

THE SUNDAY TIMES

\$1

Sunday, December 6, 2009

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plus tax

A&E: '39 STEPS'
A SALUTE –
AND SLAP ON
THE BACK –
TO SIR ALFRED



TRAVEL:
NIFTY IDEAS TO
MAKE THE ROAD
EASIER FOR
TRAVELERS



**AS MUCH
AS \$207 IN
MONEY-SAVING
COUPONS
INSIDE**

Local actions, global impact

■ Berkeley solar plan among steps taken worldwide to address climate change

By Mike Taugher

mtaugher@bayareanews.com

Last month, the city of Berkeley wrapped up a one-year experiment in which 13 residents were able to install solar panels with little out-of-pocket expense. The effort was part of a city plan to combat global warming.

The pilot hit a few snags but was promising enough that a coalition of as many as 14 counties is now seeking a grant of federal stimulus funds to dramatically expand it. In October, the Obama administration announced plans to foster similar programs across the country as part of its "Recovery Through Retrofit" initiative.

As environment ministers from around the world gather in Copenhagen this week to try to reach agreement on cutting greenhouse gas emissions, the nitty-gritty work of doing that falls on state and local shoulders. And perhaps nowhere is that truer than in the Bay Area.

The steps are early ones, to be sure, but as the international debate focuses on how deeply to cut global emissions and how much financial assistance to offer developing countries, cities and counties in the Bay Area and beyond already are measuring emissions and drawing up plans to reduce them.

"It has been a bottom-up, state and local government-led effort," said Richard Frank, director of

See CLIMATE, Page 8

MORNING REPORT

Climate change at center stage

President Barack Obama prepares for the Copenhagen climate summit as the furor heats up over leaked e-mails among climate scientists. Protesters take to the streets in several European cities to urge summit participants to adopt concrete plans to reduce emissions worldwide.



SHORTENED LIVES WHERE YOU LIVE MATTERS



JANE TYSKA/STAFF

WALNUT CREEK, 94597: Richard Angelis does yardwork at his home. Residents in the affluent neighborhood have the highest life expectancy in the East Bay.



ARIC CRABB/STAFF

CASTRO VALLEY, 94546: Julie Rettig stands with daughter Willie Wiest and husband Dan Dwyer in their neighborhood, where people, on average, live to be 79 years old.



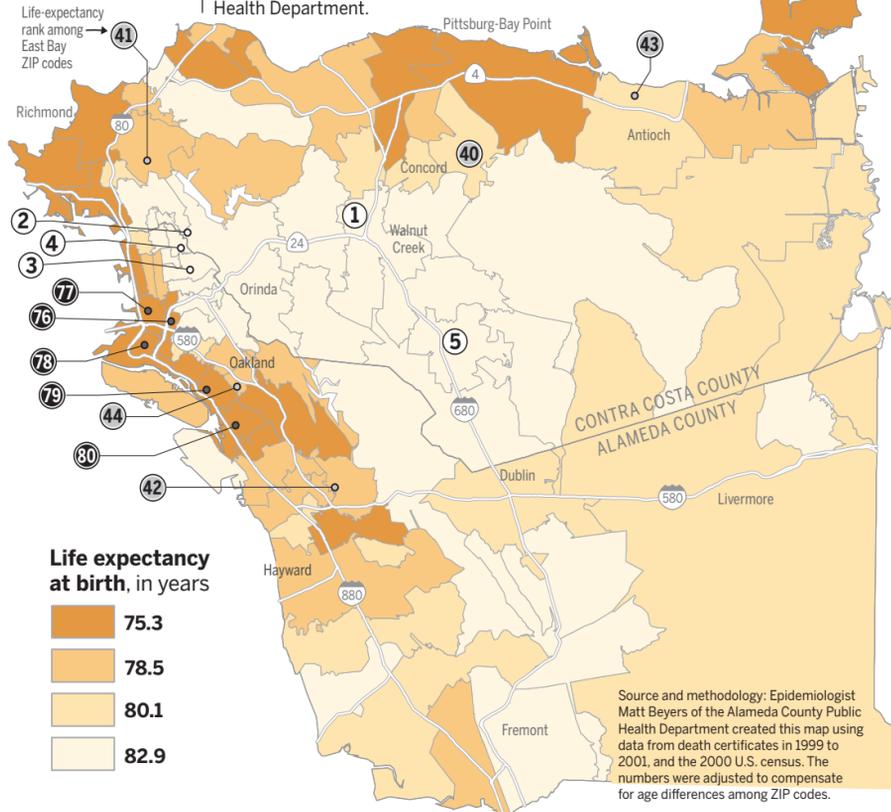
JANE TYSKA/STAFF

OAKLAND, 94603: Calixto Orantes, son Julio and wife Edel live in an area where life expectancy is 16 years shorter than in the 94597 ZIP code in Walnut Creek.

