetual good health. What a genuine community does do, however, because it is a contemplative body, is recognize its ill health when it occurs and quickly take appropriate action to heal itself.

With that said, I want to say with great gratitude to the Barron Park "community," you are that spirit bringing together the village, by your showing of acceptance, innovation and just simply, neighbor caring about neighbor.

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 Sustainable 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.

CORRECTION

By Mary Jane Leon

The article "Donkey Questions" in the Spring 2012 issue of this Newsletter had the wrong value for the cost of maintaining the donkeys. Routine maintenance actually runs around \$3000 a year.

ART IN THE PARK—RONA FOSTER

By Jen Hess

Well, it's time to try my hand at a spotlight on an artist living in the neighborhood. My first feature will be about Rona Foster. Rona hosted this year's Silicon Valley Open Studio at her home on 385 Timlott Court. I was one of the artists who had the pleasure of being hosted by her.

Rona recently had her home remodeled and as a part of that remodel she got a wonderful studio. The studio has lots of table space and shelves to display her pottery and some of her acrylic art on the walls. I can imagine spending time creating in that studio. It just lends itself to getting the creative juices flowing.

Rona has a real affinity for bright colors. She believes that this passion for the vibrant side of color comes from her experiences and joy from snorkeling in places like Hawaii, Cook Islands, Tahiti and Fiji. Some of her favorite subjects also are from sea life.

Rona's pottery fish resonate particularly with a wide variety of people. "Perhaps others are drawn to my fish for the same or similar reasons I am. I also think it's because the colors are bright and the fish are fun to look at. People often like to decorate their bathrooms with the fish I create."

Another piece of art people seem to be drawn to are her turtles. Rona says "There is a lovely story about the turtle being a wisdom keeper and guardian of long life. The turtle honors the element of earth and teaches us how to care for ourselves and those we love. She moves in her own timing. Many people resonate with this story. Besides the turtles I make are cute and colorful."

All artists begin their journey somewhere. For Rona, she started in high school. She took private pottery lessons starting when she was 18. She also took ceramics at the Palo Alto Art Center, Medocino Art Center, and the Sierra Nevada College summer visiting artists series.

Lately Rona, has been branching out into painting. She's really taken to working in acrylics. As with her sculpture, you will

find bright colors and a zest for life.

If you are interested in seeing Rona's work, you are free to schedule an appointment to stop by her studio. 3858 Timlott Court.

650-858-0589. She's a really great person to visit. I'm sure you will enjoy your time with her and will find the colors in her work to bring you joy.



JUANA RUN: It WAS Serious Fun!

By Greta Gize Olbrich



On Saturday, March 10, the Barron Park neighborhood was once again the site for a long-standing community tradition—it was the 16th Annual Juana Run. At 8:30 a.m., runners began the eight-kilometer race (that’s about five miles). We ran past Juana Briones School, onto Arastradero Road, past Gunn High, then followed the path over to Bol Park passing by the donkey paddock, down Matadero Avenue, cut over to Barron Avenue, past Barron Park School, then over to Los Robles Avenue. We all ended up back at Juana Briones School—some a lot sooner than others, but hey, it’s all about having fun and staying active, right?

At 10 a.m., the kids’ races began with 5th grade and continued until the pre-Kindergarten and Challenger races were over. The one-mile began at 11 a.m., down Amaranta Avenue, then over several blocks to Los Robles, and down Orme, back to Juana Briones. Music, a pancake breakfast, and other goodies served by local businesses kept the festivities going on the playground.

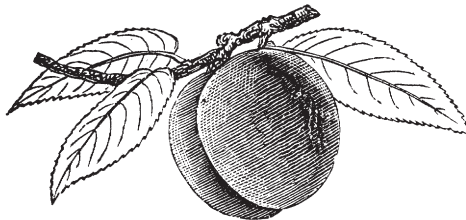
We had a record number of participants this year. 946 runners pre-registered, and 180 more people came to register the day of the race. Racers can check their results at www.juanarun.org. The 17th Annual Juana Run is tentatively set for March 2, 2013, so mark your calendars, lace up those shoes, and get ready! See you at the starting line!

If you’d like to get more involved in this wonderful neighborhood tradition, please visit www.juanarun.org for more information.

