

# THE ISLAND

Alameda Times-Star

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City editor Mike Lerseth (510) 208-6447

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## Lawyer's book targets notions of police brutality

Author reveals that criminals aren't alone

By Sharon Lerman  
STAFF WRITER

John Burris was one of the only black children at his Vallejo elementary school, but it never occurred to him this was unusual until he was transferred to an all-black school across town.

The year was 1954, and the U.S. Supreme Court had just handed down a landmark decision to desegregate public schools in Brown vs. Board of Education. It was a fluke that in Burris' case, the court's decision had backfired. He understood something significant had happened, but he wasn't sure what it was.

Now an attorney living in Oakland, Burris grew up with the Civil Rights Movement exploding around him. He felt rather insulated from it all living in working-class Vallejo, where folks of all colors worked side by side at the now-closed

Mare Island Naval Shipyard.

But as race riots broke out on college campuses throughout the 1960s, Burris became determined to fight police brutality. After stints as a prosecutor in Chicago and in Alameda County, Burris built a private practice from his desire to hold the system accountable



Burris

for poor treatment of minorities.

In his recently published first book, "Blue vs. Black," Burris chronicles cases from his career in which black men and women said they were brutalized by police. Most take place in Oakland, including such high-profile incidents as the bedlam at 1984's Festival at the Lake and the beating of Acorn Community Center director Darrell Hampton in 1990.

"I wanted to show the general population that a lot of ordinary, good people are victimized by the police and get past the

stereotypical view held in white communities that brutality happens only to criminals," Burris said.

But Mike Rains, a Pleasant Hill-based attorney who often represents police officers in alleged misconduct cases, said he believes "Blue vs. Black" paints an unfair portrait of the Oakland Police Department. Over the years, he has defended many officers against Burris' plaintiffs.

"I try to look at it as a citizen wanting to get a picture of what the police department is like," Rains said. "The picture I get

reading excerpts of this book is this is a department that's wracked with racism..."

Released in October by St. Martin's Press, the 240-page book is not intended to be simply a collection of case histories, nor is it an indictment of the Oakland Police Department, Burris said. He hopes the cases will be viewed as "pieces of a puzzle" in an effort to relieve the mistrust and misunderstanding between police and the black community.

Please see **Police**, LOCAL-3

## OPEN SPACE



LYDIA S. GONZALES

Alamedan Jean Sweeney has gathered more than 4,000 signatures in support of her initiative to turn the old belline railway into open and park space.

## Petition targets Alameda property

Call for open space where trains once ran

By Leslie Fulbright  
STAFF WRITER

ALAMEDA — Jean Sweeney lived on the island for more than 25 years before taking her first walk along the railroad tracks at the old belline property.

"I was blown over," Sweeney said of the evening stroll she took with her husband along the desolate plot last October. "It was absolutely gorgeous."

That momentous first impression marked the beginning of what has become a year-long fight to ward off developers by getting voters to sign a petition declaring the land open space.

With a number of new housing developments already in place and several more in the works on the island, Sweeney and

other Alamedans fear that open space may cease to exist.

On average, East Bay communities have 3.4 acres of parks and open space per 1,000 people, Sweeney said. In Alameda, that number is only about 1.3 acres per 1,000 people.

Sweeney spent hundreds of hours researching the subject and working with an attorney to write the initiative. She says she wants to assure the land remains a space for children to play, plants to thrive and animals to roam.

"Alamedans usually have to drive miles for something like this," Sweeney said while walking along the old tracks. "You can stand in the middle of the property here and you don't hear the traffic. You can feel the serenity."

Sweeney contends the railway is the last significant open space in West Central Alameda and that preservation of the 22

acres should be a top priority.

"Open space is a limited and valuable resource in Alameda, which must be conserved whenever possible," she said.

Californians are able to get measures not proposed by their elected representatives on the ballot through an initiative process. They must get 10 percent of registered voters to sign a petition and then a majority of voters must pass it at election time.

Sweeney's 4,200-signature petition will be presented to City Clerk Diane Felsch today.

There must be 3,816 valid signatures on the petition — 10 percent of Alameda's registered voters — for it to qualify for the November 2000 ballot. After the petition is submitted, the city clerk has 30 days to examine the signatures.