Life-and-death disparities in East Bay neighborhoods

Disparities in how long people live

Whether people have clean air to breathe, access to healthful food, safe places to exercise, decent housing, good incomes, lower-stress lives and social opportunities all play a role in how long people live, health experts say. In the East Bay, a 16-year difference in life expectancy exists between two ZIP codes that are just 12 miles apart — differences mapped here using data gathered and processed by the Alameda County Public Health Department.



- **Top 5 ranking** (with ZIP code) and life expectancy in years
- **Middle 5 ranking** (ZIP code) and life expectancy in years
- **Bottom 5 ranking** (ZIP code) and life expectancy in years

DAVE JOHNSON/STAFF

THE TWO MEN live only 12 miles apart. Richard Angelis dwells where people, on average, live to be 87 years old. Calixto Orantes and his neighbors live where the life expectancy is 71.

Health experts have long known that the poor live shorter, sicker lives. Angelis is in a Walnut Creek ZIP code where most salaries are higher than average, and Orantes lives in a part of Oakland where poverty reigns.

But a closer look into these large gaps shatters preconceived notions about health and demographics. Julie Rettig lives in Castro Valley, a comfortably middle-class enclave where she and her neighbors can nonetheless expect to live roughly eight fewer years than those in Angelis' ZIP code.

Many factors figure into these health disparities, including physically debilitating stress from crime, job loss and pollution. Surprisingly, access to health care plays only a minor role.

In a four-part series today, Monday, and Dec. 13 and 14, we explore the reasons behind these dramatic geographic gulfs in health, the growing movement to close the gaps, and why it matters as our nation engages in a debate over the delivery of health care.

For the story by staff writers Suzanne Bohan and Sandy Kleffman, turn to Page A6.

ONLINE

Go to ContraCostaTimes.com/life-expectancy.

■ **LIVE CHAT, NOON MONDAY:** Two experts — former Alameda County public health director Anthony Iton and Larry Adelman, executive producer of the "Unnatural Causes" documentary series — answer readers' questions about life expectancy.

■ **VIDEO:** Profiles of East Bay residents. ■ **INTERACTIVE MAP:** Check your ZIP code.

WEATHER TODAY, AA12: Late showers, Highs 40s, Lows 30s / Ask Amy D2 / Classified CL1 / Crossword D6 / Gary Bogue A2 / Lottery AA2 / Movies D5 / Obituaries A26 / Perspective A11-15

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JANE TYSKA/STAFF

Calixto Orantes and his wife, Edel, prepare dinner at their East Oakland home in October. Their Sobrante Park neighborhood has the East Bay's lowest life expectancy.

East Bay health inequities

Neighborhoods, social status and stress contribute to shorter life expectancies

By Suzanne Bohan and Sandy Kleffman
Staff Writers

ON MOST Saturday mornings, Richard Angelis hops onto his bicycle to join his biking group, the Alamo Crazies, for their weekly ride through rural Contra Costa County. He lives in Walnut Creek on a tree-lined street in ZIP code 94597, where life expectancy is 87.4 years, the highest in any ZIP code in the East Bay.

"I always look forward to my Saturday morning rides," said Angelis, a fit 58-year-old who bikes about 70 miles a week. "It's a good stress relief after working all week."

But 12 miles southwest of Angelis' home, in the Oakland neighborhood of Sobrante Park, there are nights when Calixto Orantes, 53, hits the ground in a cold sweat inside his small rented home as gunfire erupts nearby.

Even the sight of a gang of young men in the neighborhood agitates Orantes, an unemployed truck driver who would gladly accept almost any work. Food donations from a church help feed his family.

"I'll do anything," said Orantes, a slender man who maintains a friendly disposition despite his anxieties.

He lives in ZIP code 94603, where life expectancy plunges to 71.2 years — the lowest rate in the East Bay. That's 16 fewer years than residents in Angelis' ZIP code, and nearly seven years below the California average of 78.4 years.

Six miles from Orantes' home, a wave of relief hits Julie Rettig as she passes over a familiar drop in the road while entering her Castro Valley neighborhood.

"As soon as I drive into that court and feel that little dip, it's like, 'Ahh,'" said Rettig, a 55-year-old respiratory therapist at a San Leandro hospital. She lives in ZIP code 94546 in a middle-class suburb, where life expectancy is

79 years.

Though Angelis, Orantes and Rettig all have health coverage, a growing body of research shows that where they live, their social status, and the toll of chronic stress have a much more decisive effect on their health and life span than visits to a doctor's office.

