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Atherton,
Portola Valley,
Woodside and
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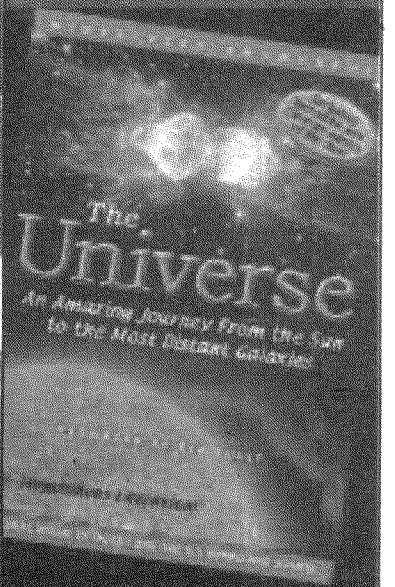
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Almanac readers
help the Menlo Park
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nine other nonprofit agencies

The OICW Way still works

With the Holiday Fund, Almanac readers help the Menlo Park job-training center and nine other nonprofit agencies

BY MARION SOFTKY | PHOTOS BY CAROL IVIE, DAVID BOYCE

When you go into OICW, the thing that grabs you is a sense of energy. Positive energy. Starting with Director Sharon Williams' office — with a giant stuffed Mickey Mouse and Barney outside — people are upbeat.

In a classroom for training computer-service technicians, Malcolm Jordan is moving hard drives inside a computer chassis. The outgoing father of four from Menlo Park can't wait until he graduates. "Then I'm going to take the talents I learned here, and get me a good job," he says enthusiastically.

That bounce is helping the Menlo Park job-training center weather the economic slump. Like other nonprofits, OICW has seen revenue plummet and needs soar. Its budget this year is down 20 percent, from \$7.6 million to \$6.1 million.

But OICW also faces a third challenge. It needs jobs for its graduates. Last year it placed 71 percent of full-time training graduates in jobs averaging \$15.45 an hour, Ms. Williams says. This is down from 94 percent a few years ago.

Hardest hit were jobs in high technology. Not only are companies laying people off, but some dot-coms that crashed, like Excite@Home, used to hire OICW trainees.

When the market turns, graduates of OICW's technical programs — like the Sun, Cisco, and Oracle academies — will be ready, Ms. Williams says. "They have earned their certification. Technology will not go away."

Graduates in other sectors are doing better. There's a waiting list to get into the Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) program, Ms. Williams says. "The health industry is booming."

OICW currently operates 10 vocational training programs, in addition to numerous backup programs, ranging from child care and counseling, to Canada College classes and job-search assistance.

Besides five programs related to high technology and computers, clients can enroll in training for nursing-assistant and clerical jobs, and for jobs in digital publishing, culinary arts, and construction.

People who hire OICW grads tend to

like them. Gary DellaVecchia, construction manager at the old Sportsmen's Club on the Menlo Park Baylands, said he is pleased with the six OICW graduates helping to clean up toxic clay pigeons, shotgun shells and lead pellets. "They all have good attitude," he says. "They want to work. They want to learn."

"We're part of the solution," Ms. Williams stresses. "But we need people to hire our graduates."

Never boring

It's hard to imagine OICW without Sharon Williams. For her, 2003 will mark 30 years of rallying people onto career ladders. She became executive director in 1979.

"Time has flown," she says during an interview. "I love this place. I never get bored. It's always changing."

OICW has come a long way since Opportunities Industrialization Center West opened its doors in Menlo Park in 1965. Based on the original OIC job training center pioneered by the Rev. Leon Sullivan in Philadelphia, OICW has served almost 72,000 people, Ms. Williams says.

Now OICW is a bustling complex of classes and services designed to build productive lives. Last year, 7,323 adults, teenagers and children enrolled in programs at OICW. More than 2,000 took



Photos by David Boyce

Roy Clay of Rod-L Electronics of Menlo Park hired OICW graduate **Irene Lepulu** of Menlo Park in 1989 as a receptionist; now she processes orders. He's pleased with the work of the 45 OICW graduates he has hired since 1977. She recommends OICW to her friends from the Islands.

