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Issue 608 • May 26 - June 1, 2011

## Community Split Over Roxbury Redo

Many agree Roxbury Park community center  
needs improvement, but how much is too much?



cover story • pages 8-9



# briefs

## Superintendent candidate spent majority of his career in Turlock



Gary W. Woods

During a 25-year educational career, B H U S D superintendent finalist Gary W. Woods has worked in three districts of different sizes and demographics, ranging

most recently from 3,200 students at San Marino Unified School District where he has been superintendent since 2007, to nearly 20,000 students at Pajaro Valley Unified School District in Santa Cruz County, where he was assistant superintendent between 2004 and 2007.

Woods spent the bulk of his career—more than 15 years—in the Turlock Unified School district as an English teacher and administrator. Turlock, located in Stanislaus County in the Central Valley, has more than 13,500 students. BHUSD has roughly 4,900 students.

Cover Photo

CREDIT: City of Beverly Hills

Turlock Deputy Superintendent of Business Services Ed Felt said Woods grew up in Turlock and his family has owned and operated a family business, Woods Furniture, for generations. Woods remained close to home while receiving his own education at UC Davis (B.A.), California State University, Stanislaus (M.A.), and University of the Pacific (Ed.D.).

Woods taught English for nine years and coached at Turlock High. In 1997, he became assistant principal of K-6 Wakefield Elementary and two years later took the assistant principal position at Dutcher School, a school for first to eighth graders. After serving two years as principal of K-6 Osborn Elementary School, now a bilingual school called Osborn Two-Way Immersion

Academy, he took over the director of human resources position in 2003 while teaching at California State University, Stanislaus.

“I was a mentor to Gary early on when he became interested in administration,” said Felt, who was Turlock High’s assistant principal when Gary was hired. “We were kind of backlogged at the high school as far as potential administrative openings.”

Felt encouraged Woods to pursue an elementary administrative position, which he did before taking on the director of human resources position.

“He did an outstanding job there,” Felt said. “He got along well with everyone, mended fences with unions, had an open door policy. People trust Gary. They know he listens, cares about them. Knowing that

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# SNAPSHOT

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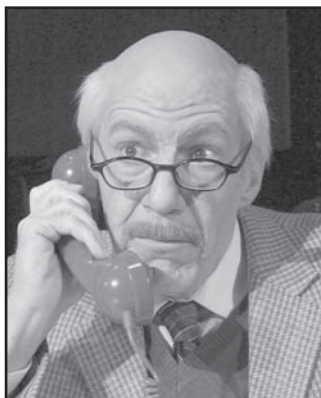
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PROM!  
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Maryam Farmanara and Negin Elazari share a laugh before heading to Beverly High Prom at the Pacific Design Center Saturday. For more prom photos, see page 10.

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OUR DATA SPEAKS VOLUMES



he was itching to move up from the director position, again [he was] at a point where he saw probably not many opportunities here, [so] he chose to pursue the area superintendent position over in Pajaro Valley.”

For much of Woods’ tenure, William H. Gibson was Turlock superintendent. Gibson retired in 2008 after nearly 16 years with the district. The district found current superintendent Sonny H. Da Marto through a search firm. Da Marto left the 11,000-student San Mateo-Foster City School District after 14 years as associate superintendent.

According to a 2008 article in the *Modesto Bee*, Da Marto made headlines in 2007 when he removed the book *Kaffir Boy* by Mark Mathabane from classrooms because it contained unsuitable material for children. Da Marto said he did not ban the book, but instead replaced it with a modified edition.

The Turlock school district unified in 2004, bringing together a district of high schools and a district of elementary schools. Prior to unification, each district had a five-member Board of Education, but only one administrative office.

According to Felt, who has worked in the district for 28 years, the reason for unification was to improve administrative and business efficiency.

“A lot of paperwork was cut in half by unification,” Felt said. “[The district established] a much more streamlined business operation that I think most people in the business world would say makes sense.”

Felt said there was not much resistance to unification, but once people adjusted to the change, “no one has ever questioned it.”

In the November 2003 election, unification passed with only 55 percent of the vote. A new seven-member board was elected, with all five elementary board members and one high school board member continuing.

Current Board member John Sims, who has been on the Board since 1999, said he may have been the only incumbent from the high school district that ran. He said two Board members did not support unification and did not run.

“I think it had to do with people that had been on the school board for a long, long time and just were comfortable with the way things were,” Sims said. “I think one of the criticisms was if we get this unified board it’s going to be more meetings, more work and bigger responsibility for those elected officials.”

Sims said that high school teachers in particular were weary of unification because they had their own bargaining unit prior to unification.

“To have one large bargaining unit with all the teachers in the district meant they were going to be one-third of the bargaining unit instead of 100 percent,” Sims said.

Felt said that the biggest resistance from the community was change, but that members of the high school community were worried about the amount of categorical funds the high schools would receive since they previously received their own fund.

“There were fears from the high school end that all this money was going to be taken from the high school pot and shifted to the elementary pot and programs would be either reduced or eliminated,” Felt said. “The first thing the new unified board did was to make sure all programs remained intact by

shifting money around.”

Felt said that as director of human resources, Woods would not have been involved in the political aspects of unification, but he would have been involved as far as looking at contracts and union relations.

Woods’ current district, San Marino Unified, scored a 949 out of 1,000 on the 2010 Academic Performance Index, and recently announced itself as California’s highest performing school district for the seventh year in a row. Turlock Unified scored a 760 API in 2010, with some of the elementary schools and one of two middle schools scoring in the 800 range. Three Turlock schools have been recognized as California Distinguished Schools. In 2010, BHUSD scored an 872 API.

More than 51 percent of the Turlock student population is Hispanic or Latino and 38 percent are white. Students with Asian backgrounds represent 4.5 percent of the student population. More than a quarter of Turlock’s students are identified as English learners, and nearly 60 percent are enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program.

Nearly half of Pajaro Valley Unified students are English learners and over 70 percent are enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program. Nearly 80 percent of the district’s students are Hispanic or Latino, followed by white students, representing 18 percent of the student population.

In contrast, less than 5 percent of students are English learners and only 1.4 percent of students are on the free or reduced lunch program at San Marino Unified. Nearly 60 percent of students are Asian or Asian American and 30 percent are white. The next largest population is Hispanic or Latino, representing 8 percent of the student population.

Under 9 percent of BHUSD students are English learners and 6 percent are on the free or reduced or free lunch program. More than 75 percent of BHUSD students are white, followed by 13 percent Asian, and about 5 percent each of black/African American and Hispanic/Latino.

