

# PANIL Notes

Volume 34 Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood Improvement League - PO Box 20375, Oakland 94620 May June 2009

## Chapel of the Chimes Sale Postponed

By Valerie Winemiller

Chapel of the Chimes administrators report that the sale of their company has been postponed. In a related decision, the previously announced development of their properties on the upper blocks of Piedmont Avenue and Howe Street has been put on hold until further notice. In a recent meeting with PANIL steering committee members Margitta Gardner and Valerie Winemiller, Andy Bryant, CEO of the facility's parent company, Lifemark, assured PANIL that neighbors would be informed as the situation evolves.

The real estate market bouyed construction towards former Mayor Jerry Brown's pledge to create 10,000 new downtown residents, but that same market is now leaving many of those condos unsold; some are empty, others converted to rentals. The much ballyhooed Forest City, in the blocks behind Sears on Telegraph between 18th and 20th, is reportedly less than half occupied. As a result, this is currently not a favorable time for any kind of multi-unit development.

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN MERCHANTS AND NEIGHBORS

## Helping Avenue Business Thrive

By Valerie Winemiller

"The Avenue business district is essentially healthy," was the message for neighbors and Avenue merchants from the experts at a joint meeting with PANIL and PAMA. "Don't panic over vacancies; this is just another part of the historic cycles on the Avenue." At the April 8 event, Ann Kraynack, who has owned Piedmont Systems for 25 years and has been an essential leader in the Piedmont Avenue Merchants Association (PAMA) for most of that time, presented a merchant's perspective. Leslie Gould, former Planning Director for Oakland, and now a principal at urban and regional planning consultants Dyett and Bhatia, provided a broad, multi-city experience of economic development and urban planning. Councilmember Jane Brunner's office was represented at the meeting by aide Maria Barra-Gibson.

### A merchant's view

Ann Kraynack observed that vacancies have come in cycles on the Avenue, and this is just one of several periods of economic slowdown that the Avenue has survived. None of the issues influencing business on the avenue is new, she said. Though neighbors say they want hardware or stationery stores, the competition from nearby big box stores makes them impractical business ventures. She also pointed out that immediate neighbors can't bring in enough cash to support small businesses; the Avenue must draw shoppers from a broader region. The attitudes of landlords and property owners, as well as community wishes, impact the business climate.

Kraynack urged business owners to "look beyond your front door"—relate to the community and other businesses, and provide strong customer services. She urged the community members to

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**PANIL Monthly Meeting: Wed., June 10 — 7:30 p.m.**

**Neighborhood Crime Prevention Council — 7:30 pm**  
Paul Brekke-Miesner our Neighborhood Services Coordinator

**General Meeting — 8:00 pm**

**The Water Situation in Northern California**

**EBMUD Representative Jon Bauer on conservation efforts, both public and personal, water politics and equity, pricing, and even a bit on water quality and bay health**

**Piedmont Gardens, 110 41st Street — 11th Floor Sky Room**

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## Helping Avenue Business Thrive (continued from page 1)

“spend your money on the Avenue, and understand the realities of small businesses. We cannot stock the huge inventory of big box stores, but we can provide personal services.”

### The big picture

Leslie Gould, who lives in Oakland, concurred with Kraynak's assessment. We have things shoppers can't get most places in the world, she stated. Small business are competing on personal services and on niche and specialty shopping. And you always run into someone you know in a neighborhood shopping district.

Piedmont Avenue is a very lively and vital area, in Gould's assessment. In contrast to troubled shopping districts, we have experienced merchants and clean, attractive shops offering new and fashionable merchandise to busy foot traffic.

The conversion of retail spaces to food uses (restaurants, etc.) has been a concern of PANIL's for some time. Restaurants can pay higher rents than retail, and bring greater impacts due to the higher number of customers per storefront space (i.e., parking and traffic). Their peak business hours in the evening do not generally provide foot traffic for retail business. In an acknowledgment of both the impact on the shopping area and on neighbors, such conversions require a conditional use permit from the zoning department.

Gould agreed that there is a tipping point where an over-concentration of restaurants damages the long-term mix for everyone's business. In her opinion, Haight Street in San Francisco has hit that point, but Piedmont Avenue has not—yet. The market loves restaurants, she observed. A few cities have tried to regulate the concentration, but it is a problematic endeavor. Governments are slow in responding to the market, and issues as simple as the definition of a restaurant raise complications.

Gould urged that any actions should be taken based on data such as:

- What are the real reasons businesses are leaving? Is it personal (such as re-

tirement), a new business failure (common) or escalating rents for established businesses?

- Is parking really a factor? Everyone complains, she noted, but in 20 years of shopping the Avenue, Gould has never left because she could not find a space.

