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helped preserve a  
regional greenbelt of land

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FabMo reduces waste  
by reusing textiles

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## Los Altos Town Crier

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Circulation: 16,000. Mailed directly to households in Los Altos, Los Altos Hills and select areas of Mountain View.

Hundreds of subscribers receive the Town Crier in neighboring communities as well as out of state. The Town Crier can be purchased at newsstands in Los Altos, Mountain View and Palo Alto.

### ON THE COVER:

Hikers enjoy the Purisima Creek Trail in Midpen's popular Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve. *RANDY WEBER* | MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT.



# BURGLARY BUSTERS ASPIRING ENGINEERS TACKLE PACKAGE THEFT WITH BAIT BOX

BY JENNAH PENDLETON  
STAFF WRITER | [jennahp@latc.com](mailto:jennahp@latc.com)

Los Altos teens Riya Mehrotra, Katie Byon and Alyssa Fang have developed a potentially groundbreaking device that could track porch pirates and report package theft directly to the police.

As a group, they have competed in national robotics competitions, receiving an invitation to the final round in Greece several years in a row. The three aspiring engineers work out of a Los Altos garage that contains tens of thousands of LEGOs, the primary building material for their robots. Riya and Katie attend Bullis Charter School, while Alyssa is a

student at The Girls Middle School.

The girls are well-versed in technology at 13 years old. They make up the #PandaPower Robotics team, aided by their coach – and Riya’s dad – Shishir Mehrotra. For their final practice before the Northern California championship, Katie and Alyssa donned homemade #PandaPower T-shirts and headbands, while Riya truly committed in a full panda costume.

#PandaPower has competed in the FIRST LEGO League, a robotics league for 9-16 year olds, for the past six years. Riya is the only continuing

member of the team this year – Katie and Alyssa are both new and said that though this is their first year participating in #PandaPower, they have long been aware of the team and its accomplishments through Riya.

“In our Zoom classes last year, she used to spam the chat with messages about #PandaPower,” Alyssa said. “So we already knew about all the cool things the team did.”

## DESIGN AND EXECUTION

The FIRST LEGO League has two components of competition: robotics and a themed innovation project. ➤

This year's theme, "Cargo Connect," asked teams to identify a problem related to the transportation of products and design a new piece of technology to address it. The girls began to explore the issue of package theft after a porch pirate stole a box from Riya's family, and they were ultimately inspired to create the Bait Box after viewing a video by engineer and YouTuber Mark Rober. Rober's video, currently sitting at 21.5 million views, goes through the process of creating a bait box that not only tracks and records the perpetrators, but also ejects a cup full of glitter to douse them with.

While the girls were intrigued by the concept, they knew they had to make theirs a bit more practical.

"We needed to make a scalable version that would cost less than \$100 so that it can be used by police stations everywhere," Riya said.

From there, the team consulted detectives from the Los Altos Police Department, an Amazon Hub ➤



Riya Mehrotra, in panda costume, is the only returning member of the #PandaPower Robotics team this year. New members Katie Byon, left, and Alyssa Fang, flank Riya. Also pictured, the team received guidance from coach Shishir Mehrotra and team mentor Anika Mehrotra.

PHOTO BY JENNAH PENDLETON | TOWN CRIER

**“WE NEEDED TO MAKE A SCALABLE VERSION THAT WOULD COST LESS THAN \$100 SO THAT IT CAN BE USED BY POLICE STATIONS EVERYWHERE.” – RIYA MEHROTRA**

## Updates from the Fire District

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THE BOGARD-TANIGAMI TEAM

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Coach Shishir Mehrotra supervises a trial run of #PandaPower's robot, which contributed to their first-place showing at a competition Feb. 26. PHOTO BY JENNAH PENDLETON | TOWN CRIER

Locker lead and an expert in the prototyping platform Arduino, who guided them on how to approach the design and execution of their box.

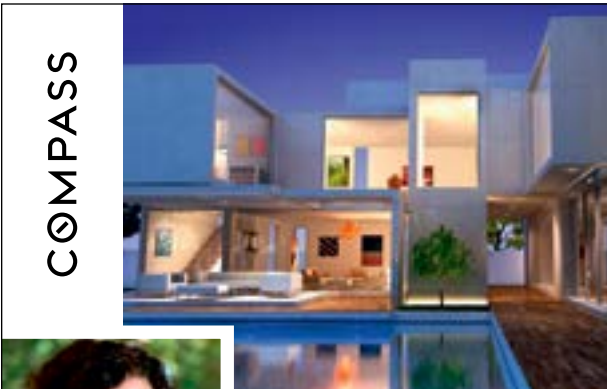
The final Bait Box prototype is a 3D printed box that contains a GPS device and other electronic hardware hidden under a false "gift," such as a pile of rocks or an old gym sock.