The Board of Education is expected to approve Woods’ contract at its meeting on May 31. The salary reportedly will be about \$250,000, a significant raise from Woods’ current \$180,000 annual salary, as reported in *The Sacramento Bee*’s database of superintendent salaries.

#### Hankin not renewed as BHEF CEO



Dev Hankin

BHEF CEO Dev Hankin’s contract will not be renewed when her term ends on June 30.

According to BHEF Chair Jonathan Prince, Hankin decided to resign.

“It’s a completely personal decision,” Prince said. “We have relied on Dev as a volunteer, as an officer, as executive committee member, as president and most lately as the CEO. The wealth of knowledge and deep relationship she had in the community and her ability

to communicate her own passion for education and the importance of raising money to keep Beverly Hills schools excellent will be missed.”

Prince said BHEF may ask Hankin to stay on month-to-month during the transition while BHEF looks for a replacement.

Hankin faced criticism after a *Beverly Hills Weekly* cover story [Issue #592] revealed that BHEF raises comparatively less money than other area foundations such as in Manhattan Beach.

Hankin declined to comment.

#### Christiansen trial continued to July 25

The trial of former BHUSD facilities director Karen Christiansen has been continued to July 25 at 8:30 a.m. in Department 124 of the Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center at 210 West Temple St., Los Angeles. Judge Judith Champagne will hear the case.

The continuance was decided at a readiness hearing on Wednesday in Department 124. Christiansen has been charged with four counts of conflicts of interest.

Last month, Judge Stephen Marcus granted a request to sever the cases of Christiansen and former BHUSD Superintendent Jeffrey Hubbard, who faces two charges of misappropriation of funds.

Hubbard’s trial has been scheduled for June 29 in Department 102 of the Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center.

#### Library looks to renovate children’s area, lobby and relocate teen zone



Nancy Hunt-Coffey

If the Beverly Hills library is renovated according to plans presented at the May 17 City Council meeting, children will be treated to an improved area promoting separate

spaces for quiet reading and active learning, teens will have a larger place to hang out and the lobby area will become more efficient.

Assistant Director of Community Services Nancy Hunt-Coffey presented plans to the City Council as part of the capital improvements budget, which is currently up for city council approval.

About \$4.7 million was allocated for the renovations as part of the 2010-11 budget. An additional \$535,000 has been proposed for the 2011-12 budget.

“We made a request for \$285,000 for the next fiscal year to implement what’s called an automated materials handling system,” Hunt-Coffey said. “That is a piece of tech-

*briefs cont. on page 4*



## CORRECTION:

### NOTICE OF COMMISSION VACANCY - PLANNING COMMISSION

The correct deadline date for filing applications for this Commission is Monday, June 13, 2011 at 5:30 p.m. in the City Clerk’s Office, Room 290, 455 N. Rexford Drive, Beverly Hills, CA 90210.



## NOTICE OF COMMISSION VACANCY

### FINE ART COMMISSION

The Beverly Hills City Council is seeking qualified residents to fill one upcoming vacancy on the Fine Art Commission. The initial term of office is for two years. At the discretion of the City Council, the Commissioner may be reappointed to a second term of four years. Each appointee will be required to file an initial and an annual “Statement of Economic Interests” financial disclosure.

In order that we may preserve the integrity of the application and interview process, please direct all inquiries to the City Clerk, City Manager or the Director of Community Services. Please DO NOT contact the City Councilmembers or members of the Fine Art Commission regarding the Fine Art Commission vacancy.

Application forms for the Fine Art Commission, along with a description of the duties of a Commissioner, and filing details are available for pickup in the City Clerk’s Office, Room 290, 455 N. Rexford Drive, or call 310.285.2400 to receive an application and information by mail or by e-mail.

The deadline for filing applications for this Commission is Monday, June 20, 2011 at 5:30 p.m.

BYRON POPE, CMC  
City Clerk

briefs cont. from page 3

nology that uses robotics technology that when patrons return their books, the system will automatically check them in, put the alarm back on and then sort them.”

The focus of the discussion was on plans for the library renovation, which will improve the lobby and children’s areas and relocate the teen zone.

“We want to try to combine the classic feel of public libraries, with contemporary design, with the Beverly Hills brand,” Hunt-Coffey said.

Although four councilmembers expressed support for the project, Councilmember John Mirisch said he did not think renovating the library should be a priority when there are other parts of Beverly Hills that need attention.

“I actually do spend a fair amount of time in the children’s section of the library, because I take my son to story time,” Mirisch said. “I have to say, I don’t think it’s all that bad. Could it be better? What couldn’t be better? But I think what we have to look at is always a question of priority. We have other aging infrastructure that’s literally falling apart that we need to address. We have parts of town that are completely underdeveloped like the southeast.”

Vice Mayor Willie Brien said the City Council identified the library as a priority last year when considering the renovations. During the discussion on May 17, Mirisch said he was skeptical about renovating the library last year, too.

Councilmember Julian Gold said he agreed with Brien.

“As we think about things that are valuable to our community, I can’t think of anything more valuable to this community than its kids and their education and I see the library as a symbol of that,” Gold said.

Mayor Barry Brucker suggested that the present would be a good time to take advantage of lower construction costs.

Hunt-Coffey said much of the project was motivated by the results of a 2007 survey sent out to residents, indicating that patrons were most interested in having up-to-date books, high-quality lighting, comfortable seating, helpful signs and space for children.

The library has been at its current location since the 1960s. The library was last renovated in the early 1990s, and Hunt-Coffey took the city council through the areas of the library that need improvement.

“Our current library is a beautiful, much loved library,” Hunt-Coffey said. “It’s visually attractive. I think we have friendly knowledgeable staff, we have a very good collection of materials, and we have very good programs for children. I’m not at all knocking the library or the building, just that it has some [shortcomings].”

Hunt-Coffey said because of the way the library is configured, natural daylight is almost absent in the building, resulting in high lighting costs. She said patrons regularly complain about a lack of comfortable seating and study tables. She said that a great amount of space is taken up by large staff desks, which the library is unable to fill at current staffing levels.

Hunt-Coffey also said the library was not



**Gwen Gross retires in Irvine**

Former BHUSD Superintendent (2000-03) Gwen Gross celebrated her retirement as superintendent of Irvine Unified School District. Pictured with her at her May 18 retirement party are from left to right, former Beverly High principal (1989-2003) Ben Bushman, *Beverly Hills Weekly* publisher Josh Gross, Irvine Superintendent Gwen Gross, retired Director of Guidance Vivian Saatjian-Green, former Beverly High principal Dan Stepenosky (2003-06) and Beverly High principal Carter Paysinger.

designed for network technology and that aging finishes, such as the carpets, need to be replaced.