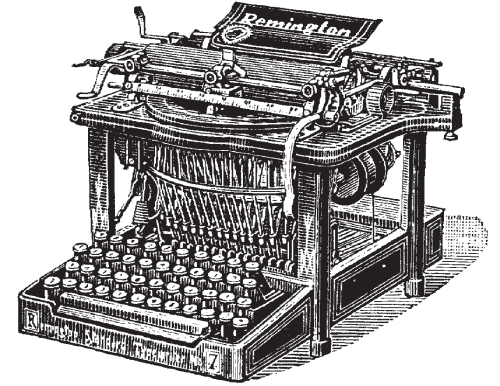
The Fruit of Our Trees

In the past three years, five residents in the Chimalus Drive area, and other areas in Barron Park have had fruit taken repeatedly from their trees without permission. Most residents are very willing to share nature’s bounty with others; all the residents request is the simple courtesy of asking permission. Some have had their entire tree(s) stripped of fruit, even physically damaging branches while taking the produce. These trees may be adjacent to streets and sidewalks; others are set back far from the street, so there is no question that the individuals are distinctly trespassing on private property.

At present, there is no clear idea how many are affected by this problem. Because of this, no meeting has been organized. If there is sufficient interest in discussing this problem and coming up with ways to deal with it, a meeting will be organized. If you’d like to be notified of a meeting date/place, please contact the BPA at ([bpa.trees at gmail dot com](mailto:bpa.trees@gmail.com)). Type “Fruit Picking” in the subject line. You’ll be contacted about a meeting date/time. At present, this is not a program organized or sponsored by the BPA. The newsletter is being used as a way to reach out to the most number of residents.



WE NEED REPORTERS!



Anyone interested in volunteering as a reporter for this newsletter?

Know someone who’s lived here a long time? Want to give us a bio on them? Know some newcomers? Anything interesting would be good. Not too long, and a few photos would be nice.

Cute stories, children and/or animal stories, and humorous articles are all welcome. Don’t worry about the way you write, we can edit.

Just a simple story of neighborhood happenings, or stories behind local businesses would help our neighborhood support them.

Deadlines are June 1st, Sept. 1st, Dec. 1st and Mar. 1st.

Submit to the editor, Nancy Hamilton at www.bpaonline.org/411/njh.html

Thank you.

BPA NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE

We have created PDF files of past newsletters. See the complete newsletters, including full-color photos!

The web editions of the BPA Newsletters usually appear one or two months after the paper editions are mailed. The files may take awhile to download (sizes given in advance).

BPA Website: <http://www.bpaonline.org>

PDF full color newsletter archive: www.bpaonline.org/www2/bp-news/index.html

EL CAMINO BUSINESS UPDATE

By Bob Moss

There have been a several business changes along El Camino in the past six months, some of which still are in progress. New businesses are E Wines and Liquors which took over the old Ernie's Liquors store at 3870; Nivio at 2865 (most recently occupied by AT&T); and Mary Bee Salon & Spa which filled the last space at 3636C where Maytag was. Smokes & More opened at 3896; Eli's Market at 3487 now is Valencia's Market, and a business seems to have occupied 3505 but there's no name on the door.

An unidentified business has applied for a beer and wine sales license at 3850 El Camino. This is the old Taco Bell store, which became Chaleteco for less than three months, closing before Christmas, Starbucks is moving into the former Jack-

There are four vacant spaces on the Barron Park side of El Camino, with three having planned occupants. Only the old Lanai Flowers isn't spoken for.

Vacancy Rates

Early this year I got lot and building sizes for El Camino Way, which I did not have for previous reports. This enabled calculation of the vacancy rates for the entire El Camino corridor from Page Mill to the border by Adobe Creek, both currently and for past years. Below are the vacancy rates with and without El Camino Way: in 2012, in 2011, in 2001 and 1996 (the end and start of the dot com economic boom) and 1992.