The first trial run with the Los Altos Police Department was successful, with Detective Anthony Fantozzi noting the department would be open to the Bait Box so that officers don't have to rely on luck to catch package thieves.

Not only did the team bring the Bait Box from paper to life, but they also are currently testing community implementation. For a donation to the project, Los Altos residents can obtain their own boxes to use. #PandaPower plans to issue a new version, Bait Box Pro, which will add a live camera feed.

The three teens giggled their way through a rehearsal presentation describing the sophisticated work they have put into their project and the two robots they built for the competition. As Riya, Katie and Alyssa described tasks such as learning a new program for the robots' code and the technique they developed to keep the robots' movements grounded and consistent, they punctuated their explanations with the silly jokes and mannerisms common to middle schoolers, a reminder that they are not adult professionals, just intelligent teens growing up in the center of high-tech innovation.

Team #PandaPower brought home first prize at their latest competition Feb. 26, meaning they are on their way to competing in the international championship this spring. 🐼



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The #PandaPower team - from left, Katie Byon, Riya Mehrotra and Alyssa Fang - showcases its Bait Box prototype, a device aimed at thwarting porch pirates. PHOTO BY JENNAH PENDLETON | TOWN CRIER

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## SPREAD THE NEWS

# Town Crier: Keeping Los Altans informed for 75 years

BY BRUCE BARTON  
STAFF WRITER | [bruceb@latc.com](mailto:bruceb@latc.com)

**T**he Los Altos Town Crier's 75-year transformation from hand-drawn "shopper" to local newspaper of record still operating in the age of social media is a story of perseverance and community spirit. Its survival – and independence – stems from a strong partnership between the paper and local residents.

The Town Crier started as a four-page, all-advertisement issue published Sept. 9, 1947, that featured hand-drawn ads for local businesses. The paper was co-founded by Dave MacKenzie, who lived in Los Altos Hills until his death in 2011, and Warren Goodrich, a nationally syndicated

cartoonist, who drew the ads. Goodrich died in 2002. The paper had a circulation of 1,800 at its launch.

Although bereft of editorial content in the early days, the Town Crier flashed plenty of personality due to its witty and irreverent co-founders.

"We needed money," MacKenzie said when asked why he and Goodrich started the shopper. "The Los Altos News (published until 1967) had no shopper, although they started one later in competition. Our advantage was that we had the one offset press in Santa Clara County, so we had better-quality printing."

As Goodrich recalled in his 2001 book “An Artist’s Life,” “In (the Town Crier), we made fun of almost everyone, including the merchants, who were allowed little to say about their ads or anything else. It caught on from the beginning and grew into a valuable property.”

“The secret (to the Town Crier’s success) was the Lucky Number,” said Mort Levine, who served as editor of the Los Altos News from 1953 to 1955 and purchased the Town Crier from MacKenzie in 1972.

The Lucky Number was one of MacKenzie’s many ideas to boost reader interest. Individual numbers were hand-stamped onto each Town Crier before distribution. A winning number, which entitled the number holder to cash, was drawn later and displayed on the windows of participating merchants. If there were no winner one week, the cash award increased by \$10.

MacKenzie’s humorous “Under the Oak” column and the “Bulletin Board,” where people could advertise items wanted or for sale, were other keys to the paper’s early success.

“The Town Crier’s beginning was at a critical junction in time for the area,” historian Patricia Graham wrote in the California History Center’s “Los Altos Reminiscences,” published in 1973. “Interpersonal needs developed with a rising population, and the ‘Bulletin Board’ service formed ➤



From left, Town Crier publishers Howard Bischoff, Kathy Lera and Dennis Young and editor in chief Bruce Barton celebrate the paper’s 75th anniversary. PHOTO BY KATHERINE SIMPSON | TOWN CRIER.



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the second of many journalistic links for the Town Crier. A local paper, the publication's expansion was a direct response to local need."