“We want our spaces in the future to be light and bright,” Hunt-Coffey said. “We want them to be environmentally responsible, so [we’ll be] using highly efficient lighting and fixtures and then implementing technology for better customer service and efficiency.”

Because the library has lost the equivalent of 18 full-time positions in the last few years, Hunt-Coffey said the renovation will incorporate more self-service technology.

“The lobby project is really driven by efficiency measures in creating public space,” Hunt-Coffey said.

She said additional study desks and seating will be added, and the space will be arranged so that not as many staff members are required in the area.

A priority for renovating the children’s area is relocating the restrooms to an area directly behind staff desks, giving staff members a clear view of who is coming in and out of the restrooms. Hunt-Coffey said there have been no incidents with the library’s current restrooms, but parents have expressed concern about the location, which is out of staff’s sight.

The children’s area will have two separate areas, one for quiet reading, and one for active learning. An enchanted woods concept has been proposed for an area storing the library’s fairy tale collection, and the theater space will be used more efficiently for story time and for afternoon studying. The large reading room in the back will be made more functional with technology placed in the center, more seating and areas where students can collaborate on projects.

The library’s teen zone will move to an area that currently houses staff offices. Staff members will move upstairs, allowing teens to use a space more than twice the size of the current teen zone, which is about 500 square feet. The staff office area has a room in the middle, which Hunt-Coffey said can be used to separate teens who want to study from teens who want to collaborate or hang out.

Hunt-Coffey said now that the design document phase of the project has been completed, the project will move into the construction drawing phase. If the city council decides to go forward, the next step would be putting the project out to bid. Hunt-Coffey predicted construction could begin later this year, and that it would last about 18 months.

**City Council discusses charging nonresidents for library cards; longer hours**

According to Assistant Director of Community Services Nancy Hunt-Coffey,

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*Looking Beyond members. Top row, left to right: Maggie Soleimani, Sherry Neman, Rosalind Moradian, Elham Navi, Pauline Moghavem, Angela Nahai, Betty Shalom, Nadia Mateen, Lili Daneshgar, Sabrina Younessi, Tannaz Assil, Elham Akhtarzad, Jessica Ghadir, Sherry Banayan, Debbie Elghanian, Fariba Nourafshan, Judy Wolf, Ladan Daneshgar, Natasha Sedaghat. Bottom row, left to right: Angella Nazarian, Susan Eshaghian, Bettina Javaheri, Debbie Farahnik, Elizabeth Mossanen, Rana Hakhamimi, Nicole Halimi, Shirley Shokrian, Shilla Hekmat. Front, seated: Yassi Mossanen*

**Looking Beyond poker tournament and auction raises over \$330,000 for children with special needs**

Over 550 people participated in Looking Beyond's May 11 Poker Tournament and Auction at the Four Seasons Hotel in Los Angeles, and raised over \$330,000 for UCLA's Intervention Program, Children's Hospital and other organizations assisting children with special needs. Now in its twelfth year, Looking Beyond is a foundation devoted to raising awareness and creating advancement and enrichment for children with special needs through programs and services.

the latest budget revision from Sacramento, released on May 16, recommended cutting library funding in half.

"The governor's revised budget was released earlier this week and in the revised budget Governor [Jerry] Brown is recommending half the funding," Hunt-Coffey said on Friday. "Now that's better than the initial budget, which completely zeroed out the funding."

The discussion of library funding came up during the Community Services department's 2011-12 budget presentation on May 17.

The City Council discussed \$75,000 as the amount that the library might receive from the state based on the latest budget, but Hunt-Coffey said on Friday that figure could be closer to \$85,000 because the library receives approximately \$170,000 a year from the state.

However, Hunt-Coffey said the exact amount Beverly Hills will receive from the state is difficult to know "because formulas they use to determine what each municipality receives is complicated." The state does not provide each city with equal funding.

City Councilmember John Mirisch brought up the possibility of charging non-residents for library cards to make up for lost funding from the state and as a possibility for funding the planned library renovation, understanding that the Beverly Hills Library would lose additional state funding it receives for serving nonresidents.

Hunt-Coffey explained that the California State Library Act provides transaction-based reimbursement, an incentive to serve nonresidents. On Friday, she estimated that \$50-55,000 of the estimated \$85,000 the library might receive from the state comes from that incentive.

In addition, Hunt-Coffey said the library

would lose services such as interlibrary loaning and discounts on materials purchased by a group of libraries.

Mirisch suggested that Beverly Hills consider charging nonresidents between \$10 and \$100 for library cards. The Cerritos public library currently charges residents \$100 a year for borrowing services.

Hunt-Coffey told the city council that 65 percent of the library's 41,000 current users are nonresidents.

"Let's say approximately 27,000 library cards are from out of town," Mirisch said. "If you were to only charge them \$10, you would more than triple the loss of revenue we're projected to lose."

Mirisch said the idea was not to reject nonresidents from using the library, but he acknowledged that charging for cards could discourage people from obtaining cards, which he suggested could alleviate library staff's workload.

"I think we need to get an idea before we commit [capital improvement program] dollars to [the library renovation] to know if we are perhaps going to charge for library cards and if we can expect as a result a reduction in the number of users," Mirisch said. "That may impact what needs there may be for future improvements."

Hunt-Coffey pointed out that charging for cards might not reduce impacts on services because some people use the facilities without checking out books.

Later in the discussion, Mirisch suggested that revenue generated from charging for library cards could be used to fund renovations.

Councilmember Lili Bosse pointed out that a survey indicated two-thirds of Beverly Hills residents use other libraries in addition to Beverly Hills. Hunt-Coffey confirmed that as a fact, based on a 2007 telephone

survey.

"Sometimes what you'll see when one library starts charging for library cards is that other libraries will start charging for library cards and then everybody ends up paying for library services," Hunt-Coffey

said.

Vice Mayor Willie Brien said he would not support charging for library cards.

"I think there are a lot of impacts to doing that," Brien said. "We do a lot of things to benefit the greater community here in Beverly Hills and beyond. We get money from the federal government to come up with new technologies to make our city safe. We don't sell that to the state or other cities, the software that we procure. We give that to other cities that otherwise wouldn't be able to take advantage to make them safer, at the same time making us safer."

Hunt-Coffey said she would be happy to look into charging nonresidents for library cards in further detail.