The table gives vacancy rates on the Barron Park and Ventura sides of El Camino separately, El Camino Way separately, and overall vacancy rates. Because current

Vacancy Rates	6/2012	6/22/2011	12/3/2001	2/6/1996	1/18/1992
Barron Park	1.9%	7.5%	3.4%	4.2%	4.0%
Ventura	10.1%	9.0%	4.4%	4.4%	3.4%
El Camino Way	22.8%	16.0%	8.2%	9.7%	9.4%
Total Overall	6.5%	8.6%	4.1%	4.6%	4.1%
Total Excluding El Camino Way	5.4%	8.1%	3.8%	4.3%	3.7%

in-the-Box at 3885. C2 Education plans to move into 3990D next to Jamba Juice. Equinox is replacing Pet Depot at 3127. Urban Sleep Store, a specialty and organic mattress store, is replacing 3Day Blinds which left 2951 several years ago. Spa Palo Alto is planning to move into the old Blockbuster store at 3990.

The offices and store at 4037-4045 El Camino Way were vacated late last year to make way for an expanded Palo Alto Commons senior housing development approved last summer. Since Su Hong moved to the former Denny's on El Camino, the nail, hair and travel stores there also closed. Thai City at 3691 closed this month. The owners said they were just worn out and planned to close several months ago. No word on the bar and restaurant that applied for a liquor permit more than six months ago at the former Dan Brown's at 4141. Stanford Cleaners left 2875 a year ago. In December, the building was demolished leaving a vacant lot that is for sale.

vacancies on El Camino Way are unusually high I also show vacancy rates without El Camino Way. Vacancy under 5% is considered fully occupied as some locations may close for renovation or as occupants move in and out.

In October 2011 downtown Palo Alto which is considered prime retail space, had a vacancy rate of 5.2% compared with 8.65% for El Camino/El Camino Way last June and 5.39% now.

Below is a comparison of sales taxes, an indicator of retail vitality, for various retail districts for the last quarter of 2011.

El Camino	\$920,003
Town & Country	\$433,313
Midtown	\$180,415
California Avenue	\$952,300
Downtown	\$2,897,003
Stanford	\$5,194,491

El Camino has a relatively high proportion of ground floor space in offices and services that don't collect sales taxes. The figures for El Camino include businesses from Page Mill to Stanford Avenue as well as our section of El Camino.

Neighbors Protest New Liquor License

In October 2010, Ernie's Liquors at 3870 El Camino Real closed and the new business owners applied to the State Department of Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC) for a liquor license. This was the first time in over 40 years that the nearby residents were able to lodge a formal complaint (in the form of protesting the license) about either of the liquor stores at Military and El Camino. In December 2010, a protest letter signed by more than 140 Barron Park residents was submitted to the ABC.

Yes. The liquor stores have always been there, but they have not been good neighbors. Over the years, the delivery trucks have gotten larger and larger to the point where they were often blocking Military Way in both directions (photos are available). To exit to El Camino, the trucks now have to turn around and sometimes drive through the neighborhood. The lack of parking at Ernie's has made conditions hazardous for pedestrians and bicyclists, and there are constant near-misses as customers exit their parking spaces while neighbors turn off at Military way to get to their homes.

Now, 18 months later, ABC has allowed Ernie's (now called E) to re-open with an Interim Operating Permit. The ABC placed some conditions on deliveries, but the road can still be blocked. The problems have died down, but the neighbors have seen this pattern before.

The final step in the protest process is a hearing before the ABC which has been scheduled for July 25-26 in San Jose.

BUSINESS BEAT

Neighborhood Reviews of Alison's Bakery

From an email to the bpa-misc list:

I was over at Alison's Bakery on El Camino next to the Starbucks this morning. Apparently there is a new owner. The guy working for him, Reuben, told me that they are going to rename the bakery. He said the owner is Korean and a really good baker, makes everything from scratch on the premises. They are making Persian breads and other things

He also told me they are going to do a Baker's Dozen meaning 14 items, not a normal Baker's Dozen of 13. So if you order a dozen cupcakes, you'll get 14.

Alison's also served only regular coffee (no espressos, lattes), but he has brought in an espresso machine. He used to run a gourmet coffee place in Fremont and brought his machine to the bakery. They will also serve sandwiches and salads.

So, if you've been to Alison's before, new owners, new goodies. They will also have day-old items discounted for sale.

He's having a renaming contest for the Bakery—wanting to do something with the new focus. If they use your name, you get free coffee for a lifetime. Send your suggestions to Reuben at 4943900 at gmail dot com.

I had the chocolate croissant; it was pretty good!

Cindy G.

From C.J.:

I think it was Cindy G. that suggested we might try the "new" bakery on ECR—formerly Alison's.