"The Town Crier established a close relationship with (Rancho Shopping Center owner) Chris Wilder, which gave it a nucleus of advertising that frustrated the Los Altos News," Levine said.

By 1951, Goodrich left for New York and publisher Bill Norton joined the fold. The paper began including editorial content, and circulation expanded to 8,600 by 1957. The 1950s brought several new features, including the photo-dominant "Foothill Focus" and "Strictly Scenic." Letters to the editor began appearing along with a host of entertaining columns.

The paper continued to grow and broaden coverage in the 1960s, as Los Altos growth "posed problems of preserving the noncommercial atmosphere of the town," as Graham put it.



Popular Town Crier editor Dolores "Tuck" Shepherd was famous for her open-door policy with readers. | TOWN CRIER FILE PHOTO

The year 1970 brought the hiring of legendary Town Crier editor Dolores "Tuck" Shepherd. Shepherd pushed the Town Crier's folksy image further, regularly featuring old line drawings on the cover to spoof a local issue. Shepherd herself was a hit with the readers because she always put them first – people were welcome to visit the Town Crier offices any time, even on deadline. Shepherd was editor for 15 years before leaving in 1985. She died in 1993. A downtown bench in Shepherd's honor was dedicated in 1994, located outside the newspaper's front door at 138 Main St. ➤

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## STOP THE PRESSES

Along with the Town Crier purchase, Levine in the 1970s accumulated more than a dozen community newspapers across the South Bay before selling to Meredith Corp. in the late '70s.

“It was their corporate decision to get into the suburban newspaper market nationally,” Levine recalled.

Meredith, based out of Des Moines, Iowa, had no previous newspaper experience – and it showed. Ad sales and circulation suffered.

“Typical large corporation with a short attention span,” Levine observed.

The Town Crier and a group of other weeklies were sold to Meredith executive Terrence Donnelly in 1988. He promptly sold them to another corporate giant, the Tribune Co., out of Chicago. The Tribune Co. shut down the daily Peninsula Times Tribune in March 1993 – and the Town Crier along with it.

Within 24 hours, Los Altos residents Paul and Liz Nyberg worked out a purchase agreement for the Town Crier and rehired a nucleus of staff to publish the next issue on schedule.



Former Town Crier publishers Paul Nyberg, from left, Mort Levine and Dave MacKenzie looked through back issues when the three met in 1997 for a 50th anniversary celebration of the paper. TOWN CRIER FILE PHOTO

Under the Nybergs, the paper grew and the editorial content focused more intensely on the Los Altos area. Operations expanded from occupying a small portion of offices at 138 Main St. to full ownership of the building, with newspaper operations taking up the entire second floor. In 1995, an overhaul of the building was completed. That same year, the newspaper joined the World Wide Web with its own website, losaltosonline.com.

Two popular traditions the Nybergs started remain today: the annual Los Altan of the Year honor, recognizing local residents for their deep and sustained community contributions, and the Town Crier Holiday Fund, an annual campaign raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for nonprofit organizations that serve people in need. Paul Nyberg, whose newspaper ownership reflected his love of Los Altos, died last year. ➤



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## NEW ERA

December 2019 brought new ownership to the Town Crier. Longtime employees Howard Bischoff, Kathy Lera and Chris Redden joined with 2018 Los Altos of the Year Dennis Young to buy the paper from the Nybergs.

Bischoff, Lera and Young serve as co-publishers. Redden, in charge of the newspaper's production and a 44-year employee, died in September 2020.

Under the new leadership team, Town Crier interior offices underwent a complete remodel. Several new staffers have come onboard. COVID-19 restrictions became yet another challenge for the paper to overcome.

Through it all, the paper's strong relationship with the public continues unabated.

"The great thing about the residents of the Los Altos area is they really care about their schools, government, local businesses and other interests," Bischoff said. "People are passionate about what they do, and the Town Crier has no shortage of things to cover, which is a reflection of this vibrant community."

"These kinds of (community newspapers) are very entrepreneurial, they had presence," Levine said. "The Town Crier's a good example. It's a paper the community embraced and felt was theirs." ❀

*Watch for updates on plans connected with the  
Town Crier's 75th anniversary.*

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## RECYCLING FOR A REPURPOSE

# FabMO reduces waste by reusing textiles



Teachers and educators share the wealth of FabMo's repurposed fabrics at the nonprofit organization's monthly sales. | PHOTO COURTESY OF KATHY BONTE

BY SOPHIA YAO  
TOWN CRIER EDITORIAL INTERN

Mountain View resident Kathy Bonte is a proud member of FabMo, a Sunnyvale nonprofit dedicated to reducing waste in landfills, repurposing unused textiles and providing resources to teachers.

