

Her two cents on foreclosure fiasco saga

Lisa A. Burns would like to add her two cents to the debate over our nation's housing crisis.

Actually, she'd like to hurl her two cents. After all, she got a letter from her lender threatening foreclosure of her home over two pennies.

A 51-year-old woman with an expertise in computers and a keen sense of the absurd, Burns considers herself an upstanding citizen with solid home equity.

She's owned the same small house in Mountain View since 1988. Her monthly mortgage payments of roughly \$1,300 are subtracted from her checking account automatically.

Last November, however, she was laid off from her job as a project manager at Stanford University.

And that began a wild excursion through the shadowy domain of refinancing with government help.

The story ends happily. Burns has a new job with a solid company. And she is refinancing her home with a new lender.

But her saga offers insight into the difficulties that people on the edge face.

Late last year, Burns began to reorder her finances. She says she approached her lender, Wells Fargo Home Mortgage, about refinancing.

You've got a problem, they eventually told her. You don't have a job. Well, yes, she said. That's why I need you to reduce my interest rate of 6.75 percent. Sorry, they said.

So in April, by her account, Burns took up Wells Fargo's suggestion to apply for help through the Obama administration's Making Home Affordable program.

Obama plan

In broad terms, the program offers incentives to lenders to reduce mortgage payments. Critics say the program has been off to a disappointing start, in part because some banks have been slow to process paperwork.

Burns says she completed filling out her documents by mid-April. Then she had to refax them to the bank at least four more times. "I have better things to do than hang around my fax machine," she said.

Finally, earlier this month, she received a loan application, an invitation to start over with a new process. "I wanted a rate, not an application," she told me.

In fairness, bankers say the government's standards have changed several times in six months — and income changes can make the program more difficult to apply. Burns is not particularly mollified.

"If anyone in government thinks this Making Home Affordable program is working, they're deluded," she told me.

Final indignity

The final insult came two weeks ago, when Wells Fargo Home Mortgage sent her a letter informing her that her mortgage account was delinquent by two cents — and that she had until Sept. 15 to pay.

"If funds are not received by the above date, we will proceed with acceleration," the letter said. "Once acceleration has occurred, we may take steps to terminate your ownership in the property by a foreclosure proceeding."

A Wells Fargo spokesman, Teri Schrettenbrunner, told me the letter was generated by a "glitch in our system." "We apologized to her for inaccurately applying her payments. And we explained that her loan had not been made to go into foreclosure."

Like I say, the story ends happily. But it has made Burns ponder what might happen to someone less well fixed.

"What if in April, I really had been on the edge?" she said. "It happens I'm not, thank God. But there are people who are."

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HIGH-SPEED RAIL

Talks aim to keep project on track

Delay over deal to use rail right of way could threaten stimulus funds

By Gary Richards

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Now that a judge has thrown the high-speed rail route into the Bay Area into limbo, attention has shifted to a dispute over a segment between Gilroy and San Jose along tracks owned by Union Pacific Rail-

road.

Officials with the railroad and the California High Speed Rail Authority confirmed that they have held discussions in hopes of resolving their differences, which if not settled soon could cost the rail authority \$3 billion in federal stimulus aid and state bond money, delay construction in Northern California and leave in doubt the electrification of Caltrain.

Earlier this summer, the railroad declared it would not allow high-

speed trains to run in its right of way parallel to Monterey Highway, citing safety reasons. Its freight trains travel at 79 mph compared with the 200-mph-plus pace at which high-speed trains can travel.

The dispute took center stage Wednesday, after a Superior Court Judge Michael Kenney ruled that an environmental report failed to address the railroad's concern.

"Our position continues to be the same as what we've said in the past," Union Pacific spokesman

Tom Lange said from Omaha, Neb. "The high speeds of these trains is simply not compatible in our right of way."

"We've had discussions with them, but the bottom line is that safety comes first and foremost."

High-speed trains would run initially from Anaheim to San Jose and on to San Francisco, and later to San Diego and Sacramento, at a cost of at least \$40 billion. Voters

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ITALIAN-AMERICAN FAMILY FESTA

Dreams of a Little Italy in San Jose



PAULINE LUBENS — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

Justin Wadstein, above, wows Emma LeFever and the rest of the crowd with his pizza dough spinning skills at the Italian-American Family Festa in San Jose's Willow Glen on Saturday. Below right, Jasmine Morales tries her hand at spinning pizza dough. Below left, a visitor displays one of the day's popular sentiments.