### Ideas for the future

It's often not the hard product, but other factors that keep the district fresh and in the public eye, Gould says. She put forward a list of low-cost ideas to strengthen business on the Avenue:

- Continued joint meetings with the community are good.
- Some inexpensive physical improvements can make customers see new excitement. She mentioned new banners, lighting, flower pots and updated store signs.
- Joint marketing and discounts, or events such as regular Thursday night “strolls,” can draw new shoppers.

Valerie Lee Ow, of J. Miller's Flowers and Gifts, mentioned plans to install new banners, planters and benches. Each councilmember has a discretionary fund for projects in their district.

Other ideas from the floor included art displays or installations; cultural events in vacant storefronts; opening of St. Leo's parking lot in evenings with an insurance rider from PAMA; or a niche event, such as an environmental faire.

Ronile Lahti reported preliminary results from the survey included in our April issue of PANIL Notes. Forty-nine percent of respondents report shopping the Avenue daily, 47% weekly; 83% walk to the Avenue. In the next issue of PANIL Notes, we expect to report the full results, along with data on changes in the makeup of types of businesses on the Avenue since a 1975 study.

49TH AND TELEGRAPH

**Free Outdoor Movies in the Temescal**

The Second Annual Temescal Street Cinema returns to 49th and Telegraph (Bank of the West Building) this summer for another year of great, free, locally made films! There'll be live music and free popcorn with events getting started at 8 PM every Thursday from June 11-July 16. Movies will start when it gets dark, no sooner than 8:30 PM. Come early or bring a chair!

Second year of this quirky series by local filmmakers

**June 11: Speaking in Tongues** <[http://www.patchworkfilms.net/coming\\_soon.html](http://www.patchworkfilms.net/coming_soon.html)> (**Marcia Jarmel, Ken Schneider**) and Children's Hospital Oakland-Made Shorts!

Opening night is dedicated to celebrating the amazing powers of children. Closely following four very different local public-schoolers through an academic year of language immersion learning, "Speaking in Tongues" draws on subtle nuances of the kids' stories to illustrate the complex shades and permutations of bilingual schooling. These amazing kids will upend all your ideas about learning. This film is accompanied by a special program of shorts made by young people at the Children's Hospital!

**June 18: Bay Area Icons: a series of shorts**

Hang out with Frank Chu of 12 Galaxies fame or throw pies at film festival goers with this eclectic celebration of eccentricity.

**June 25: Welcome to Nollywood (Jamie Metzler)**

See <<http://welcometonollywood.com/home.html>>

A crazily hilarious and inspiring documentary look at the Nigerian film industry, which is the third largest in the world after India and the United States. The film profiles several filmmakers who defy budgets, nature and sometimes sanity itself to keep the completely homegrown and grassroots industry churning.

**July 2: Drylongso (Cauleen Smith)**

Pica is a woman who can't find meaning in her own life. Living in Oakland, CA, she's tired of her job at an illegal poster distribution center. Unable to complete a photography project on herself at school, she grabs a Polaroid camera and decides to document the existence of young black men, whom she feels are a breed on the verge of becoming extinct. The results are a beautiful tribute to the power of community.

**Calendar**

For more neighborhood events go to [www.panil.org/calendar](http://www.panil.org/calendar).

**PANIL Meeting**

2nd Wednesday of the month  
7:30 to 9 p.m.  
Piedmont Gardens  
110 41st Street  
11th Floor Sky Room

**PANIL Steering Committee**  
email [contact@panil.org](mailto:contact@panil.org) for time, date and place of monthly meeting

**Glen Echo Creek Work Day**

2nd Saturday of the month  
Monte Vista Avenue, 9:30 a.m.  
654-1930

**Mt. View Cemetery Tour**

Docent led tour  
2nd and 4th Saturdays of the month  
10 a.m., FREE

**Events at the Chapel of the Chimes**

4499 Piedmont Avenue  
654-0123

**Historical and Botanical Tour**

3rd Saturday of the month  
10 a.m. to noon, FREE

**Oakland Heritage Alliance Lecture Series**

2nd Thursday of each month  
\$8 OHA members/\$10 non-members  
For more information contact:  
[www.oaklandheritage.org](http://www.oaklandheritage.org),  
763-9218

**Piedmont Avenue Branch Library**

160 41st Street, 597-5011

**Storytimes**

Toddlers  
Wednesday, 10:15 a.m.  
Pre school  
Wednesday, 11 a.m.

**Saturday Knitting Club**  
Every Saturday 3 to 4 p.m.

To place an item on PANIL's calendars, send e-mail to: [contact@panil.org](mailto:contact@panil.org)

**My neighborhood gym!**

"After working out here for years, I bought the place! Come check out our innovative new equipment & classes. Say 'Lisa sent me' and get a **\*FREE WORKOUT\***"



**Inside Outside Fitness**

\* New members only \* (510) 655-8308  
[www.OutOfSideFitness.com](http://www.OutOfSideFitness.com)  
4444 Piedmont Ave, Oakland, CA 94611

**Count Me In as Member of PANIL**

To become a member of PANIL, send a check for \$15 to PANIL, P.O.Box 20375, Oakland, CA 94620 with your name, address and e-mail address.