"I think that keeping 70 tons of material out of the landfill every year is pretty impressive for a small, all-volunteer organization," said Bonte, who serves on the FabMo board. "We also like to support teachers and educators. ... We're a very affordable source of really great materials for a lot of artists and teachers."

FabMo began 20 years ago, when Hannah and Jonathan Cranch of Palo Alto saw bags of good-quality fabric in trash bags in front of the Design Center in San Francisco. Prompted to do something about the waste, FabMo was born.

Bonte joined FabMo as a volunteer in 2009 and became a board member last year.

The goal of FabMo, Bonte said, is to inform people about textile waste and encourage creative ways to conserve material.

"I think our goal is to educate and inspire," she said. "We want to educate people about the issue of textile waste, which is a serious one, and we also want to inspire people to reuse and be creative with the materials that are available to them. So, I think we operate on two levels: educating and inspiring."

### SHARING RESOURCES

Bonte noted that FabMo offers resources and creative projects to educators and their classrooms.

"We'll provide what we call 'teacher boxes,' with little projects that teachers can implement using the materials that they get from FabMo," she said. "We also have carpet squares, which are really popular with teachers, to have kids sit on those squares in

the classroom. A lot of people from FabMo were at one point involved in education, if they're not currently, so we all have a soft spot for teachers."

FabMo also works with high schools and clubs to support their projects. Their latest partnership is with Future Business Leaders of America at Homestead High School. ➤



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“We want to educate people about the issue of textile waste, which is a serious one, and we also want to inspire people to reuse and be creative with the materials that are available to them. – KATHY BONTE”

“The Future Business Leaders of America are coming in and they have a project to do every year and they’re going to be working with us,” Bonte said. “We also said we’d be happy to donate to their art department and their theater department and things like that.”

Bonte added that a lot of FabMo’s materials are perfect for art classes or projects in schools, and members have reached out to teachers, who have greatly appreciated the supplies.

FabMo gets its materials from a variety of places, including the San Francisco Design Center and closing fabric shops.

“We get all sorts of materials from the Design Center; it’s not just fabric – there’s leather, there’s wallpaper, there’s sometimes pieces of wood, since somebody might be looking at flooring options, we get a lot of tile,” Bonte said. “And we also get private donations from people: sewers and quilters and whatnot and fabric from fabric stores that may be closing down or something that might give us some of their fabric.”

The organization also hosts annual showcases with opportunities for artists who have used FabMo materials to share and sell their work, according to Bonte. ➤



FabMo’s commitment to sharing resources receives a thumbs-up from a satisfied recipient. | PHOTO COURTESY OF KATHY BONTE



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“This year’s showcase was the third one we’ve done,” she said. “Normally, we would have a yearly event where artists who use FabMo materials could showcase their work and this time, because of COVID, it was impossible to do that. So, we started an online version.”

In the future, Bonte said FabMo aspires to expand its outreach and increase funding.

“Another thing we hope to do is connect and partner with other like-minded organizations in both the arts and environmental space,” she added. “I am also hoping that down the road we may find

a corporate benefactor who would be willing to subsidize the space for our operations. The bulk of any funds we receive currently go to rent and utilities, and with that amount reduced, we would have more to spend on outreach and education.” 🌱

*For more information, visit [fabmo.org](http://fabmo.org).*



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# WIDE OPEN SPACES



## HOW A BAY AREA WOMAN HELPED PRESERVE A REGIONAL GREENBELT OF LAND

BY KATHERINE SIMPSON  
STAFF WRITER | [katies@latc.com](mailto:katies@latc.com)

**D**uring the 1960s, the Peninsula evolved from the bucolic orchards of the Valley of Heart's Delight into the sprawling suburbs of Silicon Valley. As the decade progressed, one suburban mom watched as the open spaces she had enjoyed as a child disappeared to development.

Nonette Hanko, who was raising four children in Palo Alto, felt compelled to act. Beginning in 1970, she and a group of fellow conservationists led the effort to form the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District. The environmental pioneer, now 90 years old, served on

the Midpen Board of Directors for 46 years before retiring in 2018. The district itself celebrates a half-century of land stewardship this year.

