

BERKELEY

Empty building to be remodeled

Neighbors hope renovation will cut down on problems

By Doug Oakley
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A largely abandoned and dilapidated Berkeley school district building the size of a city block is undergoing a \$22 million renovation and will bring at least 100 employees to the University Avenue neighborhood in March.

The West Campus building on University Avenue between Bonar and Curtis streets last housed the Berkeley Adult School and has been empty since 2004. Since its closing the building collected garbage and attracted homeless people, and weeds fill its giant parking lot.

Now the parking lot is being repaved, sidewalks are being redone and several renovated buildings will house administrators, 13 charter school classrooms and a school board meeting

room. The administration building on the property is costing \$14.5 million and is expected to be finished in March.

The board meeting room will cost \$1.75 million and is expected to be finished in December. And 13 classrooms for the Realm charter school, at a cost of \$6 million paid by the school district, are expected to be finished at the end of 2013. Fixing up the building and bringing more people into the neighborhood sounds like a good idea to some neighbors and surrounding businesses.

Juha Pellinen, who lives across from the east side of the property on Addison Street, is glad the buildings are being renovated.

“There were homeless people jumping over the fences and sleeping in there before,” Pellinen said. “It will be better for security in the neighborhood when the administrators move in.”

Pellinen especially likes that the building now will have lights on the perimeter at night.

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— Juha Pellinen, of Berkeley

School district spokesman Mark Coplan said he thinks the construction also will be a plus for the area. He predicts there will be less stress on the neighborhood when buildings are in use.

“When the adult school was here, there were 10,000 students registered and there were 300 people there on any given day or night,” Coplan said. “So the impact will be far less than it ever was. And now neighbors will have some people here

instead of a huge empty space.”

Kimmy Tran, whose family opened the Four Seasons Salon eight months ago across the street on University Avenue, is hoping at least some of those new school district employees will come in for haircuts, nail work and waxing.

“I’ve been waiting for that building to open,” said Tran. “Business has been dead for a long time.”

Tran and Thanu Chaichana, who owns Your Place Thai Cuisine on University Avenue, said the construction already has discouraged drug dealing in front of the building that was going on before.

“There used to be a lot of homeless and drug dealing in this area, but it’s getting better now,” Chaichana said. “I think it’s going to be better for business. Long time ago, I did have customers who were teachers and students from the adult school.”

Contact Doug Oakley at 510-843-1408.

Was mystery man the real Murrieta?

One thing we regret as we get older is that we didn’t listen as closely as we should have when our parents talked about their parents. And then, all of a sudden, it is too late to get answers.

Mavis Bahls Strickland, a retired teacher in the Mt. Diablo Unified School District, was lucky she remembered the Sunday rides she would take with her father, William Bahls, when he told his family the stories that he had heard at his grandfather’s knee.

“We would be passing by these hills near Livermore, and my dad would tell us there were caves up there someplace where Joaquin Murrieta (the famous outlaw) would hang out.” Mavis said she wasn’t always sure that these stories were authentic, but, in later years, she checked local history books left to her by her father and figured out that, for the most part, the stories were true.

John Henry tum Suden was the grandfather of Mavis’ father, William.

Tum Suden was barely 15 years old when he arrived in New York City from Germany in 1850 to live with relatives. He was supposed to learn the grocery business. But when he was 18, he went off to California to take advantage of the Gold Rush.

He never dug for gold; instead, he started selling newspapers and gaining control of most of the corners in San Francisco to do so. He then got into the restaurant business, catering to lumbermen. One of his most popular dishes was an oyster stew served in a hollowed-out loaf of sourdough bread.

In 1860, he married Catherine Ahrens, also a native of Germany, and got into the mercantile and livery business. Three years later, he moved his growing family to San Antonio

(now Oakland) and opened a general store at East 12th Street and 14th Avenue, while continuing his livery business in San Francisco.

One of the stories engraved in Mavis’ memory is about a “Hispanic man who could come once a year to my great-grandfather’s store. He loved lemon drops and would help himself. He’d sit on the porch, suck on the lemon drops and run up a tab. Never told my great-grandfather exactly where he lived, only that it was in some caves. He never told him his last name. Said his first name was Joaquin, but there were so many Joaquins.”

Tum Suden admired this mysterious stranger after he saw him stop another man from beating a horse.

“One time Joaquin followed my great-grandfather to the barn. My great grandfather raised lots of carrots to feed the horses. He had to explain to him the benefits of feeding carrots to horses,” she said.

Joaquin ordered a wagonload. Mavis said, “My great-grandfather thought that now he would find out where this man lived.” But he didn’t. The wagonload of carrots was delivered to a spot near a certain oak tree in Dublin, where the mysterious Joaquin picked them up.

“Somehow, my great-grandfather got it in his head that the stranger was Joaquin Murrieta. But the dates aren’t quite right.” When Murrieta’s head was on display in San Francisco, tum Suden went to see it. He was furious that he paid so much money to see it. He said it wasn’t the real Murrieta. However, the mysterious Joaquin never showed up at tum Suden’s store again.

Days Gone By appears on Sundays. Contact Nilda Rego at nildarego@comcast.net.



NILDA REGO
DAYS GONE BY

LENS ON THE BAY » PICTURE OF THE WEEK



ANDA CHU/STAFF

Artist Josh Powell paints a section of his new mural along A Street at Maple Court in Hayward on Friday. The mural, with a Russel City theme, should be completed by March and joins other murals painted by Powell and many other local artists throughout the city.