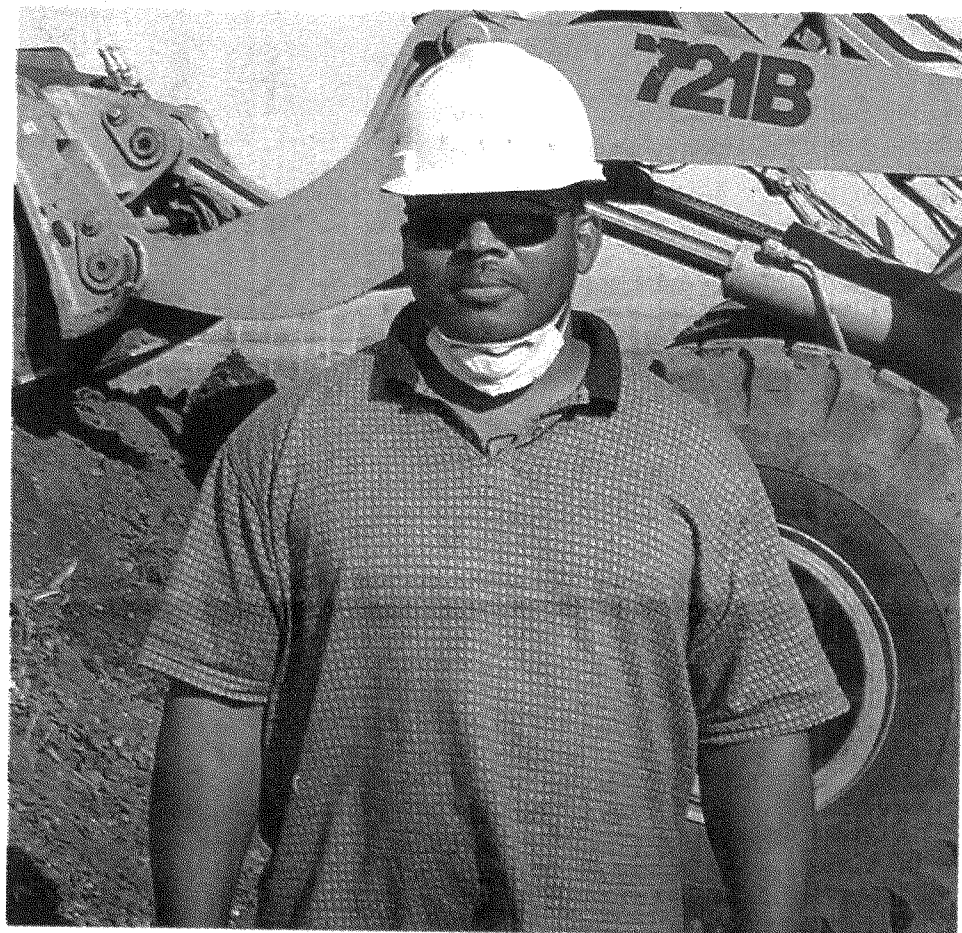


Photo by Gary DellaVecchia

Alex Foreman, a graduate of Project Build at OICW, loves his job at the Menlo Park Baylands. He's helping clean up toxic clay pigeons, lead pellets and shotgun casings left over from 60 years of skeet shooting at the former Peninsula Sportsmen's Club.

evening classes to learn English as a second language, computer skills and electronics. Teenagers participated in special programs; 93 little kids frolicked in two child development centers, while their parents trained for better jobs.

Other school and county agencies provide services at OICW. San Mateo County's PeninsulaWorks helped almost 2,500 jobseekers write resumes; pursue jobs by phone, e-mail and on the Web; and set up interviews. The county's Department of Human Services also works with clients on welfare.

When clients finish a course, OICW tries to help them make the next step. "We concentrate on career ladders. We don't just say bye-bye," Ms. Williams says.

Adversity seems to energize Ms. Williams. "In tough times we look for new ways to solve problems," she says.

Faced by \$1.5 million less in revenue from government, foundations, and donations, OICW has cut staff by 15. Evening classes have been dropped for the Cisco and Sun academies. The Bell Ringer Cafe has closed, and culinary arts students are learning to cook at Mime's Cafe in Redwood City, another project of OICW.