### INSPIRED TO ACT

Hanko's passion for the land started early.

Born at Mills Hospital in San Mateo in 1931, she recalled being taken to the Sierra Nevada every summer, "except during the war, when there wasn't enough gas." Growing up in Burlingame, she often visited the Mills Estate to enjoy quiet time in nature.

"I would come and sit at the base of the tree and just be there and listen and hear nothing," Hanko, an aspiring concert pianist, told a Midpen audience at her retirement celebration. "It was medicine for me. You have to remember that I spent four hours of practice on the piano."

By the late 1960s, the region was growing at an unprecedented pace. Hanko read an editorial in the Feb. 16, 1970, edition of the Palo Alto Times that pushed her to take action. Reflecting on Palo Alto's "environmental design study," reporter Jay Thorwaldson wrote, >

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“It’s a dream come true, being able to do something about saving our open spaces for people and animals. When you’re building something important, and we’re still building it, you never lose that joy. – *Nonette Hanko*”



“If the conservationists and others who value the view from the flatlands are really serious, they should take this time to examine their ultimate priority – undeveloped open space – and move to set up an agency capable of being a recipient for land, either donated, willed or purchased, through whatever federal funds may be available.”

Taking his words to heart, Hanko began hosting meetings, complete with blueberry coffee cake, which she credits with enticing people to return for a second meeting. Hanko and her collaborators – inspired and aided in part by the East Bay Regional Park District, founded in 1934 – spearheaded the campaign to place a measure on Santa Clara County’s ballot in 1972, allowing voters

to create Midpen, an independent special district funded by taxpayers that over the past 50 years has preserved and protected more than 65,000 acres of open space.

Alongside presidential candidates Richard Nixon and George McGovern, Santa Clara County voters considered Measure R, also known as the Room to Breathe Initiative. It passed with 67.71% support, officially creating the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.

Midpen’s first purchase, in 1974, was 90 acres of the land that would become Foothills Open Space Preserve surrounding Page Mill Road in Los Altos Hills and Palo Alto. By 1975, Midpen had hired its first ranger, received its first gift of land – what would become the Saratoga Gap ➤

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The idealistic Measure R was advertised to: “preserve open space by creating the Midpeninsula Regional Park District. Open space is our green backdrop of hills. It is rolling grasslands, cool forests in the Coast Range, orchards and vineyards in the sun. It is the patch of grass between communities where children can run. It is uncluttered baylands where water birds wheel and soar, where blowing cordgrass yields its blessings of oxygen, where the din of urban life gives way to the soft sounds of nature. It is the serene, unbuilt, unspoiled earth that awakens all our senses and makes us whole again. ... It is room to breathe.”



Open Space Preserve – and purchased what is now its most popular park, Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve.

**A DREAM COME TRUE**

Midpen continued to expand with a second ballot measure, 1976’s Proposition D in San Mateo County, and the purchase of 200 acres in the Cupertino foothills on which the Pichetti Winery stands. The district acquired land from all manner of sources – Midpen now owns land previously owned by Stanford University, James Folger (of

Folgers Coffee), the city of San Francisco (the Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve was once the site of a tuberculosis sanitarium) and the U.S. Air Force (former Almaden Air Force Station, now Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve). Midpen expanded through the final decades of the 20th century, with 25 preserves totaling more than 47,000 acres by its 30th anniversary in 2002. In 2004, the agency made its first coastline acquisitions in San Mateo County.

When Hanko retired from the Midpen board a few years ago, she told district officials in an interview that she kept working for 46 years because “it’s a dream come true, being able to do something about saving our open spaces for people and animals. When you’re building something important, and we’re still building it, you never lose that joy.”

At the time, Midpen unveiled the Nonette Hanko San Andreas Fault Trail to honor her dedication and service.

As Midpen celebrates its 50th anniversary, Hanko reflected on what she hopes the district can accomplish in the next 50 years.

“I would hope that the district is able to expand its boundaries so that it can save all of these priceless beautiful lands along the coast of San Mateo,” she said.