29th annual party marks opening of fundraising drive

By Bruce Newman

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As the sun threatened to melt everything it touched at the Italian-American Family Festa in Willow Glen on Saturday, Al Vallorz clung to the tiny pool of shade beneath the umbrella on his frozen ices cart. In addition to offering a heat stroke antidote in three flavors, Vallorz had posted a sign that read, "Take a picture with an Italian gigolo, \$1."

Vallorz had brought along his young son to provide intergenerational gigolo poses, but he was also realistic enough to anticipate a bigger profit center, posting another sign below the first: "Forget about it, \$2."

As the sun turned the asphalt along Lincoln Avenue into a licorice whip during the first day of the festival, organizers were trying to turn the two-day event — which was celebrating its 29th year — into a year-round way of life. This year's festival marked the opening of a \$200,000 fundraising drive that could lead to the creation of a Little Italy in San Jose as early as next year.

"We have a sense of community during this weekend," said Joshua DeVincenzi Melander, 29, chairman of the Little Italy San Jose project, "but we want to make it so it's not just during the Italian festival that all the Italian clubs and groups are getting together. We think we can capture the same spirit every day in Little Italy."

In Willow Glen, the smell of pizza (\$4 a slice at the Tomato Thyme booth) mixed with Italian sausage sandwiches (\$7 from the Sons of Sicily) set people dancing in near-100 degree heat to the

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Trail opens in Santa Teresa

By Lisa M. Krieger

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Civic leaders gathered in San Jose's Santa Teresa neighborhood on Saturday morning to celebrate the transformation of a half-mile strip of neglected land into a graceful winding trail.

Once featuring mostly dirt, weeds and litter, the asphalt Albertson Parkway Trail — named after the late community leader and local resident Gary Albertson — is newly landscaped with tree seedlings, shrubs and interpretive signs.

"It is quite fitting to honor Gary Albertson for his years of community service by opening a trail that will serve to bring the community

together by creating a beautiful, pedestrian-friendly parkway, which will serve as a gateway to the Santa Teresa foothills for years to come," San Jose Councilman Ash Kalra told a gathering of several dozen.

On an 80-foot wide strip of land that runs under PG&E towers, the trail stretches from Dondero Way and Cresta Vista Way to Curie Drive and Manila Way. Accessible from the Santa Teresa Light-Rail Station, the trail connects to the golden rolling hills of Santa Teresa County Park. A basin has been carved in its soil to capture rainstorm runoff, allowing the water to percolate down into the water table

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ROCK OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY



PAULINE LUBENS — MERCURY NEWS

Henry Gibson, left, Barney Randolph, right, and the rest of the choir perform at Antioch Baptist Church in San Jose during taping of a documentary, Page B2.

You call that a cooling trend?

By Bruce Newman

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If it seemed hotter than it actually was in San Jose on Saturday — and it was plenty hot enough at 99 degrees, tying a heat record set in 1968 — that could be because it wasn't supposed to be hot at all. The official forecast called for a high of 88, after it had gotten as hot as 101 in Palo Alto on Friday, shattering the old mark by five degrees.

"There was supposed to be some relief from the heat," said National Weather Service meteorologist Brian Tentinger, who coolly pointed out that it only got up to 77 in Monterey, where the Weather Service happens to be located. "But it didn't penetrate to the inland areas."

You could say that. Gilroy set a record with a high of 102, although this did not exactly set off dancing in the street in the garlic capital, where it was 101 on the same day a year ago.

Global warming at a gallop? As for today, Tentinger offered this chilling forecast: a high of 82 in San Jose. "We're expecting a stronger push of cooler marine air to the inland valley locations," he said.

The heat may have contributed to a grass fire sparked by a traffic accident along Pacheco Pass east of Gilroy. On Saturday, CalFire diverted resources to that blaze from two smaller fires burning along Summit Road on the border between Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties. (Story on Page B5). The larger of the two blazes was seven acres, and CalFire expected to monitor it and the Pacheco fire through the night.