Despite the difficult budget situation, Director of Community Services Steve Zoet said the library will be able to extend its Thursday hours to 8 p.m. without requesting additional City funds, due to response to early retirement incentives and a redirection of funds for part-time workers to staff the library on Thursday evenings.

**No funding available for southeast development in 2011-12 budget**

Despite the fact that the City Council has identified the revitalization of southeast Beverly Hills as a council priority, no plans currently exist to work toward that goal.

At Councilmember John Mirisch's request, the City Council discussed the possibility of adjusting the proposed 2011-12 capital improvement program to include funding for the revitalization of southeast Beverly Hills at the formal meeting on

*briefs cont. on page 7*

# from the hills of beverly



## Issues: what's hot what's not

And some events of note  
By Rudy Cole

Even a cursory look at recent council agendas will show that, in historical terms, we are not living in any real crisis mode, that hard choices on budgets have been made without too much interruption in city services, and that the gloom and doom voices are out of tune with reality.

However, some city issues:

Not on the front decision-making burner, but troublesome, are some very neglected business areas: The many empty stores on North Beverly Drive and the almost decades long vacant store fronts on the south side of Wilshire between Spalding and Linden. North Beverly Drive, because of an inability to attract tenants, and Wilshire because the owners have yet to win approval for increased entitlements. (Plans for mixed uses were not approved years ago.)

Although previous councils had the resources and opportunity to create new parking structures, the parking fund, powered by revenues, is almost broke and, if

the city loses the two-hour free legal battle, could become an even greater fiscal problem and, equally important, make it more difficult to create new parking, and provide maintenance and improvements on existing lots.

Far reaching impacts: More difficult to create much needed increased parking facilities on South Beverly Drive and on Robertson Boulevard.

Future choices:

Yet to be unveiled are the new owner's plans for the Robinsons-May property at 9900 Wilshire. Although approvals run with the property, and these are condominiums and some limited retailing, the concept was for expensive, upscale condos. That may not be as viable, considering the increased number of expensive housing developments in western areas around Beverly Hills, and the lingering housing uncertainty.

Could the owners try going back to the city for a hotel development, either an

ambitious, convention-style project or a more limited, boutique, luxury model with well under two hundred rooms? Neither is likely to win love and admiration among north neighbors. Also, doubtful because the same group owns the Beverly Wilshire.

However, our hotels are recovering and occupancy in most is reasonably high, Asian tourists are returning and the trend seems headed for even more visitors in the months ahead.

Also on future planning and council agendas: The long awaited improvement plans for Little Santa Monica near Wilshire. Still, one of our least attractive gateways and inexplicably stalled because of phantom plans for a Broad art museum, the separate project plans and owners should be placed on the fast planning track.

Could there be reductions in the Joint Powers Agreement, our historic plan, first conceived by then-Mayor Dr. **Charles Aronberg** with backing from former school board president **Vicki Reynolds**, also later a councilmember and mayor, that provides critical support for our schools?

This is a tough politically loaded decision, but with the city forced to make major cuts on services, most yet to be fully felt, the pressure not to increase and even make moderate reductions, will have to be considered.

Speaking of schools, give credit to the BHEF board chair **Jonathan Prince** and others for the imaginative blitz drive for a goal of raising one million dollars in one week. There were some major donors, but mostly it was small amounts raised by dozens of volunteers that led to coming close to the goal.

(We will recognize all the volunteer workers when the drive is complete, but even BHEF vice chair for finance, **Todd Okum**, was smiling.)

Special appreciation also to the Beverly Hills Police Officer's Association the Beverly Hills Firemen's Association, each of whom gave \$10,000 to the BHEF fund drive. That is truly an incredible community caring act by our first responders. (Thank the next cop or firefighter you see.)

Still on the back burners: A Labor Day Taste program, mired in power plays.

Decision time should include what the program would do for our own restaurants and hotels, not as a promotion for all of Southern California.

Too many of these kinds of programs come directly to the council without being vetted by the city-funded Conference and Visitor's Bureau. If we have sufficient trust in the CVB to provide revenues from the Transient Occupancy Tax to promote tourism, why not begin consideration of business promotion plans through their organization?

One of the more contentious problems working its way through city government are long-delayed plans for improvements at two parks, La Cienega and Roxbury, with Roxbury receiving the most attention (see cover story page 8).

Efforts to single out one department head for responsibility for promoting some elements of the plan that have met with park neighbor objections are ludicrous.

The back story of this bleep in the process has more to do with other personal needs and not the merits of any park plan.

However, the process has been years in the making. Especially Roxbury has gone through dozens of public hearings, meetings with neighbors and consultant and staff studies. It is a work-in-progress begun long before the current division head was even working for the city. And there have been major modifications, mostly reductions in the scope and facilities. If anything, there has been a highly responsible outreach that has kept park neighbors informed and involved. Credit staff for this too.

There is a reality check that has to be made. Yes, park neighbors concerns are critical, but so are park users who are not immediate neighbors. This park desperately needs improvements, the facilities and buildings do not come close to Beverly Hills standards. As the dialogue and meetings continue, the Recreation and Parks Commission and the City Council need to do what has long been a city tradition: Protect and support our city staff when they are carrying out programs the leadership began.

Another flap that is very strange: Criticism of a city staff program called 9/80. What that means is that some city employees, not all, will work for nine hours instead of eight and have one day off every other Friday, or some variation of the plan.

Our workers did not demand this program, but it helps reduce traffic, and the city is our largest employer, without impairing services. The same plan has been adopted, and is working successfully in dozens of cities, including our neighbors: Santa Monica and West Hollywood. Ironic note, considering the source of the objection, almost the exact same program is followed in the city of San Marino! Cool it on attacks on our city staff. We have an historically collegial relationship that should not be impaired by petty differences, not in our community's interests. Most residents understand and support city excellence.

\*\*\*

If our businesses had as many customers as our library, our economic woes would be over.

I was actually amazed by the numbers of people I saw in all the various areas of our city library, from toddlers with mothers, to student users, to adults in reference areas, the library is a vibrant, incredible community resource, and yes, most of the users are indeed residents.

The council-approved renovations merit more space than we have this week. But just one example, if minor, are plans for moving children's restrooms to more secure areas and to modernize youth facilities.

\*\*\*

Events to attend:

The Maple Counseling Center holds its annual movie premier and car drawing on June 2 at the Motion Picture Academy. People you know who have won the drawings in recent years? Former Mayor **Donna Ellman** and school board member and past president, **Myra Lurie** and her hubby, car

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lease executive, **David Goldman**. (Since Ellman fostered the trolley in the triangle to reduce car traffic and David runs the premier leasing company, Executive, there is some irony in their wins.)

