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Local News



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PARENTS ARE ASKED TO PITCH IN

PTA SEEKS MONEY FOR `THINGS'

Looks like Palo Alto Unified's elementary schools are having problems playing together.

The elementary school parent-teacher associations -- which annually pull in more than \$1 million in donations and loosen the purse strings for everything from flip charts to computers -- supposedly pledged not to send letters home to parents this fall asking for more money. The thinking was that they shouldn't compete with the Partners In Education campaign, a new initiative run by another parent group that has taken over sole responsibility for financing additional classroom aides and other supplemental staff.

But Internal Affairs found out that a few PTAs put out their own pleas anyway.

For instance, Escondido Elementary's PTA is suggesting \$100 per student to pay for supplies and the noontime sports and art programs. And Walter Hays Elementary's PTA is soliciting \$125 per student for technology materials.

``It's no longer for personnel," Hays Principal **Carol Piraino** tried to explain of her PTA's direct appeal. ``It's just for things, which also are really important."

Besides, she added, the suggested donation is ``a lot less than what it's been in the past."

Escondido Principal **Gary Prehn** was a little more willing to come clean.

``Yes," the school PTA sent out direct appeal letters, he said. ``Although we're not calling it a `direct appeal.' It's a `School Supply Fund.' "

`Fuddy-duddy' fights for her rights

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Mountain View Police Chief **Scott Vermeer** plans to talk this week at a Human Relations Commission meeting about "bias-free policing." Vermeer will limit his remarks to racial profiling, but city resident **Wendy Fleet** may show up to ask him about police bias against another group -- activists like herself.

Fleet complained to council members recently about being asked by officers to put away a "Teach Peace" sign she was brandishing at a downtown festival.

If you frequent shops and restaurants on Castro Street, chances are you've seen her holding the sign, which she keeps tucked in her car so she can whip it out while running errands.

"If an old fuddy-duddy lady holding a sign silently gets interrogated, what signal does that send to people who look less threatening?" Fleet asked Internal Affairs.

Fleet said she was silently holding the sign, swaying to the melodies of a nearby band at the Small Brewers Festival last month, when cops told her that someone at the festival complained about her and asked that she leave.

"No way," she said. "Free speech is the bedrock of American rights." She even cited the 1980 U.S. Supreme Court's *Pruneyard vs. Robbins* decision affirming speech rights on private property.

Police consulted with the event organizer who had informed them of the complaint, then told Fleet she could continue holding the sign.

City council members seemed to agree with Fleet.

"I want to make sure our police are very clear on what folks' rights are," said council member **Rosemary Stasek**.

Board approves rubber-stamp rule

San Mateo County Board of Supervisors President **Mark Church** didn't mind doing "mind-numbing" tasks like loading bread on racks in a factory as a college student or stuffing envelopes as a volunteer for political campaigns. But he didn't think he was going to be spending hours after each board meeting signing 3-foot stacks of documents.

That's exactly what he found himself doing after assuming office in January.

It wasn't long before he decided to give his hand a break. After consulting with the county counsel, he ordered rubber signature stamps and has been happily stamping away since July, saving himself about three hours after each meeting.

But Church recently found out a board resolution passed in the 1980s allowing stamps in place of real signatures wasn't in force anymore.

He swiftly asked the board to pass a new resolution, which it did at a meeting Tuesday. To Church's delight, the board voted to make the resolution retroactive to January, so he won't have to go back and sign several months' worth of old paperwork.

"It was a needless waste of time," Church said. "My time is better spent working on the issues like housing, jobs, the economy, the environment. That's what I was elected for."

You say victory, I say tie

Last week, the Sixth District Court of Appeal handed down a ruling that lays to rest a squabble over semantics between Santa Clara County and three county labor unions.

The spat revolves around the wording of Measure C, a Nov. 2 ballot initiative that, if approved, would allow the county or its unions representing attorneys, nurses and correctional peace officers to call on an arbitrator to settle labor disputes.

Last month, a lower court ruled that County Counsel **Ann Ravel** must reword the ballot question, saying it was unfair and confusing. The county immediately appealed. On Wednesday, two of three appellate court judges fully upheld Ravel's original wording, much to the chagrin of the unions and one of their consultants, **Tom Saggau**. As far as Saggau is concerned, the score's tied, and the county isn't necessarily the victor.

`` We won the first round and they won the second round, but if you count up the judges, it's 2 to 2." But Ravel claimed a clear coup: `` That's ridiculous. That's not how the law works," Ravel said. `` You don't divide up the judges. It doesn't matter what the numbers are. The majority agreed with the county, and that's the decision."

Mercury News Staff Writers Nicole C. Wong and Julie Patel contributed this week to Internal Affairs. Send tips to jfiles@mercurynews.com or call (650) 688-7554.



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