“Fifty years ago, Nonette Hanko brought a small group of concerned citizens together, and with ➤

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the support of local voters, created Midpen around a vision of ‘Room to Breathe’ in our region for people, plants and animals,” Midpen general manager Ana María Ruiz said. “We invite the public to join us in 2022 to celebrate how far we have come together as a community in realizing our vision, sharing stories from the last half-century of perseverance and recognizing the contributions of people past, present and future.”

With more than 245 miles of trails, Midpen is still working to preserve public spaces and connect trails. Per a 2020 agreement, Midpen, Peninsula Regional Open Space Trust and 10 other agencies are collaborating to open a Bay to Sea Trail for public use by 2037. 🌲

*For more information on Midpen’s 50th anniversary celebration, visit [openspace.org/50-years](https://openspace.org/50-years).*

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# FRONT PORCH FELLOWSHIP

## Pastor fosters connection in downtown Mountain View

BY SAM BLEWIS  
SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

**I**n June 2016, I packed up all my belongings and my cat, Bandit, and moved across the country. I took Interstate 10 all the way from Florida to Southern California, then made my way north to Los Altos, where I was to be the newest associate pastor at Los Altos United Methodist Church.

I moved so that I could live more openly and authentically as a lesbian pastor, which is much more acceptable in California than in many places in the Southeast United States. Bandit and I moved into our 600-square-foot apartment in Old Mountain View, ready for our next big adventure.

The day I rolled into Mountain View I did some unpacking and then walked

downtown to Casa Lupe for dinner. I walked through the parking lot of what was Trinity United Methodist Church to a bustling Castro Street. As I passed by that church for the first time, I felt a little tug.

“What an opportunity this place has to connect with the folks of downtown Mountain View,” I thought.

And that’s how my love story with Mountain View began.

Since that day I’ve met my wife, who I married in September 2018. We welcomed Granger, a pit bull chihuahua mix pup, later that month. And in June 2019, our first two kids, Jo (now 20 years old) and Akiah (now 16 years old), came to live with us.

I’m no longer in that 600-square-

foot apartment. Instead, we live in the house that belonged to Trinity United Methodist Church, which has since merged with Los Altos United Methodist Church, just one street over from where I was.

And that tug I felt on day one? That has become Front Porch.

### SACRED ACT OF NEIGHBORING

Front Porch started as a dream – what would it look like to create meaningful connection with and among the people in downtown Mountain View? What would it look like to create a space where people could come from different backgrounds and find that they are united and a part of something bigger ➤



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than themselves? What would it look like to follow Jesus in a way that includes those people the church has often ignored? How can we follow Jesus in a way that cares more about people's behavior than their beliefs?

Now we are celebrating Becoming Front Porch – a moment of transition for Front Porch. We spent many months sharing what Front Porch would be. We anticipated that it would be a place where people can come from different spaces and backgrounds and share in a commitment to something bigger than themselves. We emphasized the Sacred Act of Neighboring as a path to personal and communal growth. It was fun to dream big dreams.

And now we celebrate that we are no longer anticipating but actively living what we say we are about. Not that we're done growing, changing and transforming. That will be a lifelong process for Front Porch the organization, as well as the people who make up the organization. But we



Front Porch participants enjoy a Sunday night dinner in Mountain View, part of a ministry that emphasizes the Sacred Act of Neighboring. | PHOTO COURTESY OF SAM BLEWIS

are saying that in this place, you will find a community of people full of flaws and imperfections but dedicated to growing in the Sacred Act of Neighboring.

What a gift to be in this place and time. 🌟

*Sam Blewis is pastor to the neighborhood for Front Porch, a ministry of Los Altos United Methodist Church. For more information, visit [frontporchmv.org](http://frontporchmv.org).*

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Pastor Dave Moore and family

Image by Zara Tahir

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# Filling in the Blanks

## Local resources help with GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

BY MARY LARSEN  
STAFF WRITER | [maryl@latc.com](mailto:maryl@latc.com)

Once upon a time, back a few decades, genealogical research involved myriad trips to libraries, courthouses, city halls and even cemeteries.

Nowadays, with the help of computers and resources like the Los Altos Family History Center, searches have become much easier.

Located at 1300 Grant Road, the Los Altos Family History Center has been operating since approximately 1979. William Skeehan, Family History library director, started as a librarian at the center nearly 50 years ago.

A function of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Skeehan said Family History libraries exist in every major city in the U.S., “wherever there’s an LDS population.”