ONLINE EXTRAS » EXPANDED FEATURES ON THE WEB

PREP HOOPS

Join our MLK Tournament live blog at 5 p.m. Monday as Mitty faces De La Salle. www.contracostates.com/high-school-sports



GOLDEN NIGHT

Join us starting at 2 p.m. for a full afternoon and evening of Golden Globes coverage. www.mercurynews.com/movies-dvd



49ERS EXTRA

Check out slide-shows, live chat wrap-up and Twitter feed from the 49ers-Saints playoff game. www.mercurynews.com/49ers

ACTION LINE

Got a problem? Let Dennis Rockstroh help. Join his live chat Monday at noon. www.mercurynews.com/extra



ACTION LINE
DENNIS ROCKSTROH

Wow, it’s barely 2012 and already award season.

Good Housekeeping has just announced its 2012 VIPs (Very Innovating Products) that last year made life simpler and easier.

The award winners were chosen from more than 1,500 new products, evaluated by the scientists and engineers at the Good Housekeeping Research Institute.

They spent 12 months testing items in the magazine’s state-of-the-art product-testing laboratory, said the magazine’s news release.

Polled readers also said that the one product they couldn’t imagine living without and that has stood the test of time is Scotch tape, introduced in 1930. Try living without it.

So, here are some of the magazines’s 2012 winners:

■ **Nest Learning Thermostat** (\$250, nest.com) A programmable thermostat that reduces your home energy bill by adjusting temperatures to your needs considering just 11 percent of owners set their thermostats correctly. Using sensors, this thermo-

stat even detects when you’re at home — and not — and adjusts the heat and AC accordingly. You can modify temps and timing remotely from your smartphone, tablet or Web browser. Plus, it retrieves weather reports via Wi-Fi to check whether the settings are energy-efficient.

■ **Hamilton Beach The Scoop Coffeemaker** (\$70, hamiltonbeach.com) Single-cup coffee makers are convenient, but at 25 to 50 cents a pop, consumers pay a premium for those coffee-filled pods, said the magazine. The Scoop brews a single serving with any ground beans and can fill an eight-ounce cup or a 14-ounce travel mug.

■ **Yonanas** (\$50, yonanas.com) It transforms frozen bananas into a creamy, soft-serve treat, while frozen berries become a sorbet-like sweet without added cream or sugar. “Good Housekeeping’s adult and kid taste-testers loved it all.”

Contact Action Line at actionline@mercurynews.com, 408-920-5796 or Twitter.com/Action_Line.

Volunteers to clean up Lake Merritt

On Monday, the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, hundreds of volunteers are expected to turn out throughout Oakland for a day of service to the community.

One site is at the Lake Merritt Garden Center, starting at 9 a.m. As one of a half dozen or so “lake stewards” who have been helping out with removing litter and trash, I plan to work the section along the Lakeshore Avenue side, stretching from the newly



ANNALEE ALLEN
LANDMARKS

restored pergola over to the historic East 18th Street boat landing.

Thanks to Measure DD funds, the length of the lake next to Lakeshore has seen great improvement, with new landscaping, lawns and pathways. Nearly a decade ago, in November 2002, over 80 percent of Oakland voters passed the \$198 million bond measure to cover improvements to Lake Mer-

ritt and the Estuary. Since then dozens of projects have been phased in; others are still in progress. Measure DD funds do not cover ongoing maintenance, however, so that is where volunteers come in.

I will be on the lookout for some new markers recently installed. The product of a team led by artist Scott Oliver, who received a city of Oakland Cultural Funding Program Grant, the markers guide visitors around the perimeter of Lake Merritt and explain the forces that have shaped it. Oliver’s team previously created a self-guided audio guide of the lake.

The marker project is called, “Once Upon A Time, Happily Ever After,” from a phrase used at the entrance to Children’s Fairyland. So far I have spotted four of the signs that installed over the holidays. They’ll enhance the experience of walking around the lake. For more, go to www.onceuponatime-happilyeverafter.com.

A group calling itself the Measure DD Community Coalition meets at the garden center on

a regular basis to watch over the implementation of Measure DD, and anyone interested is encouraged to attend. The next meeting is at 7:10 p.m. Monday, at 666 Bellevue Ave. To check for agenda items, I recommend going to www.waterfrontaction.org/dd. Under discussion at Monday’s meeting will be developing more volunteer strategies and possible corporate sponsorships for ongoing park maintenance.

By law, Measure DD funds cannot be used for ongoing maintenance or operation costs. Oakland Public Works staff have seen major reductions in recent years, so volunteer groups are stepping up to help maintain the wonderful improvements from Measure DD. Residents can sign up for training by the Public Works staff to become “master volunteers,” and perform tasks like mulching, weeding, deadheading flowers, as well as general cleanup. Monthly work parties are held the last Saturday of every month.

The Clean Lake Initiative

is another effort that operates under the direction of a nonprofit group known as the Lake Merritt Institute. Volunteers focus on cleanup and volunteer coordination, as well as ongoing education about the complex and fascinating ecology of what is in essence a tidal slough, the oldest designated wildlife refuge in the United States. The institute maintains “You Clean It” supply boxes, located at various points (such as next to the East 18th Street Landing). According to its site, www.lakemerrittinstitute.org, the group formed in 1992, so it is embarking on its 20th year of service to the lake. Leave a message for Institute Director Richard Bailey at 510-238-2290 to learn more.

While advance registration for Monday’s service projects is encouraged, (www.mlkchallenge.org) you can also show up, ready to work, said Tora Rocha, with the Public Works staff who oversees volunteers in Lakeside Park. “Wear sturdy shoes and bring work gloves,” she said. Clear skies are forecast.



Katy Murphy’s column will return.

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