Please see **Beltline**, LOCAL-3

## Detectives to analyze online sex

Seminar to inform parents

By Glenn Chapman  
STAFF WRITER

PEDDMONT — Police detectives who track sexual predators on the Internet will share their computer insight with parents at a seminar here next month.

"Doing these online investigations has been a big eye-opener for us and we've learned a lot of things," Police Detective Steven DeWarms said of the Internet sex crimes he and partner Curtis Selseth have probed this year. "We want to teach people ways to protect their children on the Internet."

Selseth and DeWarms will host a computer safety seminar at the Veterans Memorial Building in Piedmont beginning at 7 p.m. Dec. 2. The seminar is restricted to adults because detectives plan to log into Internet chat rooms to illustrate the kinds of lascivious overtures that are directed at children who use computers.

To best gauge the size of the room needed for the seminar, people are asked to call the detectives to reserve a seat for the presentation. DeWarms or Selseth can be reached at 420-3015 or 420-3013.

"We are getting into the holiday season, with people out buying new computers for homes with children," DeWarms said. "We can give people information on technology and software to enhance parental control and guard against viruses."

In July, DeWarms and Selseth arrested Jason Astoria of San Jose and John Joseph Costello Jr. of San Ramon after they allegedly used an Internet chat room to arrange trysts with a person they believed to be a teen-age Piedmont girl. "She" was actually DeWarms, who had gone on-line under the name of a young girl.

Astoria had promised to bring a rose to a rendezvous on July 17, but showed up instead with a bag containing condoms, according to investigators who took him into custody.

Costello sent DeWarms a scanned picture of himself on the deck of a sailboat before arranging to meet the imaginary girl, the detective said.

During an appearance in Oakland Superior Court last week, Astoria, 25, pleaded guilty to one felony count of sending harmful matter to a child, DeWarms said. The plea was negotiated with county prosecutors. Astoria is to appear for sentencing Jan. 21.

Alameda County prosecutors opted not to pursue the case against Costello and dismissed

Please see **Online**, LOCAL-3

## Political organization mobilizing online

Asian Americans aim at greater visibility in election

By Lisa Gardiner  
STAFF WRITER

Nearly every day, Adam Chou sits down to his home computer in Fremont and launches a flurry of e-mailings.

And he could be making political history.

This computer systems manager is one of the many local organizers of The 80-20 Initiative, an Asian-American political action group founded just last year in Foster City.

The group's goals aren't necessarily new. They're trying to get the majority of America's 9 million Asian Americans, who traditionally split their votes among Democrats and Republicans, to ally with one party in the 2000 residential election.

As the first Asian-American political group in cyberspace, and perhaps the first political group in cyberspace, the group's potential impact on next year's election is being watched with fascination.

"This is really a novel approach and we don't know what is going to happen," said David Lee, executive director of the Chinese-American Voters Education Committee, an organization based in Cupertino and San Francisco.

What remains to be seen "is whether you can move from cyberspace into the polling place," Lee said. "I think that's something that's yet to be seen."

The group's name reflects their goal: They'd like to see 80 percent of Asian Americans sink their vote and contributions in one party's candidate.

With endorsements and contributions, the group plans to reward the political party's candi-

## Metro@home captures design elements, styles

Store is located in Jack London Square

By David Scholtz  
STAFF WRITER

OAKLAND — With the development of 1,100 new residences expected just within the revitalized Jack London Square district by late next year, Dwight Jackson has visions of upscale furnishings and various nicknacks finding their way into many new homes.

Metro@home, at the foot of Washington Street along the

signs and contemporary styles — created by influential foreign commercial designers and local arts.

The store is an offshoot of Metropolitan Contract Group, where Jackson serves as chief executive officer.

Metro@home makes hard-to-find items from leading designers accessible to consumers with discriminating tastes.

The store strives to serve the needs of "an ascending class" of consumers, said Christ Surinis, Jackson's partner and design director.



NICK LAMMERS

Visitors to Metro@home are exposed to an array of items created by influential foreign commercial designers and local artists.