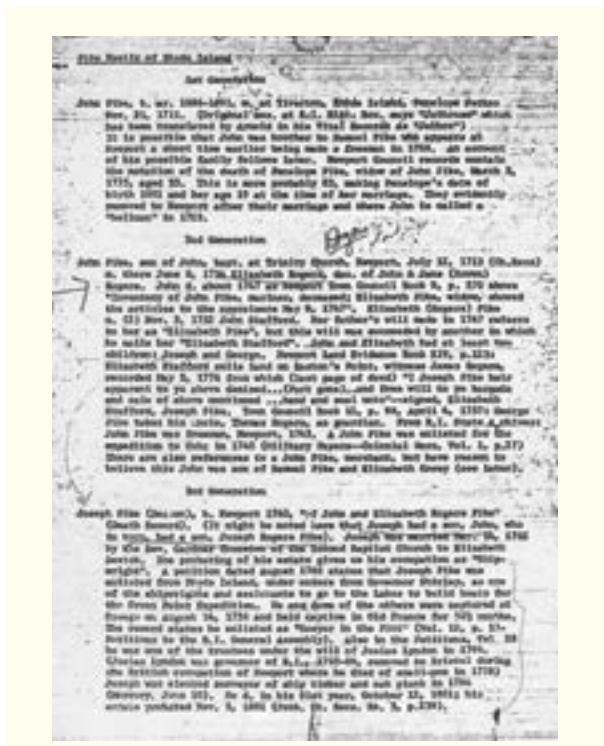
Other Family History libraries are located in Santa Clara on Quince Street and in Menlo Park on Valparaiso Avenue.

“There are more all over the Bay Area,” Skeehan said. “We all access the same computer records, whether we’re the smallest or the largest.”

The majority of local users, though, are “probably not Mormons,” according to Skeehan.

Anyone who wants to start or expand their research is welcome.

“They may know their family tree and want more information, or don’t know the techniques,” he said. ➤



Before the advent of the internet, families traced their roots the old-fashioned way. | IMAGE COURTESY OF MARY LARSEN

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The center has three computers, two microfilm readers, two printers, scanners and helpful librarians. Pre-pandemic, 30-40 people per month used the center, along with nine librarians. Users can avail themselves of MyHeritage newspapers, Ancestry.com and many databases, free of charge.

Every month, more information is added, thanks to volunteers who roam the world and upload pictures of their findings.

“A person these days doesn’t have to go through cemeteries,” Skeehan said, as many grave markers can now be accessed by computer.

There can be unexpected benefits to researching one’s family tree.

“There have been people who did not know their heredity at all and were surprised who they came from,” Skeehan said. “They’ve located missing ancestors, as well as living missing people.”

With the FamilySearch search engine, users also may also be found



#### Library resources

The Los Altos Library has a robust genealogy research page, including FamilySearch, HeritageQuest, Mercury News historical archives, New York Times historical issues, the Passenger and Immigration Lists Index and more. Residents also may access the Ancestry Library Edition at no charge from within the library.

For the full range of resources, visit [sccld.org/resources/genealogy](https://www.sccld.org/resources/genealogy).

by other family members doing research of their own.

For those just getting started researching their family tree, Skeehan advised that the first step is to “talk to living relatives and try to gain as much info as you can.” The Family History Center can help from there.

“We’re friendly and cater to both experienced genealogists as well as those just starting out,” he said. “We love to see the excitement when they find things out.” 🌸

*The Los Altos Family History Center is currently open 7-9 p.m. Wednesdays; other times are available by appointment.*

*For more information, call Skeehan at (650) 961-2073 or visit [familysearch.org/wiki/en/Los\\_Altos\\_California\\_Family\\_History\\_Center](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Los_Altos_California_Family_History_Center).*

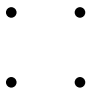
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# PARC REGENT CELEBRATES 104 Years Steeped in Arts and Culture

BY MARGARET ABE  
SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER

**T**he year 1918 was a momentous one, marking the end of World War I. It was also the year Iraida Espinosa, a longtime resident of the Parc Regent retirement community in Los Altos, was born. She turned 104 Feb. 22.

Born in Humacao, Puerto Rico, Espinosa graduated from the University of Puerto Rico. In 1937, she moved to Boston and earned a master's degree in music at Radcliffe College, a Cambridge, Mass.-based liberal arts college for women. In Boston, she met her future husband, Aurelio Espinosa, a Spanish instructor at Harvard University, whom she married in 1942. Shortly after, they moved to West Point, N.Y., where her husband taught foreign languages at the U.S. Military Academy.