With the dot-com crash, OICW has also seen its mix of clients change. It still serves people on welfare, people in trouble with drugs or alcohol, people out of prison, single parents, and kids just out of school.

But almost one-third of its clients now have lost their jobs, Ms. Williams says. Many are desperate, with their whole standard of living at risk. "Their parachute fell from the sky."

Undefeated, Ms. Williams is brimming with ideas and programs. This year Smart-

The OICW job-training center in Menlo Park is one of the beneficiaries of the Almanac's Holiday Fund.

Force, an e-learning company, has given OICW 14,000 scholarships for online learning. "We've already had students take a course on SmartForce and pass industrial certification," says Ms. Williams. "People can do this any time."

OICW is also getting a big influx of computers from Hewlett Packard's Digital Village program in East Palo Alto. So it's giving old computers to students and staff to take home and take courses. "They can do it at 2 in the morning if they want," she says.

"OICW works in all economies," Ms. Williams continues. "In tough times, we're energized to be smarter and more aggressive for our students."

Project Build

The bang of hammers and buzz of saws make it hard to talk in the Project Build shop, where 26 students are learning construction, and management of hazardous materials.

Mohekonokono Samita — generally called Mario — appreciates the chance to become a carpenter and build a career in this country.

"I'm getting more experience. It's changing my life," says the young Tongan who moved six months ago to join his family in Belle Haven after seven years working in New Zealand.

A small house is rapidly taking shape as students lay the foundation, frame the building, and fit the boards. By the time we leave, the front steps are in place.

Mr. Samita and his fellow students — including five women — are engaged in a 16-week course that will gain them apprentice membership in Local 217 of the Carpenter's Union at \$18.45 an hour, and also certification to handle hazardous materials.

Project Build is ideal for trainees who may not have the ability or interest in high-tech jobs, notes counselor Doug Fort of Redwood City. Some also come to the program with histories of prison, alcohol or drugs that make them hard to hire. But contractors don't care so much about the background, he says. "They want workers with good skills who can pass a drug test."

Meanwhile, Mr. Samita can hardly wait until he completes training January 31. "I got over some fears. I can solve my own problems," he says. "January 31 — that's what I'm looking forward to."

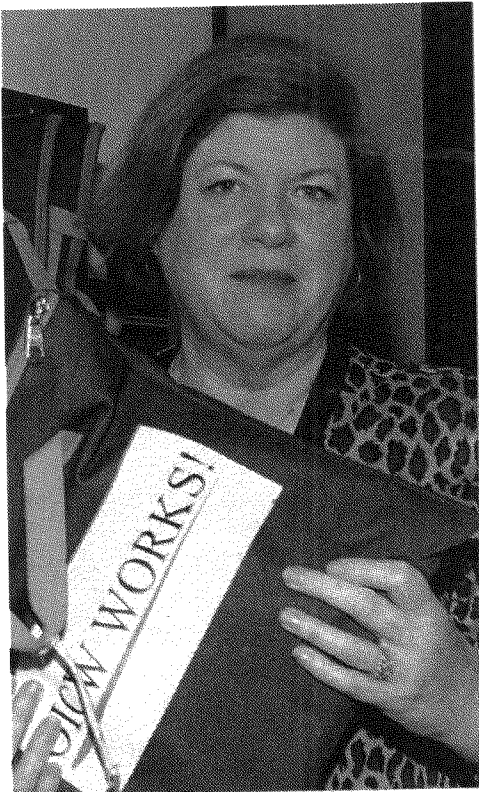


Photo by Carol Ivie

Sharon Williams, executive director of OICW since 1979, holds a book bag that staff and students at the Menlo Park job-training center can load with books to take home and read to their children.

Happy graduates

Out on the Menlo Park Baylands, Alex Foreman of Menlo Park is using his OICW training in hazardous-materials handling to help clean up toxic debris from 60 years of skeet shooting.

"I'm the rebar man," he says proudly. He works with the operators of heavy machinery who are excavating the surface layer to find the steel rebar cables that reinforced the concrete in the former gun club. He cuts them off before they damage a bulldozer. "Rebar pops up like rabbit ears," he chuckles.

