

Practice makes perfect



Kirstina Sangsahachart / Daily News

Nina Risi, 10, right, warms up for a ballet class at the Menlo Park Academy of Dance on Monday. Nina and her fellow classmates are practicing for their end-of-the-year showcase June 12 to 13 at the Woodside Performing Arts Center, 199 Churchill Ave., in Woodside.

MOUNTAIN VIEW

City officials look to curb bird population

BY DIANA SAMUELS
Daily News

What isn't good for the goose is good for the gander. To drive pesky geese and coots from a golf course, city staff is suggesting a new tactic: filling in ponds with rare burrowing owls.

The Mountain View City Council is looking at strategies for managing bird problems at 7:30 in the Plaza Conference Room.

The city has struggled for years with coots, which are drawn to the ponds. "The birds also eat the grass on the lake, causing considerable damage," according to a city staff report. "The birds also eat the grass on the lake, causing considerable damage to golfers and park users." The repair cost to the city is \$100,000.

The coots are migratory and arrive in September and mid-April, while the owls arrive in March and stay through September, according to the city.

To drive the birds away, the city is considering coyote decoys, and sprinklers, and noise makers, according to the staff report. In 2008, the city developed a pilot program under which it drained three of Shoreline's four ponds, used a dog to chase the birds and added goose eggs so they would not hatch.

As a result of those efforts, between January 2008 and January 2010, Shoreline's coot population decreased from 5,200 to 2,200 and the goose population fell from 490 to 340, according to the city.

City staff is suggesting that the two ponds on the western side of the golf course be turned into habitat for burrowing owls. The city plans to develop athletic fields on 12 acres in that part of Shoreline, where the owls have been known to forage. The filled-in ponds would potentially replace that lost habitat.

Bird advocates, including the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, objected to the athletic field plans last fall, concerned for the future of the burrowing owls.

The tiny birds, which eat insects typically made by squirrels, are a concern in California. Santa Clara County has the largest nesting pairs of burrowing owls, and Shoreline only had three pairs.

Shani Kleinhaus, an environmentalist with the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, said she is "optimistic" at city had originally considered "mitigation credits" at a wildlife refuge, but wildlife advocates object in Mountain View.

Kleinhaus said she is "very happy" that the city is also considering owl management plan, since that's the city's current plan. She said she would be involved in the plan.

"Our hope is that it will not only increase the numbers (of owls)," she said, "but also the willingness (on the part of the city) to fund the plan." E-mail Diana Samuels at dsan@dailynews.com

SCHOOL MATTERS

Gunn principal talks policy, leadership

School Matters recently interviewed outgoing Gunn High principal, Noreen Likins. We began with her travel plans, which will include stops in Africa, Europe, Australia, South America, Antarctica, New Zealand and Baja California in her first nine months of retirement. Then we got serious, talking about her successor and Palo Alto High's new incoming principal. During Likins' tenure as principal at Gunn, Sandra Pearson, Scott Laurence and Jacqui McEvoy served as principals at Paly.



PREEVA TRAMIEL

School Matters: You have outlasted three principals at Palo Alto High School. What is different here at Gunn?

Noreen Likins: I can't say because I've never worked with the Paly community. I think Gunn is a community that has grown much closer over the years, particularly this year.

SM: What do you think of parents' involvement in their child's education?

NL: It's absolutely vital. It's very important that parents understand

the system. If you didn't go through it yourself, you don't know how to work within the system; you don't know what things have to be done.

SM: ACS (Adolescent Counseling Services)?

NL: Enormously helpful. They are not as visible as we would like them to be because we don't have space for them in heavily trafficked areas.

SM: Do you keep tabs on students who are on medication?

NL: We do. I have lists here that are constantly updated.

SM: Are there quite a few?

NL: Yes, quite a few.

SM: Any idea why?

NL: Many reasons, stress is one.