The next four years of Espinosa's life were filled with playing the piano, folding bandages and caring for their first child, Margarita, born in 1944.

In 1946, the couple relocated to the Stanford University campus, and their family grew with the birth of Maria in 1947 and Ramon in 1952. At Stanford, Espinosa began a two-decade career in education, which included teaching Spanish at Woodside Elementary School, coordinating foreign language instruction at the primary school level for the Palo Alto Unified School District and teaching second and third grades at Walter Hays Elementary School in Palo Alto. 🌸



Iraida Espinosa celebrates her 104th birthday at Parc Regent with her son, Ramon. PHOTO BY MARGARET ABE | SPECIAL TO THE TOWN CRIER.

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## Women's History Month



# *Remembering Los Altos' Mary Golda Ross, Lockheed's first female engineer*

BY KATHERINE SIMPSON  
STAFF WRITER | [katies@latc.com](mailto:katies@latc.com)

**M**ary Golda Ross checks more than one “representation” box – she was Lockheed’s first female engineer and the first Native American aerospace engineer. She was also a Los Altos resident who will be featured in the History Museum’s revamped permanent exhibition.

Ross was born in the small Oklahoma town of Park Hill in 1908, and soon moved in with her grandparents in the nearby Cherokee Nation capital of Tahlequah to attend school. She graduated from high school at 16 and enrolled at Northeastern State Teachers’ College in Tahlequah in 1924.

According to reporting from the Tahlequah Daily Press, Ross was confused by the terminology during

college enrollment and didn’t know how to declare her major. The paper reported in 2016 that “the person assisting her register rephrased the question by inquiring what her favorite subject was in high school. When Ross responded ‘math,’ she was designated a mathematics major.”

Ross recalled being the only female in her class at Northeastern, which had previously offered only certificates for female teachers but in 1921 began offering coed education and bachelor’s degrees.

“I sat on one side of the room and the guys on the other side of the room,” she told the Daily Press. “I guess they didn’t want to associate with me. But I could hold my own with them, and sometimes did better.”

## PIONEERING SPIRIT

While working as a teacher in Oklahoma and elsewhere after her graduation into the late 1930s, Ross eventually earned a master's degree in mathematics by taking summer classes. A year after finishing grad school in 1938, Germany invaded Poland, and by the end of 1941, the U.S. would enter World War II, shifting the economic and industrial needs of the country.

Ross applied for a position at Lockheed Corp. in 1942 after learning while visiting friends in Southern California that the company was short on workers with her technical background. She was hired and assigned to resolve a technical problem with Lockheed's P-38 Lightning fighter aircraft. Unlike many women who left the workforce when the war ended, Ross remained at Lockheed at the company's request while it paid for her further education at UCLA.

As WWII ended and the space race began, Ross made another pivotal move – in 1952, she moved to Los Altos when she was transferred to Lockheed's Sunnyvale office, where she worked in the famed Skunk Works division. To this day, much of Ross' work with Skunk Works is classified. It is public knowledge, however, that she was the only woman on the team besides the secretary, and that she made critical contributions to NASA's Planetary Flight Handbook, which includes concepts that might guide future missions to Mars or Venus.

Ross died at her Los Altos home in 2008 at age 99.

Ross' legacy reaches beyond her contributions to science to encompass her work encouraging women and Native Americans to follow in her footsteps in the field of engineering. She lectured at high schools and colleges as a member of the Society of Women Engineers and co-founded the group's Los Angeles chapter. She funded scholarship programs for engineering students, was active in the American Indian Science and Engineering Society, and supported the Smithsonian Institution's efforts to create and maintain the National Museum of the American Indian. 🌸

*The Los Altos History Museum's updated permanent exhibition is scheduled to open early next year. For more information, visit [losaltoshistory.org](http://losaltoshistory.org).*

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The images at right show Mary Golda Ross throughout her life. The middle image, a painting by America Meredith of the Cherokee Nation, hangs in the National Museum of the American Indian. Ross is pictured outside the museum in the bottom right photo. | TOP LEFT PHOTO COURTESY OF NINETY-NINES MUSEUM OF WOMEN PILOTS; ALL OTHERS COURTESY OF SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION





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