The Alameda County Public Health Department, a leader in research on these nonmedical causes of disease, provided Bay Area News Group with a groundbreaking database that reveals the prevalence of various diseases and life expectancies throughout Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Along with a small but growing number of public health departments, the agency funds the research to make the case that unhealthy neighborhoods play a far greater role in triggering diseases than germs, bad genes or irresponsible behavior, and that more health care dollars should be spent on the root causes of ill health.

Some key conclusions

from health disparities research:

■ Choosing healthy lifestyle habits is more difficult in neighborhoods that lack basic resources such as safe parks, libraries, good schools and grocery stores.

■ Strong social support — such as churches, community centers and schools, as well as healthy personal relationships — are weaker in poorer neighborhoods. These play a powerful role in living longer, healthier lives, according to numerous studies.

■ Constant stress, induced, for example, by living in fear of crime or under the burden of financial problems, floods the bloodstream with cortisol and adrenaline. High levels of these stress hormones are linked with the onset of numerous chronic diseases.

■ Closing the gap in life expectancy between those perched on different rungs of the socioeconomic ladder isn't just unfinished work in the Civil Rights Movement, health advocates say. It's critical to controlling run-

away health care costs.

Treatment of chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes accounts for 75 percent of the nation's \$2.2 trillion annual health care bill, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. Much of that disease burden is borne by the nation's poorer residents. Yet to public health officials' frustration, only 5 percent of that money is spent preventing it where they say it often starts — in unhealthy neighborhoods.

Health, not health care

Only 15 percent to 20 percent of the disparities in illnesses and death among U.S. populations are connected to access to health care, according to a 2008 article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Genetics is estimated to account for 15 percent to 20 percent of life expectancy.

Few people realize the powerful role that neighborhoods and social factors play in the development of disease, said Nancy Adler, a UC San Francisco medical psychologist and authority on socioeconomic status and health. Instead, many view health care services as a key determinant of good health and longevity.

"Clearly, health has been equated with health care, and that we can get patched up for whatever happens to us," Adler said.

But many diseases can't be easily cured, she said, and instead become costly conditions managed for a lifetime.

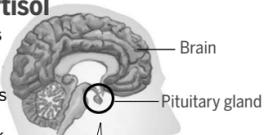
Moreover, the health care system typically treats conditions after they arise, Adler noted in a report on health disparities she co-authored, called "Reaching for a Healthier Life."

The stress effect

Middle-class people aren't living as long as wealthier people in the same area. One explanation is **chronic stress** — those experiencing more financial hardships and dealing with more everyday worries aren't as healthy as wealthier people. Over time, chronic stress can lead to a condition called **allostatic load**, which becomes even more pronounced in people lower on the socioeconomic ladder.

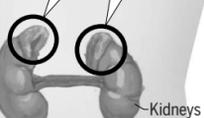
Stress and cortisol

In response to stress or perceived danger, hormones produced by the adrenal glands (including cortisol and adrenaline) work together when the body must react quickly to sudden threatening situations.



1 The brain and the body react to stress.

2 Adrenal glands In a flight-or-fight response, the adrenal glands produce cortisol (and other hormones) to give the body more energy.



Long-term effects of high allostatic load

- Elevated levels of cortisol can create a feeling of hunger, leading to overeating and obesity.
- High blood pressure
- Poor glucose regulation: Under stress, people crave sugar and carbohydrates, which give a quick boost, but then lead to a drop in energy. Over time, this increases the risk of developing diabetes.
- Lowered immune system resistance: can lead to inflammation and increased odds of developing many diseases.

Cortisol and craving

The hormone cortisol is secreted from the adrenal gland and helps regulate glucose, which the body uses for energy. But chronic stress creates a constant state of alarm, making the body crave sugar and carbohydrates.

Defending against allostatic load

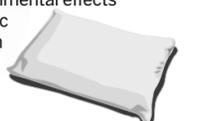
Regular exercise

Physical exertion can have a powerful effect in diminishing the cascade of stress hormones.