I'm hooked!

Richard brought home a couple of their "Cinnamon Twists" just to try them out. OMG! No doubt they might bring on some major health incident—and they'd be worth every bit of it! Now been back twice to get more.

Best of all? Reuben is absolutely wonderful! Made me feel as if I were his long-lost friend reincarnate and immensely brightened my (previously really bad) day with his cheery friendliness.

If you haven't been there yet? GO! a great experience!

C.J.

Alison's Bakery, 4131 El Camino Real, Suite 104, Palo Alto, CA 94306. Phone: 650-494-3900.

Open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. every day.

BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION

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Lydia Kou

Newsletter: Nancy Hamilton

Seniors Lunch: Bob Frost

Traffic & Streets: Vacant

Welcoming: Gwen Luce

Zoning & Land Use: Vacant



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

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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."

The Story of the Barron Park Volunteer Fire Department

By Douglas L. Graham, Barron Park Historian

[This article is re-printed from the Summer, 2006 issue of this newsletter]

Our Own Fire Department

Once upon a time, Barron Park had its' own fire department.

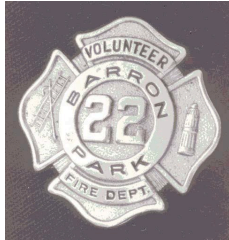
For 26 years, from 1949 through 1975, a cadre of volunteer firemen was recruited from and maintained by the neighborhood, organized as a fire protection district under Santa Clara County supervision. The district was governed by a commission, initially appointed by the County Board of Supervisors and later elected by the people of our neighborhood.

The district provided for the formation and organization of a volunteer fire department, which it supervised. This was an all-male group—there were no female fire-fighters in those days. The firemen soon developed an *esprit de corps* and camaraderie shown by the fact that their wives always turned out to provide snacks and sandwiches whenever there was a fire. Stories about each fire circulated through the neighborhood and helped build the feeling of community that later became the hallmark of Barron Park.

In addition to overseeing the fire department, the district provided a focus for community action. Much neighborhood political energy was expended in fighting over various district-related issues. The district was viewed by many Barron Park residents as a surrogate local government: a sort of local and personal stand-in for the distant and faceless county government. It also became one of the main rallying points in the ongoing annexation battles with the City of Palo Alto.

The Fire Protection Dilemma in 1946

The district came into being to solve a crisis in fire protection of the Barron Park area, which arose immediately following



Badge worn by Volunteer Fireman Skip Berryessa of Verdosa Drive.

World War II. Fire insurance rates were very high in the neighborhood because of the poor service provided by the State Forestry Division from its fire stations in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The Forestry Division announced they would no longer provide service to unincorporated county areas in the flatlands like Barron Park. The county suggested forming a local fire protection district but insurance industry fire underwriters advised that it would be too small to be economical. Another option was foreclosed when Palo Alto refused to consider contracting with Barron Park to provide fire protection service. Faced with this dilemma, one group of residents organized by Cornelis Bol pushed a proposal to establish a separate fire district. In an election held January 21, 1947, the proposal was turned down by a vote of 148 to 145.

The Neighborhood Considers Annexation

This fire protection crisis stimulated the first attempt by Barron Park residents to annex to Palo Alto. A group headed by real estate developer Kendall Bowers (for whom Kendall Avenue was named) circulated a petition. However, when the issue was brought to the City Council for a vote on April 15, 1947 it was turned down. This was largely at the instigation of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which was then politically powerful. Palo Alto was a "dry" town and the WCTU did not want to see Barron Park's liquor stores and roadhouses in the city.

David Packard Lends His Support

At this point, the pro-annexation forces were joined by Barron Park resident David Packard, Co-founder of Hewlett Packard. David, Lucille and their children lived at 724 Matadero Avenue from 1939 or 1940 until about 1950 when they moved to Los Altos Hills. David was a Palo Alto Unified School District Trustee and rallied the school board behind the annexation movement. It was already supported by the city staff, which brought another measure to the City Council on December 8, 1947. However, the annexation was again axed by the WCTU by a letter to the Mayor

two days later. Although the City Council voted in favor of another election, it was without enthusiasm and the neighborhood felt snubbed. When it finally came to an election in Barron Park on November 17, 1948, the annexation went down to defeat, 338 votes to 261.