The movie is the well pre-release reviewed "Love, Wedding, Marriage" and ducats may still be available at (310) 271-9999. Reception, refreshments follow drawing and movie. This is really one of our most enjoyable events and The Maple Counseling Center, one of our most important resources.

Police Chief **David Snowden** will receive the 2011 Jack Webb Award in September, presented by the Los Angeles Police Museum to be held at the Beverly Hilton. For information, call FTA at (310) 288-1755.

The Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce presents its annual Business Excellence Awards Wednesday, June 1, also at the Beverly Hilton. Among those to be recog-

nized is **Nanaz Pirnia**. For information, call the Chamber at (310) 248-1000, ext. 114.

Two events on the same day: The Rodeo Drive Walk of Style recognition of the legendary **Fred Hayman** with a plaque unveiling and tribute and the Beverly Hills Bar Association's annual State Supreme Court luncheon at the Beverly Hills Hotel, Tuesday, May 31.

Not too much of a conflict, but it does raise a possibility. Why not a city master calendar with all events available as far in advance as possible? Either the city or the Chamber could provide this service, but it could help avoid problems.

Final political thoughts: Serving on city commissions prior to council election does help prepare for public service. New councilmembers **Lili Bosse** and Dr. **Julian Gold** have made seamless transitions from commissions to the city council. Both are doing their homework, both bring independent,

new perspectives to council decision-making and are serving in a cooperative, if not always in agreement, manner with their colleagues.

Concerns about a dearth of candidates for this fall's school board election may indeed be very mature. We have been hearing about some very strong and viable contenders.

One Beverly Hills-is-not-the-world note: While we appreciate President **Barack Obama's** desire to restart the stalled peace process, there is a truth that was all too obvious during the recent march on Israel by residents of the West Bank and Syria. The president would have heard one chilling call: "Death to Israel." It will be extremely hard to watch a hostile nation created right on its borders until the Palestinians and all of Israel's neighbors clearly recognize the State of Israel. Peace can only come by this reality, not by increasing the threat to Israel's existence. Incidentally, the back-

to-1967 borders has been a United States policy through all the Republican administrations too. Given a realistic policy, Obama may be the president who can actually bring a fair and secure peace to the area.

\*\*\*

How many of the richest people in Southern California live in Beverly Hills?

According to the Los Angeles Business Journal's annual list of the 50 wealthiest, a small army. Next week the BH richest, if we can verify the LABJ use of addresses and omit BH Adjacent or residents by business offices.

*Rudy Cole served for eight years as a member and chair of the city's Recreation & Parks Commission. He was also President of the Greystone Foundation and served on three other city committees. Rudy can be reached at: Rudy@bhweekly.com.*

briefs cont. from page 5

Tuesday night.

Councilmember Lili Bosse suggested the possibility of using the \$6.5 million in capital assets funds currently allocated to Roxbury Park.

Bosse explained that while looking for possible ways to fund a project in the southeast, she noticed that about half of the funding for the \$14.65 million Roxbury Park project comes from the capital assets building fund. She said while she was running for office, she had understood that all funding for the project would come from the parks and recreation facilities fund.

"I'm just addressing money that's going to be used from the building fund," Bosse said. "I'm saying, can we have it available—in case that money isn't used for Roxbury Park—can we have that money available potentially for the southeast?"

Bosse said her intention was not to kill the Roxbury Park project, but in looking at the projects that are part of the capital improvements program, that was the one project receiving funding from the building fund.

City Manager Jeff Kolin explained that capital assets funds are being allocated to Roxbury Park because the City has some large development projects that have been approved but are pending development, including 9900 Wilshire, and that they require park improvement fees that will be paid out of the parks and recreation facilities fund.

"A current problem we're facing is the parking enterprise fund is running a deficit," Kolin added. "We do not have the fund spinning off enough revenue to do exactly what we've been talking about, which is building up resources from parking operations to fund acquisition of a future facility."

During his presentation, Mirisch discussed the possibility of kick-starting the revitalization of the southeast area by building an underground parking structure with landscaping and shops and restaurants above it. Mirisch suggested a site on Olympic Boulevard and Almont Drive as a potential spot for a parking structure. He said the goal for the area was to make it more walkable

and livable.

"In past years unfortunately there had simply been a lot of lip service paid to [the southeast] with studies that had been done ending up dusty or in some drawer," Mirisch said. "I would like to appeal to you and make the suggestion that we not only perhaps set up a task force, but beyond studies and happy talk, that we actually set aside some money to be able to finally do something."

Mirisch presented a slideshow of photographs he recently took on a stretch of Olympic Boulevard between La Peer and Doheny drives, displaying empty buildings, shuttered storefronts and car storage lots. Mirisch said that South Robertson Drive and East Wilshire Boulevard also need attention.

Although all four of Mirisch's colleagues expressed interest in revitalizing the area, no consensus was reached to allocate funds for the cause in the next fiscal year.

Bosse's proposal to set aside the \$6.5 million currently proposed for Roxbury Park for potential southeast projects was met with opposition from Mayor Barry Brucker, Vice Mayor Willie Brien and Councilmember Julian Gold.

Brien said he was not willing to move funds from a project in development to a project that does not yet have a clear concept.

Gold suggested exploring creative means of funding, including private-public partnerships, since revitalizing the area would involve working with private land and property owners.

Mirisch said his goal was not to take funding away from Roxbury Park or the library renovation, but he suggested the City start saving funds for the southeast now so the City could be in a position to take action once a plan is developed. He pointed out that money was set aside for Roxbury Park before plans were developed.

Brien suggested that the council get started now on a concept for the southeast to bring back for the 2012-13 fiscal year budget.

Although no funds will be allocated for a project in the southeast in the next fiscal year, Mirisch was directed to chair a may-

or's task force of residents including homeowners association members and Horace Mann PTA members to come up with target areas and ideas for projects. Mirisch was also encouraged to engage with current property owners about revitalization.

#### Yebri testifies before Congress

One hundred members of the Los Angeles chapter of 30 Years After traveled to Washington, D.C. for the AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee] Policy Conference from May 21 to 24. Delegates heard speeches from leaders including



Sam Yebri

President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and attended meetings and lobbying appointments on Capitol Hill about the U.S.-Israel relationship.

