

## The buzz

**PTA PERFECTION . . .** The **Palo Alto Council of PTAs** was recently awarded two **California State PTA Awards** at the 107th annual statewide convention in Anaheim. The local council was honored with the **Outreach Award** for its leadership in launching the Bridge of Caring program, a long-term effort to provide support and relief to schools in Louisiana damaged by Hurricane Katrina. The Palo Alto Council was also this year's recipient of the **Advocacy Award** for its communication efforts on behalf of local ballot measures. The group was also recognized for its legislative advocacy efforts, which have included letter-writing campaigns and speaker events with locally elected state representatives.

**GOLD STARS . . .** Students from **Eastside College Preparatory School** in East Palo Alto have received awards and scholarships from **Northern California's 2006 Hispanic Youth Awards**, which identifies and promotes students of Hispanic descent. **Luis Alberto Torres**, who graduated from Eastside last week, was this year's Gold Medallion Winner for Engineering and Mathematics. He plans to major in chemical, civil or electrical engineering. **Giovanni Mata Mgana**, who also recently graduated from Eastside, was the Gold Medallion Winner for Sports. She is the first member of her family to graduate from high school and will attend Santa Clara University. In its ninth year, this national leadership program annually provides more than 200 students with \$650,000 in educational grants in 12 regions across the United States.

**TEA TIME . . .** A longtime substitute teacher for Palo Alto's public schools, **Sheralee Hill Iglehart**, spoke at the first annual **Children's Authors Tea** held last month at Trinity School in Menlo Park. Iglehart, who did graduate work at Stanford University, explained to the event's 100 guests that many classic children's books, such as Winnie the Pooh

(continued on page 34)

# School's Out

A monthly section on local schools edited by Alexandria Rocha



A class of young bicyclists listens to teacher Richard Swent talk about on-road safety earlier this month at Hoover Elementary School.

## With the summer arriving, kids and parents learn to bike safely

by Anabel Lee

**F**reedom and confidence come on two wheels. Or at least for those too young to get behind a steering wheel. Richard Swent, an instructor certified by the

League of American Bicyclists, preaches this message during his bike class, "Middle School Bike Skills." Swent's program is unique to the Bay Area and is geared toward educating 10- to 14-year-olds and their parents about interacting

safely with traffic and empowering the young cyclists with skills for on-road riding.

"Kids feel great about themselves when they bike to school because they power themselves," said Swent. Bicycling also gives this age group a sense of freedom since they can get themselves to friends' houses and parks. It prepares them to be better drivers and allows them to get to know their neighborhoods too, since riding a bike is a "much richer experience than

# Have wheels, will travel



Jack Shapiro, 10, gets help from bike-safety teacher Richard Swent on how to correctly fit his helmet.

(continued on page 34)

## Have wheels

(continued from page 33)

sitting passively in the back seat," he added.

Swent has been teaching "Middle School Bike Skills" three to four times every fall, spring and summer for two years through the Palo Alto Recreation Department. The class is also co-sponsored by the city's Parent Teacher Association Council. He most recently offered the class on June 4 at the Cubberley Community Center to a class of five kids and four parents.

The idea for a youth-oriented cycling class hit Swent back in 1997 after his son's school, Palo Verde Elementary, held its annual Bike

Rodeo for the school's third graders. The rodeo, which enlists the help of the city firefighters and the Stanford cycling team, is similar to Swent's program in intent: It too tries to point out to young cyclists the hazards of bicycling in streets and the safety tips that can eliminate them.

However, since the rodeo is only one day long, Swent said the event left him thinking more was needed.

The class, which is based on curricula developed by the league, includes classroom instruction, basic bicycle and helmet fittings, bike checks and a road component. According to Swent, his class reduces

the chances of crashing by up to 80 percent.

On a recent Sunday, Swent started the classroom lecture by calling cycling "serious fun," since bicyclists have all the rights and responsibilities of vehicle drivers but are not required to have a license or be a particular age. Pie charts illustrating the most common motorist and cyclist errors helped him emphasize the importance of communicating on the road and negotiating intersections with drivers.

"Cyclists fare best when they act and are treated as drivers of vehicles because then everyone would follow the same rules," Swent said. However, he noted that motorists



Adam Heyman

Bike-safety instructor Richard Swent tests the fit of 10-year-old Gina Scarpino's helmet during a recent class sponsored by the Palo Alto Recreation Department.

frequently treat cyclists as "second-class citizens," especially kids since they are juniors.

In addition, Swent used videos to show the class how to execute tricky maneuvers at intersections, mainly box and vehicular left turns. A box turn, or pedestrian-style left turn, requires two crossings. After crossing from one corner to another, the cyclist stops to turn his or her bike in order to renegotiate the second crossing. Then the cyclist proceeds when appropriate.

The vehicular turn is done the same way as one would in a car; cyclists merge to the center of the road, wait for oncoming traffic to clear or for a turn signal and then turn left. Making a left turn from the right side of the road is the second-most-common mistake cyclists make.

During the road component, the class followed Swent and an assistant, John Weiner, on a 4-mile neighborhood ride around Midtown. About half a block before reaching each intersection, Swent and Weiner discussed with the class what they were going to do — a left turn, for example — and then demonstrated it. Each of the kids took turns doing the same move while parents watched and followed along. The entire class then regrouped on the other side of the intersection to talk about what happened.

Members of the class found this to be the most valuable part of the day.

Ten-year-old Jack Shapiro rides his bike to school three to four times a week, which his father Dave Shapiro says has been a source of confidence for him.

"Jack has been very proud of going out on his own and biking," said Dave.

Jack said the most helpful aspects of the class for him were learning "the different kinds of turns going left and how to ride regularly in a bike lane."

Carmen Roberts, 11, agreed. "The most important thing was I learned how to do a box turn." She has recently started riding her bike to school as well and to her friends' houses. Both Jack and Carmen have been riding bikes since they were 4.

Carmen's mother, Terry Roberts, found it helpful to have someone else talk to her daughter about bicycle safety. "I've talked about it my way, and to have someone else give their take on it in a different way has filled in the gaps and reinforced the information. Kids sometimes also pay more attention to other people than to their parents."

Terry said she encouraged Carmen to start riding because she found it to be an environmentally sound way for Carmen to get around and to get some regular exercise.

But for Carmen, it's not necessarily the exercise or environmental friendliness that has her hooked. Rather, she said she enjoys "the independence" her bike offers because she does not always have to rely on her mom to drive her around anymore.

And for some, there will always be the need for speed. Asked what he likes best about riding his bike, Jack said: "Just going fast." ■

*Editorial Intern Anabel Lee can be reached at alee@pawekly.com.*

## The buzz

(continued from page 33)

and Babar, originally gained popularity as bedtime stories. "To think we wouldn't have had Winnie the Pooh all these years if some parent wasn't trying to get their kid to sleep," she said.

**A BIRTHDAY FOR BING . . .** A research symposium, titled "Toward a Deeper Understanding of the Development of the Young Child," was held earlier this month at Stanford University to commemorate the 40th anniversary of **Bing Nursery School**. Five Stanford professors and another from the University of Virginia presented research on social and cogni-

tive development. Bing is part of Stanford's Department of Psychology and serves as a setting for child-development research and teaching. About 450 children are currently enrolled. ■

*Talk about school and kids' issues at Town Square! To start a conversation, just post a topic at Palo Alto Online, www.PaloAltoOnline.com.*

*The buzz is a regular feature during the summer months announcing news and events related to schools and youth. Send news to At School Editor Alexandria Rocha at arocha@pawekly.com.*

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