We Establish Our Own Fire Department in 1949

After the annexation ballot defeat, Barron Park residents, again under the leadership of Kendall Bowers, concentrated on establishing a fire department. On January 11, 1949, the voters went back to the polls and approved the formation of a Barron Park Fire Protection District by nearly a four-to-one majority; 225 ayes, 60 nays. Chester F. (Chet) Slinger was elected a commissioner and subsequently as President. The district was funded by allocation from the property taxes collected from the area it covered.

The new district inquired about contract protection from Palo Alto, but the City Council, following recommendations of the public safety committee and the Board of Safety, turned them down again on May 9, 1949. Costs and legal issues were cited. The message had been consistent since the time of the Barron Mansion fire in 1936, when the City had refused to help fight the fire even though all the other surrounding cities and fire districts pitched in.

Formation of the Volunteer Fire Department

The district went ahead and formed a volunteer fire department in 1949, effectively



removing the issue from future annexation controversies for more than twenty years, until a change in resident opinion occurred in the early 1970s.

The department was organized and in operation by the autumn of 1949. The Fire Chief was Chet Slinger, who resigned as Commissioner and President to take the Chief's part-time paid job. Slinger owned a boat works on El Camino Real between Barron Avenue and Military Way, which over the years of the fire department became the unofficial "political headquarters" for Barron Park.

By October, a "firehouse" had been leased—this was located in the aluminum-clad shed still to be found behind the Lanai Flower stand at 4050 El Camino Real (in 1949, this property was numbered 4042). A 1949 Van Pelt 600 gallon-per-minute pumper truck had been acquired and was shown off at an "open house" conducted at Barron Park School on October 23, 1949. This truck was designated "unit #91" by the County. At one o'clock a.m. on November 21, the department had its first call when a fire broke out at 891 Jude Avenue (now San Jude Avenue). The fire, caused by flooding of a floor furnace, was quickly put out with "no damage to property."

It was about this time that the department included the management of a controlled burn as part of its training. Mike Slinger, who was about nine years old at the time, remembers the day well. They set the fires on vacant lots where La Jennifer Court was laid out in 1950. Mike was eager to get up close and see the action, so when a fireman tried to stop him at the training area perimeter, he got through by telling the man "It's alright, the Chief is my dad." When he came up to the fire, his dad, Chet Slinger, saw him and asked "How did you get in here?" When Mike told him, Chet didn't say another word but just turned the fire hose on him and, Mike says, "washed me right back to the road."

By January, 1950, when the Board of Fire Underwriters of the Pacific published a Municipal Fire Protection Report on Barron Park, the company totaled 17 men, all volunteers except for the Chief. At some point, the district acquired its second major piece of equipment, a 1951 GMC 40-gallon-per-minute High-Pressure Pumper, designated "unit #90" by the County. Drills were being held twice weekly since everyone was

Barron Park Fire District

To Report a FIRE

Dial DA 3-2400

FOR BUSINESS CALLS—DIAL DA 3-9863

For FIRE PERMITS:

3785 EL CENTRO or
3980 EL CAMINO REAL

Between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.
(IT'S UNLAWFUL TO BURN WITHOUT FIRE PERMIT)

Effective January 1, 1955

NEWS PRINT SHOP, 846 COLLEGE AVENUE, PALO ALTO

Placard distributed to all residents.

new on the job. Training included practice on the resuscitator and inhalator—there were no paramedics or Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) in those days, so the volunteer firemen were the first-line emergency medical response team. According to Joe Weiler, most of the calls in later years were medical emergencies.

How the Alarm and Response System Worked

To report a fire, you dialed DA 3-2400. According to the oral history given by Joe Weiler to Ann Knopf in 1977, the phone rang in three houses, as well as at the fire station. The chief had one phone and there were two others. By arrangement, the three families made certain that there was always at least one fireman to respond. The three homes were connected to the fire station with a buzzer that set off the alarm—a siren. It cycled up and down eight times with a wailing that could be heard throughout the district. Every fireman who heard it would drop what they were doing and drive or run to the firehouse. The first two got the address and took the truck to the fire, sometimes stopping to pick up other firemen they encountered on the route there.