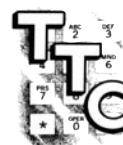
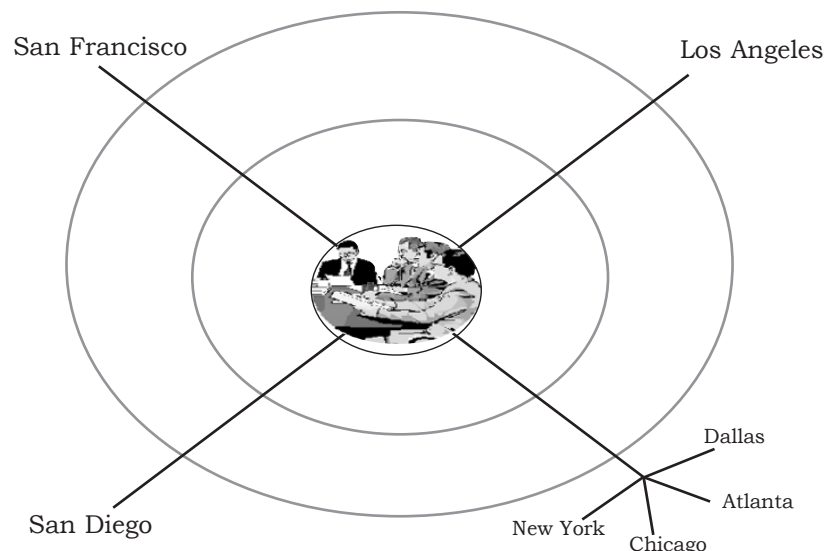
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## COMMUNITY SPLIT OVER ROXBURY REDO

**Many agree Roxbury Park community center needs improvement, but how much is too much?**

**By Melanie Anderson**

Plans for a new community center at Roxbury Park prompted lively discussion last week at a community meeting and during the Beverly Hills City Council's budget study session. The two-story community center would feature a gymnasium, library annex and teen area.

The proposed capital improvement budget allocates \$6.5 million in capital assets to the community center project, which is estimated to cost \$14.65 million.

"The [current] building is 55 to 60 years old and in very, very rough shape," Mayor Barry Brucker said on Tuesday. "I have visited recreation centers from Calabasas to Gardena to the City of Hawthorne to Chula Vista and elsewhere, and I would venture to say Roxbury Park community center is probably in the absolute worst shape and condition that I have seen while visiting these other cities."

Director of Community Services Steve Zoet said that in 2007, which was before he returned to the City, the City did a study comparing the costs of building a new facility with renovating the current facility and adding components that would have been proposed for a new facility.

"[The study] suggested there was about a million and a half dollars difference," Zoet said. "It's not insignificant [but] I presume given the overall costs involved, a new facility [provides] benefits of designing into it the exact program needs of the space versus taking the existing building, which honestly is not all that well-designed and [adding] uses into it. Anything done to the current facility must be built to current code. That drives a lot of costs. [If you] build from the ground up you're conforming to codes as you go."

As a compromise, Councilmember John Mirisch suggested building a smaller-scale community center during the city council's discussion on May 17.

"I think one can look at the possibility of perhaps a new build that may not be on as grand a scale as what has been planned," Mirisch said. "When you talk about facilities that are falling down

and costs of replacement versus costs of patching, that may be a valid argument. What I want to discuss another time is perhaps just the scale of the new facility."

Beverly Hills residents and Roxbury Park users assembled at the park's community center on May 18 for a presen-



*"Beverly Hills is known for having quality facilities and excellent services for teens, preteens, adults and seniors.*

*This is just one opportunity we have at our flagship park, Roxbury, to provide such amenities for our community."*

**-- Mayor Barry Brucker**



*"I think one can look at the possibility of perhaps a new build that may not be on as grand a scale as what has been planned. When you talk about facilities that are falling down and costs of replacement versus costs of patching, that may be a valid argument. What I want to discuss is perhaps just the scale of the new facility."*

**-- Councilmember John Mirisch**

tation from Zoet and architects Steve Albert and Patrick Hirsch about plans for the new community center.

"There were a couple people advocating for it and those speaking against it as

would be expected in a process like this," Zoet said.

According to Zoet, about 20 people expressed their opinions or asked questions about the proposed community center.

Brucker described those in attendance as a "diverse crowd," including individuals who did not support any development at the park and those who wanted only minimal improvements, as well as parents of preschoolers, teens, seniors and recreational league participants who supported the project for various reasons.

Zoet took the community through the project's process so far, and the architects showed the community renderings of the building, which Zoet said took into account suggestions from the public that were expressed at previous community meetings and in a survey that went out to 18,000 residents in 2006.

In May 2008, the City Council approved the Parks Master Plan for improvements at La Cienega and Roxbury parks. At that time, the plan proposed improvements to park grounds in addition to a new community center. The total cost was estimated at \$27.6 million in 2008 dollars. Improvements at Roxbury Park were prioritized over La Cienega Park based on facility conditions.

Zoet said improvements at Roxbury Park

grounds at Roxbury Park, would only move forward if funding becomes available.

Phase I is projected to cost \$14.65 million, which will cover the two-story 26,344 square-foot community center building. The current one-story community center building is 17,753 square feet. Although the new community center is a larger building, the building's footprint, 18,489 square feet, is smaller than that of the current community center, 23,676 square feet, because it is being built up.

Mayor Barry Brucker said that a smaller building footprint will allow for more green space.

"The plan that they have actually increases green space at Roxbury, which is something we desperately need," Brucker said.

Features of the proposed community center include a new gymnasium, a tot lot adjacent to the preschool, expanded library space, a rock climbing wall, staff offices oriented to promote improved supervision of the park, and energy efficient materials, equipment and technology.

Irrigation associated with the community center will be installed along with low-flow water devices, but the majority of irrigation would be addressed in the second phase of the master plan. The May 6, 2008 staff report stated that during a three-month period in 2008, there had been 10 water line breaks or sewer-related problems.

Arden Drive resident Marilyn Gallup cited the 2006 survey, in which she said 345 out of 1,707 respondents expressed interest in a gym and 182 people said they wanted a rock climbing wall.

Gallup said she questioned why those particular features were being incorporated into the community center when results of the 2006 survey showed that the community did not want them.

The City was not able to locate a copy of the survey results before press time.

Results of a 2005 survey from the Sports Management Group about a possible community recreation facility identified a gymnasium as the most desired feature, with 79 percent of respondents indicating interest. About 46 percent of the respondents expressed interest in a rock climbing wall. Nearly 1,100 people responded to the survey that was available online or by request from the City.

The majority of respondents also expressed interest in a pool, exercise equipment, a youth game room and open park space. Of those who answered the survey, nearly three quarters said they would use the recreation facility one to two days each week if most of their requested features were incorporated. More than one third indicated they would use the facility three to five times a week.