**OVEREATERS ANONYMOUS HOW** — Hosts its weekly speaker discussion meeting, 7 p.m., First Christian Church, 2441 San Jose Ave., 522-6150 or 523-0367.

### Tuesday

**AA HAPPY HOUR GROUP** — The AA Happy Hour Group hosts its book-study meeting, non-smoking and wheelchair-accessible, 5:45 p.m., First Presbyterian Church, 2001 Santa Clara Ave., 839-8900.

**ALAMEDA BOARD OF EDUCATION** — Holds a special meeting at 7:30 p.m., Alameda High School Little Theater, 2200 Central Ave.

**ALAMEDA CITY COUNCIL** — The Alameda City Council holds its regular meeting, 7:30 p.m., Council Chambers, 2263 Santa Clara Ave., 748-4508.

**ALAMEDA HEAD START** — Provides children, ages 3 to 5, with classroom experience, 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. or 1 to 4:30 p.m., call Lynne, 865-4950, ext. 126.

**ALAMEDA HOLISTIC INSTITUTE** — Hosts free workshop on ways to avoid the cold and flu season, 7 p.m., 1505 Webster St., 523-2120.

**MASTICK SENIOR CENTER** — Programs, activities and services for seniors 60 plus or disabled 50 and older; 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Thrift Shop, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., 1155 Santa Clara Ave., 748-4597.

**OVEREATERS ANONYMOUS HOW** — Hosts its weekly book study meeting, 7:15 p.m., First Presbyterian Church, 2001 Santa Clara Ave., 522-6150 or 523-0367.

**PAINE WEBBER** — Hosts free tax strategy seminar at 12 p.m., 1364 Park St., 884-5390.

### Wednesday

**AA HAPPY HOUR GROUP** — The AA Happy Hour Group hosts its regular meeting, non-smoking and wheelchair-accessible, 5:45 p.m., First Presbyterian Church, 2001 Santa Clara Ave., 839-8900.

**ALAMEDA HISTORICAL MUSEUM** — Open 1:30 to 4 p.m., 2324 Alameda Ave., 521-1233.

**ALAMEDA RECREATION AND PARK DEPARTMENT** — Holds coed Kickoff League for first, second and third graders beginning at 3:30 p.m., 1327 Oak St., 748-4565.

**CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH SENIOR CENTER** — Hosts social activities, crafts, a quilt program and a lunch program, \$1.50 donation, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Ben Coppersmith hosts the "Let's Talk" club at 11 a.m., 1700 Santa Clara Ave., 522-3958.

**MARINA VILLAGE TOASTMASTERS** — Holds a meeting to discuss and practice public speaking and interviewing skills, free, noon, 1301 Marina Village Parkway, Suite 105, 337-6150.

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## Police: Burriss saluted for human rights work

Continued from LOCAL-1

Burriss believes police must let down their authoritarian guard and show the public their human side, which means admitting when they make mistakes.

"You have all these police officers who are human, and much of what they're doing is interacting with people. So you expect mistakes to be made — to err is human."

At the close of the O.J. Simpson trial, when pundits began dissecting the events that led to Simpson's acquittal, Burriss was called upon by print and television media to lead his expertise. He said at the time that the black community's strained relationship with police prevented a guilty verdict. He still finds it a powerful example today.

"They understood police were capable of lying, planting evidence, messing with evidence. The white community couldn't even fathom that," he said. "Both are functions of our own histories."

(Los Angeles police Officer Mark) Furman couldn't trust the black community. He was unwilling to look (jurors) in the eye and admit he used the N-word. And if he could have done that, I believe they would have forgiven him."

In 1993, Burriss represented Rodney King in his civil trial. He

meeting ever held in North America, leaders will launch a round of negotiations and also debate the rules of commerce between countries in the coming century.

About 50 house members are on the advisory group, which consists of delegates who have had a long interest in the global

"(The King case) highlighted what police were capable of doing, without relying on lawyers to interpret the events," Burriss said. "It was there for all to see."

A new commitment to exploring such phenomena as "driving while black" is the result of high-profile cases that increase public awareness of police misconduct, Burriss said. He hopes the cases in his book will help keep students, public administrators and police officials moving along that path.