Mr. Foreman, who lives with his mother in Belle Haven, is enthusiastic about his experience at OICW. "It trains everybody," he says. "The people try really hard. They push you to stay in class. They train you stitch by stitch to achieve a better-paying career."

Closer to the freeway, Rod-L Electronics

See OICW, next page

About the Holiday Fund Series

Every year at this time, the Almanac offers its readers a close-up look at the agencies that serve the homeless, the hungry and the disadvantaged of our community. We also provide an opportunity to contribute to a select group of nonprofit organizations that are helping to alleviate the needs that persist despite the area's tremendous wealth.

The Almanac's Holiday Fund drive could not happen without the help of the Peninsula Community Foundation and the donors who provide matching grants for most of the contributions. Last year, \$135,570 was sent in by more than 300 readers and matched by the foundation donors. With

matching grants, \$224,650 was contributed to nine nonprofit organizations.

This year, the foundation is again making \$100,000 available for matching grants, although large donors to the fund are encouraged to add their grants to the matching-grant pool.

Readers will also notice that for the first time, all Holiday Fund donations will be shared equally among all 10 recipients. The change was made because all nonprofits, large or small, are desperately in need of funds this year, during the area's persistent economic downturn. With the matching grants, each agency could receive up to \$20,000.

How to give

Your gift helps children and others in need



Contributions to the Holiday Fund will be matched dollar for dollar (up to a maximum of \$100,000) and will go directly to programs that benefit Peninsula residents. Contributions will be distributed by Peninsula Community Foundation to the 10 agencies listed below. No administrative costs will be deducted from the gifts, which are tax-deductible as permitted by law. This year, due to the tremendous

need of all nonprofits, donations to the Holiday Fund will be shared equally among the 10 recipient agencies. This means that, unlike prior years, donors will not be able to direct their gifts to a particular agency. If reader donations reach \$100,000, the amount needed to attract the maximum amount of matching grants made available by corporate and other donors, each nonprofit will be eligible to receive \$20,000.

This year, the following agencies will be supported by the Almanac's Holiday Fund:

■ **Boys & Girls Club:** Provides after-school support to 4,000 young people, ages 6 to 18, at branches in Menlo Park's Belle Haven neighborhood, East Palo Alto and Redwood City.

■ **El Concilio:** A nonprofit coalition of 24 Latino service providers with a mission to increase access to quality health care, employment and education.

■ **Lytton Gardens:** A community that offers older adults in the Palo Alto and Menlo Park area housing, health care and supportive services, with 320 independent living and 50 assisted-living apartments, and a 145-bed skilled-nursing facility.

■ **Opportunities Industrialization Center West (OICW):** Nonprofit agency provides job-training, counseling and placement services, with the goal to help people find good jobs with good wages.

■ **Second Harvest Food Bank:** The largest collector and distributor of food on the Peninsula gathers donations from people and businesses and distributes them through service organizations throughout San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

■ **Shelter Network:** Provides short- and long-term transitional housing and services to more than 1,000 homeless San Mateo County residents, including children, annually.

■ **South County Community Health and Nonprofit Center:** The newly opened center provides a central source of medical and human services for East Palo Alto and southern San Mateo County, focusing on uninsured and low-income individuals and families.

■ **St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room:** Serves hundreds of hot meals six days a week to people in need. Also offers emergency food and clothing assistance from its Menlo Park facility.

■ **Teen Pregnancy Coalition:** Provides educational pregnancy-prevention programs for youth, in partnership with educators, community residents, and health and human service providers.

■ **Youth and Family Assistance:** Agency provides services for runaway and homeless youth, and offers programs in substance abuse, youth development and abuse prevention.

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Peninsula Community Foundation is located at 1700 South El Camino Real, No. 300, San Mateo, CA 94402-3049. More information about the Foundation can be obtained by contacting PCF at the above address or by calling (650) 358-9369. The Almanac will make every effort to publish donor names for donations received before Dec. 31, 2002, unless the donor checks the anonymous box. All donations will be acknowledged by mail.

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Thanksgiving Holiday DEADLINES

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Lytton Gardens: warm, safe, vibrant community for seniors

By Jane Knoerle

Almanac Staff Writer

More than 10,000 seniors have been served by Palo Alto's Lytton Gardens since its founding in 1968. Today 550 residents call Lytton Gardens, at 437 Webster St., their home.