Although an 80,000-square-foot recreation facility was recommended as a result of surveys and meetings, the idea for the Parks Master Plan originated because residents expressed concerns that improvements at La Cienega and Roxbury parks should be prioritized because they needed repairs. Staff evaluated the parks and worked out a Master Plan to incorporate some of the proposed elements for the recreation facility into the existing facilities.



"I don't necessarily have a problem if we're going to decide to build a new facility," Councilmember John Mirisch said on May 18. "I heard the argument that ultimately building a facility will save us money because it's more expensive to continue to patch up the old facility."

However, Mirisch said he did not think all the new features are necessary.

"One of the reasons we spend over \$10 million each year on the [Joint Powers Agreement] is to have access to the school facilities," Mirisch said. "If we want basketball courts, especially if the schools are upgrading their facilities with the bond, we should talk with them about that rather than spend these additional funds."

The Beverly Hills City Council had its own discussion about the community center during its meeting the night before, when the Community Services department presented a report on its budget. The City Council also discussed the project during Deputy City Manager David Lightner's presentation of the capital improvement budget for the next fiscal year, which sets aside \$6.5 million for the park project.

Lightner announced that the Planning Commission had found the five-year capital improvements program to be in confor-

mity with the City's general plan.

Councilmember Lili Bosse, who was chair of the Planning Commission when she was elected to the city council, said she disagreed that the project was in conformance because she explained that one of the items required for conformance is that parking must be expanded to minimize the impact of park and recreational activities on the surrounding neighborhood.

According to the staff report distributed to members of the Planning Commission at their meeting on May 12, "the new community center improves and expands the existing recreational facilities at Roxbury Park and will add onsite parking for an additional 125 cars, thereby minimizing the impact on surrounding streets caused by the current inadequate supply of parking at the park."

Bosse said the current plan calls for 125 spaces, which means only 77 spaces would be added. She said a parking study by Carl Walker called for 172 spaces for the new community center. Based on a recent survey, Bosse said there are currently 48 parking spots at the park. She said eight spots currently available on Roxbury Drive would be eliminated to accommodate a new parking lot entrance.

Bosse pointed out that the parking study was based on a 22,300-square-foot community center, instead of the 26,344-square-foot community center currently proposed.

Bosse also noticed that the Planning Commission staff report states that the new community center would "include noise and impact mitigation measures in its design to minimize impacts to adjacent residential uses." However, she said that proposed outside balconies hosting parties might not mitigate noise, and she also said that the new building may not be compatible with the architecture, mass, scale, character and landscape of the adjacent neighborhood because it is two stories.

"From my perspective, I do not believe as proposed this does conform with the general plan," Bosse said. "I think the Planning Commission did not receive all the details. They did not know what the parking situation is. I feel they were not able to make an informed decision on this because they did not have all the information that I do."

Bosse said she spent "many, many hours" researching the specifics of the project by meeting with Zoet and the project's architects.

Lightner said the Planning Commission asked questions that went beyond materials in the packet.

"They looked at examples that were shown of proposed plans and discussed parking specifically," Lightner said.

It was ultimately resolved for Bosse to meet with Director of Community Development Susan Healy Keene and present her with additional information that she could choose to present to Planning Commission Chair Dan Yukelson for review.

Additional community meetings, which have not yet been scheduled, will take place before plans for Roxbury Park are brought before the City Council for approval.

"Long story short is Beverly Hills is known for having quality facilities and excellent services for teens, preteens, adults and seniors," Brucker said. "This is just one opportunity we have at our flagship park, Roxbury, to provide such amenities for our community."

At Tuesday's City Council meeting, all five members acknowledged that the park's facilities need improvement of some kind.

*briefs cont. from page 7*

"There's a delegation of 30 Years After members who are in Washington, D.C. for the twin purpose of advocating for the United States-Israel relationship at the AIPAC policy conference and advocating for the renewal of the Lautenberg Amendment in partnership with HIAS organization, [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society], which works to help religious refugees from Iran and other countries immigrate to the United States," 30 Years After President Sam Yebri said.

30 Years After is a Beverly Hills-based nonprofit organization with a mission to educate, inspire and mobilize the Iranian Jewish community through civic action conferences, lectures and other programs.

On Monday, Yebri testified before Congress' Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission during a hearing about religious minorities in Iran to advocate for the extension of the Lautenberg Amendment, which Yebri said "fast-tracks" procedures for the immigration of religious minorities from Iran to the United States. The amendment was part of the 1990 Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill to establish a presumption of refugee eligibility for certain categories of people from the former Soviet Union and Southeast Asia.

"If this amendment is not renewed, religious minorities in Iran who suffer from discrimination and the threat of violence are either stuck in Iran indefinitely or must find their way to freedom through the dangerous paths of Pakistan or Turkey," Yebri said.

The amendment is set to expire in June unless Congress renews it.

"The response has been very receptive in our meetings and in the hearings," Yebri said. "However, this amendment is part of the appropriations legislation, and in this economic climate, there's a challenge to keep or add any program to the federal

budget."

Yebri said he was one of about six leaders representing different minority communities in Iran, including Iranian Christians, Kurds and Bahais.

"I spoke for about seven minutes sharing my personal family story of leaving Iran, anecdotes about recent difficulties of the Jews of Iran, and advocating for renewal of the Lautenberg Amendment," Yebri said.

Yebri's family initially came to the United States with the help of the HIAS organization.

Yebri's Washington, D.C. visit included a meeting with Representative Henry Waxman (D-Los Angeles) to discuss the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Yebri will marry Leah Talasazan on Sunday.

#### **Ezri Namvar faces up to 80 years in prison for wire fraud conviction**

Los Angeles businessman and real estate developer Ezri Namvar was convicted of four felony counts of wire fraud for allegedly stealing approximately \$21 million from four clients, which included Beverly Hills residents.

A federal jury reached its verdict on May 19 after hearing eight days of testimony.

Hamid Tabatabai, who worked with Namvar, was also found guilty of the four wire fraud charges. Namvar and Tabatabai face a maximum sentence of 80 years in federal prison.

"The verdict is really not a surprise to any of his victims, but it's still nice having a group of 12 independent people verify what the victims have been saying all along, which is he's a fraudster," said attorney A. David Youssefyeh, who helped victims organize a bankruptcy case against Namvar.

According to a press release issued by the Federal Bureau of Investigations in Los Angeles, evidence presented at the trial showed that four victims entered into agree-

ments to deposit approximately \$25 million with Namco Financial Exchange Corp. in 2008.