"The halo has been removed, and the public is more willing to hear an account and not be dismissive of it," Burriss said.

Many of Burriss' Oakland cases were settled out of court for relatively small sums of money. And the book is written from the attorney's perspective — the same way he advocated for his clients in court. But despite what Rains considers Burriss' "grandstanding," he says the civil rights attorney has generally had a good influence on police.

"I think police recognize (court) is one more level of police review that's out there," Rains said. "My clients have always been mindful of a rigorous Internal Affairs Department and the Citizen's Police Review Board. And they've been mindful of John Burriss."

"I worry about workers in NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) countries who are subject to poor working conditions," she said. The congresswoman also said she wants to frame the need to stop HIV/AIDS epidemics in Africa as a trade policy issue.

Lee will be financing her own

She praised the World Trade Organization, which along with the Clinton administration has been taking heat for limp attention to environmental and labor issues. Labor leaders have been calling for the WTO to impose laws against child labor, forced labor and workplace discrimination. Some also are pushing

country to spread around the world," she said.

The event is expected to draw more than 5,000 delegates and as many as 50,000 demonstrators. President Clinton and Vice President Gore are likely to attend, as well as an unknown number of other heads of state.

## Beltline: Land will cost \$1,000

Continued from LOCAL-1

"If they qualify, I will certify them and take the initiative to the City Council," Felsch said. The council can then decide whether it wants to adopt the measure. If not, the measure goes on the ballot and requires a majority vote to pass.

The initiative is aimed at providing "land particularly suited for open space in a city that is underserved by areas for park and recreation purposes and to preserve a habitat for unique plant and animal life."

The tract is just south of the Marina Village Business Park, fringed by Constitution Way, Sherman Street and Eagle and Atlantic avenues. It was previously home to a railroad track used by trains serving companies on the northern waterfront.

The property was put on the market about a year ago and local developer Mike Valley intended to buy it for an estimated \$14.5 million to build 150 to 200 homes.

But Valley's plans will most likely be halted by the city. Last month, the council passed an ordinance expressing the city's intent to purchase the Alameda Belt Line Railroad.

That stemmed from Sweeney's discovery of a Dec. 15, 1924, agreement between Alameda and a group of railroads named the Alameda Belt Line.

The agreement stated that if the city sold the belt line, Alameda could repurchase the property in the future with a year's notice and a sum equal to the original cost, plus the cost of any and all additional improvements and extensions.

"Jean found the document that explained this agreement," said Vice Mayor Tony Daysog. "Even if I don't agree 100 percent with the open space initiative, she should be commended for finding it."

The ordinance passed by the council states that on Dec. 4, 2000, the city will purchase the beltline railroad and its extensions, making the city the legal land owner.

Daysog estimated the cost to the city will be around \$1,000. "We stand to make millions," Daysog said. "Everyone is already planning on what to do with the money."

"But if the initiative is legally approved by the voters, it could control the zoning of the property no matter who the owner is," said Alameda City Attorney

Carol Korade.

The belt yard provides a natural link between the bike trails from the ferry and Alameda Point and those leading over the Fruitvale Bridge to the Fruitvale BART station.

Current zoning of the property is not exactly clear, but Sweeney knows if it shifts to open space it "will prevent overcrowding, promote aesthetics and enhance the quality of life for all Alamedans."

"It will also reduce traffic and congestion and provide outdoor recreation for all citizens."

"This is a chance for a wonderful park like Golden Gate Central Park," Sweeney said. "We could have trails, bridges, ponds and trees. Maybe even a rose garden."

Daysog said that having 22 acres as open space seems "a little too rigid, and somewhere between 30 and 50 percent sounds more reasonable."

Sweeney points to a section in Alameda's general plan that says the city should "work to establish greenways on unused railroad rights-of-way adjoining Main Street and Atlantic Avenue, extending east through the railroad yard to Sherman Street."

## Online: Parents advised to track PC use

Continued from LOCAL-1

the charges. Contra Costa County prosecutors, however, reviewed the evidence and

gators.

The pornography was allegedly found on a home computer confiscated from Costello, 48, in June on suspi-

or other shared family room so they can be aware of who's trying to befriend their children. Parents also can learn to access