Fighting the Fire

Usually the "high pressure 90" truck was taken to the fire first, as it was capable by itself of putting out most fires. Joe said its water capacity was 250–280 gallons (the bigger truck carried 600). The "90" could throw a straight stream strong enough to dig holes in asphalt pavement. It could

throw a stream of water five feet wide for a distance of 100–150 feet.

Water Difficulties

One of the difficulties facing the new district was the inadequate water supply. Rapid growth in the neighborhood in 1947 through 1949 had stretched the capacity of the two private water companies serving the bulk of Barron Park. The Fire Underwriters had noted that, and their assessment resulted in higher insurance rates. One company sold out to Palo Alto in 1950, but the other, the Bol Water Company, held out until 1954. From that time on, the district was entirely dependent upon Palo Alto to supply water. The mains were inadequate, the connections with the city were too small, and hydrants were not always located where the district wanted them. Friction between the city and the district was not helped by the failure of two more annexation initiatives, in 1951 and 1954. The 1954 failure led directly to the successful annexation of the Ventura Avenue area on December 29, 1954, and the consequence was removal of the area from the Barron Park Fire Protection District. The lost area included the tax-lucrative commercial strip on the other side of El Camino. This was the beginning of the piecemeal nibbling away of the neighborhood that eventually made the shrunken fire district uneconomic by eroding its tax base.

Reform Movement Takes Over in District

During this time a reform movement was building within the district. The Commissioners were still being appointed by the County Board of Supervisors, even though the original intent had been to make the office elective within the first four months. On August 17, 1954, 527 Barron Park residents petitioned the Board of Supervisors for an elective board of fire commissioners. The election date was twice established and then set aside by subsequent vote of the supervisors, but finally an election was arranged for July 12, 1955. At the election, three incumbents, including Chairman Nick Sharko were ousted. Most of the reform slate, headed by incumbent Dan Baker, were also anti-annexation. Baker was elected Chairman.

Baker was a very interesting man. He lived on La Selva Drive where the State Historical Monument to Sarah Wallis was later placed. When I knew him in the 1980s he



OLD-TIMERS—Anthony Musachia, Barron Park's first and only volunteer fire chief, warms up his department's 1949 Van Pelt pumper in front of aluminum-walled fire station trucked behind a flower stand on El Camino Real. —Staff Photos

Anthony Musachia, Volunteer Fire Chief, with the 1949 Van Pelt Pumper.

was President of the Palo Alto Historical Association. It was his stash of clippings and memorabilia from the Barron Park Fire Protection District files that made the writing of this history possible. He had been a news photographer and his photographs of the Wallis-Barron mansion burning are the only ones known to survive from that famous fire.

The Fire Commissioners Join the Annexation Battle in 1955

Finally everything came to a head in 1955, with a major pro-annexation movement countered by a slightly stronger backlash anti-annexation movement. Both sides actually gained majorities in successive petition drives. However, the "antis" spoke last and loudest. The Barron Park Fire Protection District got into the fight when Commissioners Hughes Brewster, Duane Lyle and Raymond Schumann (a majority of the commission) announced support for annexation on November 17, 1954. This created a rift in the commission, with Commissioner Dan Baker joining the opponents. Barron Park civic leaders Jack Silvey and William Faulkerson called for the pro-annexation commissioners to resign, Silvey saying that it seemed paradoxical to him that some commissioners are trying to put the district out of business. The 1955 annexation movement ultimately failed, but the fight nearly tore Barron Park apart. Friends fell out and neighbors vowed never to speak to each other again. The animosities that were stirred up continued to reverberate down into the 1970s.

However, the immediate late 1950s and early 1960s turned out to be a relatively

peaceful period on the Fire Protection District Commission, as the "reform" (and anti-annexation) commissioners dominated neighborhood politics and dealt more effectively with the city on hydrant and water supply issues. The Commission cut the fire department salary budget and reduced the tax rate in 1956. The Chief's position, which had been paid, became volunteer. Anthony Musachia was the first and only volunteer chief.

Flood Duty

One interesting "additional duty" the volunteer firemen picked up was to respond, during heavy rainstorms, to calls from creek watchers living near the Barron Creek culvert at the intersection of Laguna and Los Robles Avenues. During high creek flows, trash would build up on the trash rack, partially blocking the flow and threatening over-banking and flooding the area between there and El Camino Real. This situation arose repeatedly, usually in the middle of the night. The firemen would come with a long-handled rake and remove the trash. According to one story I was told, on one occasion they arrived with several six-packs of beer, expecting a long stretch of duty. Several hours later, a policeman in a patrol car came by and found them sitting in the street with their backs to the culvert railing, surrounded by empty beer cans and obviously in no shape to respond to any emergencies.