The company was to hold clients' money in "safekeeping" before it was reinvested in real estate, but evidence showed that Namvar, with Tabatabai's assistance, used the money for unauthorized and undisclosed purposes, which included paying off creditors and investors of Namvar's investment company, Namco Capital Group, Inc.

The FBI stated that the four victims' money was wired to Namco Financial Exchange Corp. over a six-month period, and the money was transferred from National Financial Exchange Corp. to a Namco Capital Group bank account, among other places. The money was allegedly used to pay the company's expenses and liabilities. The company entered bankruptcy proceedings in April 2009.

Of the \$25 million in exchange proceeds, only about \$4 million was returned to or used on behalf of the victims.

The sentencing is scheduled for August 22, and U.S. District Judge Percy Anderson will preside. On May 19, Percy ordered Namvar, who is free on bond, under house arrest with electronic monitoring. A hearing is scheduled for June 1 to determine if Namvar should be remanded into custody.

Namvar's attorney Marc Harris did not return a phone call from the *Weekly*.

#### **Alex Stettinski to head Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce**

The Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce announced the hiring of its new executive director, Alex Stettinski, on Friday.

"As a business leader serving the Beverly Hills community, the Chamber required a combination of vision and management expertise in its leader," Chamber President Todd Johnson said in a statement. "Alex has this exact combination. His wealth of private and community experience, track

record of management success and commitment to his work will be valued assets in our ongoing efforts in keeping our organization strong."



*Alex Stettinski*

Stettinski, who has lived in Beverly Hills for the past 16 years, has over a decade of marketing experience. Most recently, he was in charge of all marketing and commu-

nications related activities at the Downtown Center Business Improvement District (DCBID) to brand, position, and promote Downtown Los Angeles. He also was responsible for cultivating new members and communicating with current members of the Central City Association, a membership-driven business advocacy organization.

Before his work at DCIB, he was executive director of the Avenues of Art & Design BID, where he led the organization's marketing strategies, sponsor relationships, and City and media relations. According to the Chamber of Commerce, Stettinski was responsible for a 300-percent increase in revenue within his first three years with the Avenues of Art & Design BID.

The Chamber of Commerce announced that Stettinski has "been able to develop strong relations with City Council members, other City officials and worked closely with various commissions and committees to further the mission and goals of business communities."

At the City Council study session on May 17, Johnson said he expected Stettinski would take his post in about 30 days.



*Daniel Shofet, Tara Farahdel, Justin Shouhed, Brigitte Neman, Anabel Math and Matthew Davidov*



*Mike Lavi, Chloe Azria, Sharon Dann and Ardy Rahbarpoor*



*Daniel Rudyak, Taylor Dordick, Camille Geiderman and Alex Gabbay*



*Dora Shamool, Matt Yashar, Niaz Yashar and Charles Bert*



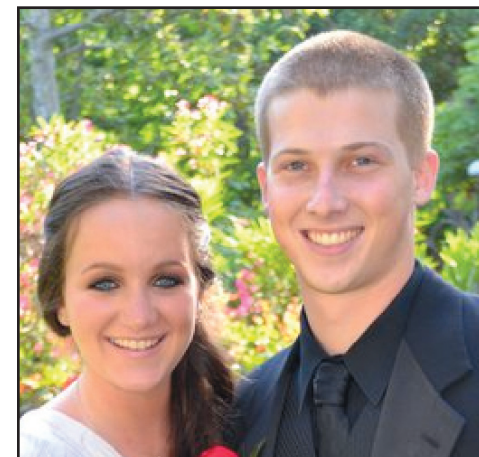
*Maryam Farmanara, Julian De Los Prados, Negin Elazari and Amir Ahobim*



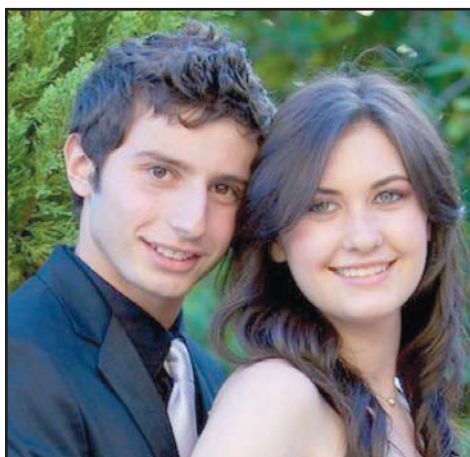
*Whitney Smith, Brittany Pourmorady, Leora Kashani, Dior Dokhanian and Natasha Navi*



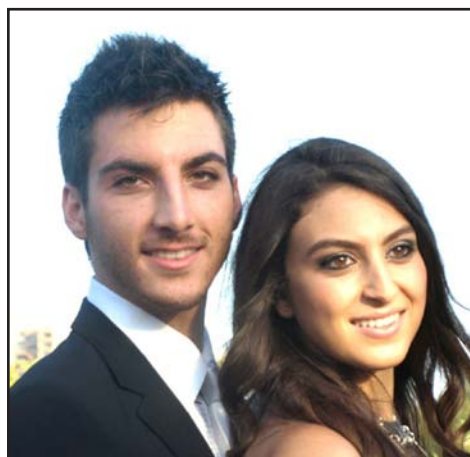
*Colette Farzan and Diamo Dokhanian*



*Michelle Levy and Joey Livingston*



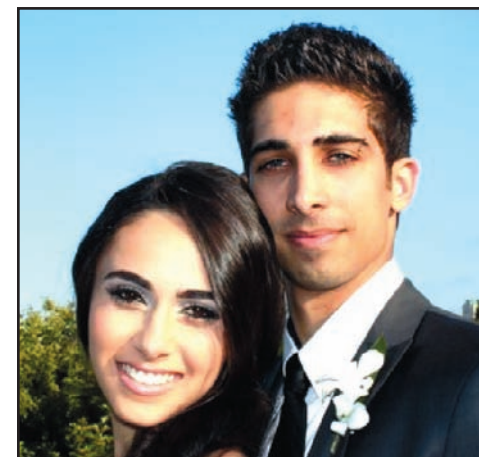
*James Ephrati and Jaclyn Karpik*



*Demis Dokhanian and Leora Kashani*



*Negin Elazari and Sharon Dann*



*Sogol Ashourpour and Nathan Soleimani*

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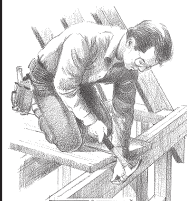
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