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Despite arrests, search for boy goes on

By Josh Richman
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 Those who had been aiding Louis Ross and Jennifer Campbell since their 5-year-old foster son, Hasanni Campbell, vanished earlier this month expressed sadness Saturday, a day after the couple was arrested in connection with what investigators now call a homicide. Oakland police released no new information Saturday, after arresting Camp-

bell, 30, Friday afternoon at the Union City BART station and Ross, 38, later Friday at the couple's Fremont home. Campbell was booked Friday night on suspicion of being an accessory to murder. Police said they would be booking Ross on suspicion of murder. Prosecutors must decide by Tuesday whether to charge the couple or release them pending further investigation. Oakland attorney John

Burris, who has been advising Ross and Campbell, said Saturday it was unlikely he would actually represent them. He mainly does civil rights cases. Still, he said, he tried to meet with them Saturday but was unsuccessful. "I just want to let them know what's ahead for them," he said. Burris said it appears investigators' probable cause for arresting Ross and Campbell was because Hasanni

was never in the vicinity of the Rockridge shoe store where his foster parents said they last saw him Aug. 10; police say the boy actually was last seen Aug. 6 with his foster parents near a Wal-Mart in Fremont. Sherri-Lyn Miller, who has used her San Leandro shop to print T-shirts with Hasanni's image to publicize the case, said the foster parents' arrests won't slow her effort to locate the boy.

Italy

Continued from Page 1

accordion band Bella Ciao, with its fabulous Chinese-Vietnamese singer Mimi Ferrari from "far Eastern Sicily." Down the block, you could get a tri-tip sandwich called the "Gina Lollobrigida," which seemed like a generous — possibly even Picassoesque — interpretation of what the '60s bombshell brought to Italian cinema. The Italian-American Heritage Foundation, which is spearheading the drive to recapture one of downtown San Jose's oldest Italian neighborhoods and turn it into a destination dining and drinking district (www.littleitalysj.com), had a tent at the festa with maps showing Italians their ancestral regions, so people could check their

"roots in the boot." "If we don't rescue our history, it's going to be lost," said foundation president Ken Borelli. He pointed to a display of photographs of the stained glass windows at Sacred Heart Church — now predominantly Latino — filled with family names like Cribari, Biscaglia and Rancadore. "I think the Little Italy will become a focal point for supporting our heritage by doing things like helping people learn the language. That's the vision. But we still need what I call a pasta fazool — the money." The unlikely anchor for the development at the moment is Henry's Hi-Life, on the corner of St. John and Almaden, a steakhouse owned by an Irishman that rarely gets more Italian than the vinaigrette dressing on its salads. A news clipping on Henry's wall says the neigh-

borhood was once so rough that "the locals drive around in stolen police cars." But that was long before the restaurant replaced the old Torino Hotel, in its heyday a boarding house filled with immigrant Italians, many of them farmers who had come to San Jose to plant olive and lemon trees in the valley's rich soil. A lot of the old Italian homes in what was then known as the River Street district — bounded by Julian Street, Almaden Boulevard, St. John Street and Guadalupe River Park — were torn down when Highway 87 was built, but a core group — now owned by developer Barry Swenson and soon to be leased to Italian-oriented businesses — will serve as the heart of the city's Little Italy. Melander says he hopes to begin construction on a series of arches and cobb-

stone walkways that will set the historic district off by next January. The first two tenants will be a cultural resource center, which will focus on teaching children to speak Italian, and Lucia Marie's Italian wine and espresso bar. Melander says he hopes to attract a variety of restaurants, pastry shops and delicatessens featuring regional Italian cuisine. The Italian-American organizations that are pushing the project have been careful to avoid the controversy that surrounded the naming of what eventually became Little Saigon. "They got caught up in political battles because the original name came from a council member," Melander said, referring to the council's Madison Nguyen. "We're not asking the city for anything." Well, maybe just a dollar here and there. Or two dollars to forget the whole thing.

Trail

Continued from Page 1

and protect the bay. The park, a 2.6-acre easement, was dedicated to Albertson in 1987 by the San Jose City Council in honor of his leadership. The former president of the San Jose Alliance of Homeowners and a member of the Santa Clara Valley Coalition, he advocated in the early 1970s for extension of Highway 101 as a bypass to Monterey Highway, a deadly strip of road then known as "Blood Alley." Tragically, the stretch of

road that so worried Albertson proved deadly to him and his family. In 1974, Albertson, his wife Doris and daughter Denise were killed in a head-on crash with an out-of-control car on Monterey Highway while traveling home from buying a Christmas tree. The new trail, funded by the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority, adds to San Jose's network of 50 miles of trails. The city hopes to add at least three miles of trail a year, eventually creating a 100-mile-long interconnected route. Contact Lisa M. Krieger at 408-920-5565.



PATRICK TEHAN — MERCURY NEWS
 From left, Trang, Valerie, Vanessa and Paul Tran of San Jose check out the Albertson Parkway Trail.

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