The Fire Protection Issue Flares up Again

It is ironic that the annexation story ended exactly where it began 29 years earlier—with Barron Park facing a serious crisis in fire protection. This was the premier topic at the final public meeting held by the Barron Park Association before the 1975 annexation election. Dan Baker, the Fire Protection District Commission Chair, was present to answer questions. The attachment to the meeting notice explained the essence of the problem. The major fire fighting equipment was the 1949 Van Pelt 600-gallon-per-minute (gpm) pumper and the 1951 GMC 40-gpm high pressure engine. Both were in need of replacement and could no longer be maintained because spare parts were not readily available for the obsolete equipment. The hose also needed to be replaced. In order to replace this equipment, the local tax rate would have to be raised from \$0.137/100 to more

than the maximum 0.239 allowed by law. Citizens would have to authorize a higher rate through a tax override election. As the BPA said, "It would be impossible for a community of this size to support a fire department that would give service like (what would be) available upon annexation."

Upon annexation, Barron Park would be upgraded from a fire rating of six to the Palo Alto rating of three, resulting in a \$30/year savings in premiums for a \$60,000 house (which was probably about the average Barron Park home value in 1975). Some annexation opponents were dismayed that they had not known of the volunteer fire department's serious equipment problems and financial limitations. Speaking personally, I was a fairly new homeowner in Barron Park at the time and was quite concerned about the fire protection level rather than the insurance cost—better fire protection was the single most compelling reason, to me, to be in favor of annexation.

Annexation Ends the Fire Protection District

On November 4, 1975 the 28-year-long "Cold War on the Peninsula" ended with a two-to-one vote by Barron Park homeowners to annex to the City of Palo Alto. An immediate result was the assumption of fire protection service by the city, effective November 5. Annexation became officially effective December 8 and the Barron Park Fire Protection District and Volunteer Fire Department passed into history.

The property was taken over by the city and the trucks were sold. One of them (the 1951 GMC Pumper) was purchased by a former BP volunteer fireman and taken to Grass Valley for years. Recently, it has been returned to Barron Park in the ownership of Al Larson, Paradise Way. It was exhibited at the Barron Park May Fete in 2004.

The Bol Fire

Joe Weiler told, in his oral history, of the big fire at the Bol residence on Roble Ridge: "I was on the Bol's fire, the day they had it. We couldn't get water." . . . (There were only 2-inch mains on Roble Ridge.) . . . "We finally backed that big pumper up to the swimming pool. I remember Pete Yusackia who was one of our firemen and myself . . . we couldn't get close enough. We dropped our bundle off. And then we had to move it because we had to get off the hydrant. You

have a bundle of 150 feet or so (of hose) and you drop it from the big tanker, near the fire. Then you drive the truck and that unloads the rest of the line, 100, 200 feet or whatever is necessary to . . . (reach) . . . to the hydrant itself. So we did that. Then we pumped for a few minutes and we sucked those lines dry. Sucking mud. When you do that you can collapse the line itself. So we had to shut down.”

“With this fire raging in the Bol’s home” . . . (actually his studio by the creek) . . . “and all his acetylene things going up from the basement we had a hot one. We had to turn the truck around and unhook and get the hose back to where . . . (the swimming pool was) . . . about 200–300 feet and Pete and I were trying to hump this hose on our shoulders, up far enough to where we could drop it in the pool. It was quite a chore. Anyhow we did get it up there and we stuck it in the pool and we were sucking from the pool and we finally got our fire out. So that was Bol’s fire.” Mike Slinger explained to me that they would have used 10-foot hard rubber siphon sections to avoid hose collapse in the pool itself.

The Cameo Club Fire

According to Joe Weiler, the worst fire that the Barron Park Volunteer Fire Department ever had to fight was in the Cameo Club on El Camino Real. It was called in at around four o’clock in the morning and the temperature was down around 26 to 28 degrees. Joe said when they got hooked up to the hydrant and started putting water on the fire, “. . . the water froze and came down on the driveways and froze and we couldn’t stand up and we’d never fought a fire like this before. Someone should have taken photos because it was pretty comical.”