Lytton Gardens offers three programs with a variety of health-care services. In independent living, 375 seniors live in their own apartments. They can take college courses, work out at the fitness center, get their hair done, play bingo, and join fellow residents every night for dinner.

The residents give back to the community by teaching arts and crafts to pre-schoolers, tutoring at Garfield School, serving lunches at Avenidas, and volunteering at the Palo Alto public library.

When needed, there is assisted living, where 50 seniors receive assistance with bathing, dressing and medication while still living in their own apartments.

The skilled-nursing facility offers rehabilitation, post-operative, Alzheimer's, long-term and hospice care for 125 patients.

All these facilities cost money. Lots of it. The average cost to Lytton Gardens for each resident in independent living is \$9,500 a year; for assisted living, it's \$19,400; and for the health-care center, it's \$60,000.

To qualify as a resident of Lytton Gardens, applicants must fit the HUD income requirements,



Traci Ariss, left, and her son, Conner, visit with Louise Brady in the skilled nursing facility at Lytton Gardens.

which means roughly a \$48,000 a year income for a single person; \$55,000 for a couple, according to Gery Yearout, vice president of residential services

at Lytton Gardens. The average income for residents, however, is actually less than \$13,000 a year. Residents contribute according to their ability.

Applicants, or a family member, must also live within the communities of Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Atherton, Woodside, Portola Valley, Redwood City, East Palo Alto, Mountain View, Los Altos or Los Altos Hills.

Most Lytton Gardens revenue (59 percent) comes from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Medicare and

MediCal. Residents, donors, corporations and foundations make up the rest. Revenue from grants, foundations and corporations in the fiscal year ending in March 2002, however, was down to \$160,000, from \$282,000 in the previous year.

The number of seniors over the age of 65 in the United States is expected to grow 60 percent by 2020, according to Lytton Garden figures, with the population over 85 nearly doubling. Today the average age of its independent living residents is 79 and rising.

Lytton Gardens was founded by Palo Alto community leaders, including the congregations of the First Methodist Church and First Presbyterian Church. Its goal is to give seniors an opportunity to live their so-called "golden years" in a warm, safe and vibrant community. ■

Lytton Gardens
is one of the
beneficiaries of
the Almanac's
Holiday Fund.

OICW

continued from previous page

has been hiring OICW graduates since 1977, when Roy Clay founded the company that makes electrical safety test equipment. A former Palo Alto city councilman, Mr. Clay was recently honored by the governor as the founder of one of California's oldest black-owned technology companies.

"I've hired 45 people," says Mr. Clay amid the clutter of moving his company to new quarters in Bohannon Industrial Park. "They are all very, very good. They know their job. They are very responsible people. Many have gone on to still better jobs."

Irene Lepulu of Menlo Park came to Rod-L as a receptionist in 1989, straight from an intensive, two-week job-preparation program at OICW. She's still there, but now in a more responsible

job processing orders. "They were very helpful. The counselors were wonderful," she says.

Ms. Lepulu, who came to this country from Samoa in 1977 not speaking English, finished Menlo-Atherton High School in 1988. She learned about OICW from family members who took courses there.

Like many graduates, Ms. Lepulu remains a strong advocate of OICW in the community. "I try to get my friends from the islands to go there first," she says. "They connect with a lot of good people. They are referred to a lot of good jobs."

OICW needs...

To keep training people for good jobs in a down economy, OICW needs support from the community in the form of money, jobs, and volunteers.

"I see OICW as a solution to community problems, individ-

ual problems, and economic problems," Ms. Williams concludes. "I believe investment in OICW provides a huge benefit to society." ■

About OICW

■ OICW provides daytime instruction programs: Certified Nurse Assistant; Culinary Arts; Cisco/Sun Academy; Computer Service Technician; Digital Publishing for Print & the Web; Office Skills; Oracle Academy; Project Build; Electronics/Telecommunication.

■ Additional services include: classes in English as a second language; GED preparation; introduction to computers; Microsoft Office; and introduction to home health care.

To reach: Opportunities Industrialization Center West, 1200 O'Brien Drive, Menlo Park, CA 94025; 462-6300, www.oicw.org.