Help keep the neighborhood informed and make our voices heard.!

## Piedmont Avenue Branch Library Has a New Librarian

By Ronile Lahti

Andrew Demcak, the new children's librarian and acting branch manager comes to Piedmont Avenue after one year as the children's librarian at Oakland's Elmhurst branch and eight years running the library's Bookmobile, as well as brief periods at the West Oakland and Martin Luther King branches. A native of Los Angeles, Andrew is a graduate of San Jose State University's masters in library science program and completed his undergraduate work at St. Mary's College. He has spent his entire library career with the Oakland Public Library system.



When asked what he felt was the most important thing anyone could do for children, Andrew responded, "Read to them!" He said it's been proven that children entering kindergarten who have not been read to have a vocabulary of approximately 5,000 words, while children who have been read to have a vocabulary of over 50,000 words. "Read to them," Andrew said, "even if it's only the menu from the local pizza parlor!"

### Other Changes at Our Branch

These are tough economic times and the economic crisis has filtered down to Oakland's library system. At our branch, we only have two full time staff members; everyone else is a part time employee. Since a mold infestation prompted the closure of the Montclair branch, our branch has had an increased amount of walk in traffic. Our branch ranks fourth in walk-in traffic and first in usage per square foot. And usage is projected to increase if the suggested "branch pairings" are put in place. The current plans are to "pair" the following branches: Temescal, Elmhurst, Lakeview, Golden Gate, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Melrose so that each will share one staff and all will go to shortened hours of operation. (Budget info is available at [http://www.panil.org/hot\\_topics/oakland\\_2009\\_budget.html](http://www.panil.org/hot_topics/oakland_2009_budget.html)).

**PANIL has learned that Citibank has plans to sell the property at 41st and Piedmont Avenue where our library stands. See [www.panil.org](http://www.panil.org) for updates.**

## Letter to the Editor:

### Piedmont Avenue Elementary School

Spring is the time when parents' thoughts turn to school selection and those of us with children at our neighborhood school, Piedmont Avenue Elementary, have begun to receive inquiries from interested parents. The following is my answer to the question "Is Piedmont Avenue Elementary right for my child?"

My daughter is in first grade at Piedmont Ave. and has had two great teachers. She is bright and curious and at this point is as advanced and engaged as the children of friends who attend other schools, including private. My mother, who has taught second grade for thirty years says she wishes my daughter would visit her classroom to teach the second-graders a thing or two!

We had the opportunity to send our daughter to a private school and decided on Piedmont Avenue Elementary instead. My son will be starting kindergarten in the fall.

The intangible benefits of attending our neighborhood school are incredible. In the last month I've bumped into teachers at the market and video store. The letter-carrier who delivers our mail delivers to the school, too and recognizes and says hi to the kids. It's great to be able to go to your own school to play on the weekends. I love walking to school in the mornings and greeting neighbors doing the same. Not to mention the environmental benefits of not having to drive to get to school.

In this area we "think global, act local" and I don't think there's any better way to teach this to our children than going to school locally, too.

I see so many Obama signs still on display in our neighborhood, with their message of "Change we can believe in." We can all make this idea real, starting with our neighborhood school. I believe the best way to continue improving our neighborhood is for those who live in the neighborhood to attend and get involved with the school.

Good luck to all parents who are choosing a school this year and we hope to see you at Piedmont Avenue Elementary.

- David Martindale

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**PIEDMONT AVE PHOTO GALLERY  
A View of the Avenue**

This photo of the fascinating things in a store now closed is by Richard Friedman and appears on his photo blog at [www.rchrd.com/photo](http://www.rchrd.com/photo).

*We invite photographers to send photos taken on the Avenue or in the neighborhood to contact [@panil.org](mailto:@panil.org).*



**Piedmont Avenue Merchant Association  
has adopted the Piedmont & Key Route Plazas and the area around  
our branch library as part of the city's**

**Adopt-A-Spot Program**

**PAMA has agreed to take care of these areas because they will no  
longer receive regular maintenance from the city  
due to our current financial crisis.**

**We also plan to adopt the 41st and Piedmont Avenue parking lot.**

**We need all the help we can get!**

**Go to: [piedmontavenumerchants.org](http://piedmontavenumerchants.org) for more information  
and join in the effort.**

**Thanks!**

Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood Improvement League  
P.O. Box 20375  
Oakland, CA 94620  
www.panil.org



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## Piedmont Avenue Elementary School — Monthly Pizza with the Police



Pizza with the Police with Officers Frazier, Holton, and Tarum on May 20. Congratulations to each of the students who earned this activity in April and in May.



Pizza with the Police with Officer Holton on April 17.