It was a very hot fire, and difficult to put out because of the way the Cameo Club was constructed. Joe said that the Cameo Club (then) was called Congers and featured a 16-ounce beer they call the fishbowl that they sold for a quarter. He related that the place had been revamped several times. One of the problems with that fire was that a wall would have two or three layers. “When they would refurbish it, they wouldn’t just paint the wall and put (a) little paper on it, they wanted another look. So one wall would be here, then a little air space and another wall and another wall. The ceiling is the same way. It was a terrible thing to put out because it was burning

inside. You’d get a fire out and it was burning BEHIND this wall. It was freezing and it was cold and it was a mess.”

The Day the Bols’ Barn Burned

My one and only personal experience with the Barron Park Volunteer Fire Department came not too long after we moved into our house on Ilima Way. It was on Washington’s Birthday, February 22, 1974, the day the Bols’ old barn burned down. The barn, which had been used by homeless men (or “bums”, as we still referred to them then) for years, had somehow caught fire on that wintry Sunday afternoon.

It had been intended that the barn would be used to support a 4-H club “demonstration garden” as part of the new Bol Park to be developed in the back end of the Bol Family “donkey pasture” that Spring. The barn was located across the creek from, and about 80 feet directly behind my house. It was very un-scenic; really just an old shed with a “tin” roof, quite dilapidated. Verna, my wife, and I had gone to Mt. Hamilton for the day, and as we were returning home at dusk, we turned off Los Robles onto Laguna and into a cloud of smoke. The smoke was thicker as we turned onto Ilima way and my heart was in my shoes as it got thicker when we approached our house at the end of the block. One of our neighbors was on our roof wetting down the shakes with a garden hose, and behind the house was a bright orange glow and billowing black smoke, shot through with red sparks. Our neighbors on both sides were wetting their roofs. Embers were everywhere, as the barn roof had just fallen in. After recovering from the first panic, my first thought was how glad I was that the barn burned. My second thought was to wonder if it had burned thoroughly enough to discourage anyone from proposing to rebuild it. The third thought was that I was very glad to have been away when it happened so that no one would suspect me of setting the fire!

But this isn’t the story. . . the story is about the Volunteer Fire Department. I will tell it as I remember having it related to me by my neighbors. The basic facts were confirmed in an interview on June 1, 2006 with Mike Slinger, Chet Slinger’s son. The Fire Department was called promptly on that holiday in 1974, but they had every trouble they could have had. When the truck first came, no one had remembered

to bring the key to unlock the gate to the donkey pasture. So, back to the firehouse, get the key. Back to the pasture, unlock the gate. The truck drove into the pasture and promptly bogged down in the mud (it had been a wet winter and an especially wet February). While the pumper truck was stuck in the mud, they hooked up the hose to a hydrant on Laguna but they didn’t have enough hose with them to reach the



1951 GMC High-Pressure Pumper, undergoing restoration by Al Larson of Paradise Way.

barn and there was no way to go back to the firehouse to get more. By this time, the barn was burning merrily but there was absolutely nothing anyone could do except stand back and enjoy it.

After the barn roof collapsed, there was no longer any danger to the houses on Ilima Way. We all hopped over the creek and stood around admiring the fire. Finally a tow truck arrived, but it got stuck in the mud also. Eventually the department got a hose on the embers and cooled them down. A second tow truck rescued the first one and together they got the fire truck extricated. All in all, it wasn’t the fire company’s finest hour. Personally, I was glad about the mud. I would have been sorely disappointed if they had gotten there in time to save the building.

I hope you have enjoyed this story about volunteer fire protection in Barron Park—the fire department played a major role in shaping the sense of community that is still preserved in Barron Park today. Those of us who lived here before annexation should occasionally stop for a moment and remember these men who sacrificed a lot of their free time and risked their own safety to fight fires and answer medical emergency calls from their neighbors. All honor to their memory!

BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER
SUMMER 2012

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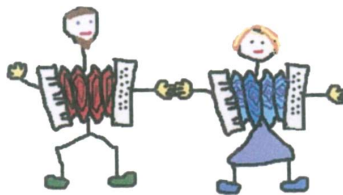
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