Even though we try — oh, how we try — to de-emphasize where kids are going, sometimes they see each other as competitors. We've had a lot of kids who have lost a parent to illness, cancer particularly. We have a lot of kids who are dealing with divorce; that's like losing a parent. About a third of our kids come from one-parent homes, or have two addresses, two parents in different households.

SM: Talk about your successor, Katya Villalobos.

NL: Katya understands the classroom and that is very important. She's moving into a position in a school where I hope things are

working well, there are no pressing problems that have to be fixed, and so she can sit back and observe for a while.

SM: Can you say something about the next Paly principal, Phil Winston?

NL: I've worked with Phil for four years. He is a dedicated, hardworking person, very student-centered. He's rather quietly spoken.

SM: Why has Paly gone through principals so quickly?

NL: I think that they've been unlucky. Fred Dreyer was a very competent man, but really a part-time principal when he moved to Redding, and a lot of things did not get addressed. Sandra Pearson was an interim (principal), and people often don't take an interim seriously and the interim lasted for two years. So when you add those things together, they had a long period when nothing very much happened on the campus. That leads people to believe they can do their own thing, and when they do their own thing, it's very hard to pull that back.

Preeva Tramiel was president of the Paly PTSA from 2006 to 2008. E-mail comments to schoolmatters@palaltopta.org. See the PTA Council Web site, www.palaltopta.org, for submission guidelines for news releases.

SAN MATEO COUNTY

Defense: Teen shot victim, but it wasn't

BY LAURA DUDNICK
Bay City News

Jurors heard opening statements Monday in the San Mateo County Superior Court trial of a 19-year-old man accused of murdering a Carimont High School senior at a party in 2008.

There is no question that Ricardo Garcia, now 19, fatally shot 17-year-old Solomon Zarate on Sept. 13, 2008, Garcia's defense attorney Charles Smith said, but whether the killing was murder or voluntary manslaughter remains up to jurors.

Prosecutors allege that Zarate and Garcia were members of rival street gangs and got involved in a fight at a party on Columbia Avenue near El Camino Real in unincorporated San Mateo County's North Fair Oaks area

that night. "This is a very simple case," prosecutor Al Giannini said. "This is a murder, plain and simple."

The 5-foot-10, 255-pound Zarate, an alleged member of the Heller Street Tongan street gang, decided to "check," or challenge, an opposing gang member at the party, Giannini said.

He picked a suspected member of the North Fair Oaks gang, to which Garcia also allegedly belonged, according to Giannini.

When Garcia saw his friend fighting with Zarate, he "jumped in immediately," Giannini said, "to be the biggest, baddest gangster."

By this time, there were people gathering outside the party watching the fight in the street, with some egging them on and others trying to pull the

fighters apart. "And out comes the gun," Giannini said.

The prosecutor said Garcia pulled out his gun and fired one wild shot that hit the ground, but quickly pulled the trigger again, this time hitting Zarate.

"Nobody expected Mr. Garcia to produce a gun and just open up in a crowd of people," Giannini said. "But Mr. Garcia brought him down."

Giannini said Zarate "staggered" to a nearby vehicle and Garcia followed him and continued shooting.

"Mr. Garcia came up to him while he was helpless and shot him again, and again, and again," Giannini said. "He emptied his revolver into Mr. Zarate."

Smith said Garcia continued shooting at Zarate because he was scared Zarate had a weapon of his own. He

said Garcia knew Zarate was part of the Heller Street group and that they had posted pictures of weapons on popular social networking websites including MySpace.

"When Ricky went to help his friend, he was scared," Smith said. "He was absolutely no match physically for the Tongan group, but he knew he had a gun," he said.

Smith acknowledged that Garcia, who sat quietly in court dressed in a black suit, his skin pale and short black hair gelled in place, is responsible for shooting Zarate.

But the killing was voluntary manslaughter, not murder, Smith said. Voluntary manslaughter, he said, is imperfect self-defense.

Garcia fled but surrendered to the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office his