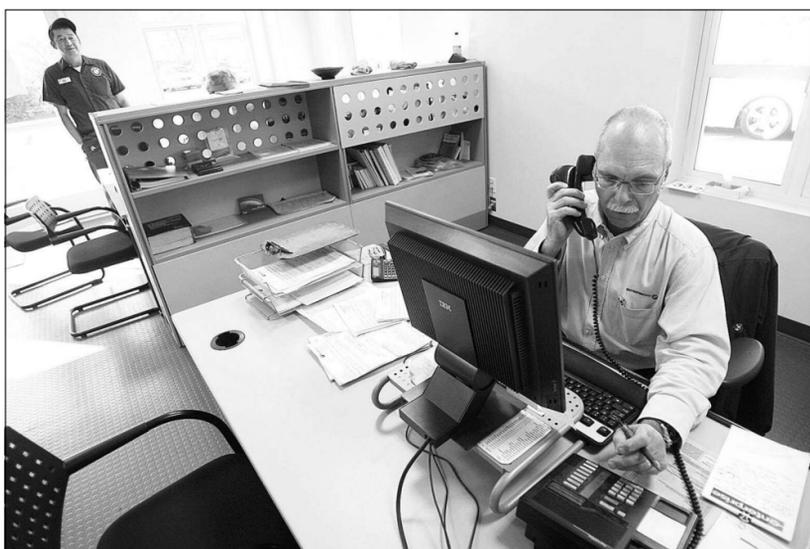
A good night's sleep

Lack of sleep exacerbates the detrimental effects allostatic load can have on health.



Source: Nancy Adler, MacArthur Network on Socioeconomic Status and Health
JEFF DURHAM, DAVE JOHNSON and SUZANNE BOHAN/STAFF

See LIFE, Page 7



JANE TYSKA/STAFF

Richard Angelis, of Walnut Creek, works in November at Weatherford BMW in Berkeley. Angelis reduces stress by cycling about 70 miles a week in Walnut Creek and Alamo.



JANE TYSKA/STAFF

Julie Rettig, her husband, Dan Dwyer, Rettig's daughter Willie Wiest and Nevaeh Campbell, whom Wiest baby-sits, live in a middle-class Castro Valley neighborhood.

EAST BAY HEALTH INEQUITIES FACTS

■ **West Oakland** residents breathe the air that contains three times more diesel particles than the rest of the Bay Area.

■ **In Contra Costa County**, black children are hospitalized for asthma problems at nearly five times the rate of white children.

■ **The 94603 ZIP code** in East Oakland has the highest cancer death rate, at 286 deaths per 100,000 population.

■ **The 94596 ZIP code** in Walnut Creek has the lowest cancer death rate, at 70 deaths per 100,000 population.

■ **Latinos in Alameda County** are five times more likely than whites to lack health insurance.

■ **People living in San Pablo**, Richmond and Pittsburg are more likely to die from diabetes than other Contra Costa County residents.

■ **Alameda County** during the past four decades has seen the gap in death rates between African-Americans and whites widen. In 1960, African-Americans had a 4 percent higher death rate than whites. The gap rose to 14 percent in 1970, 20 percent in 1980, 35 percent in 1990, 42 percent in 2000, and 53 percent in 2005.

■ **People living in Richmond**, San Pablo, Oakley, Antioch, Brentwood and Pittsburg are more likely to die from heart disease than other Contra Costa County residents.

■ **In Alameda County**, from 2001 to 2005 the rate of premature deaths among white and black residents who live in poor areas was twice the rate of white and black residents living in higher-income areas. Premature death is defined as dying before the age of 75.

■ **Contra Costa County residents** are more likely to die from cancer than other Californians, but less likely to die from heart disease.

■ **Oakland hills residents** on average live 5.9 years longer than those who live in the Oakland flatlands.

■ **In Contra Costa County**, African-Americans have higher death rates from heart disease, cancer and stroke than the average county resident.

■ **Life expectancy for African-Americans** living in the higher-income Oakland hills is about the same as life expectancy for white residents of the poorer Oakland flatlands. This indicates that factors other than poverty are limiting the health of African-Americans, county health leaders say.

■ **Asians in Contra Costa County** have lower death rates from all causes than the average county resident.

■ **Immigrants in Alameda County** have lower death rates than their U.S.-born counterparts of the same race and ethnicity.

■ **In Alameda County**, Latinos tend to have higher poverty rates, less education and more limited access to health care than white residents. But Latinos have lower death rates than whites.

■ **In Contra Costa County**, men have higher death rates than women from heart disease and cancer. But women have higher death rates from Alzheimer's disease.

■ **In Contra Costa County**, San Pablo residents are more likely to deliver babies who have low birth weights than other county residents. Walnut Creek women are least likely to have low-birth-weight babies.

■ **In Alameda County**, 10 public elementary and high schools lie within 500 feet of a high-volume freeway used by more than 100,000 vehicles per day. A 2003 state law would ban these schools from being built today because of unacceptably high levels of air pollution from the nearby freeway.

—Sandy Kleffman and Suzanne Bohan

Sources: Life and Death from Unnatural Causes report by the Alameda County Public Health Department, Community Health Indicators for Contra Costa County, a 2007 report by Contra Costa Health Services, and other data from county health departments.

Life

From Page 6

Though that treatment is critical to prevent a disease from worsening, the report noted, its development in the first place is usually tied to such external factors as chronic stress, poor diet, lack of exercise, environmental contaminants and smoking.

Changes in physical and social environments, such as improved food and water sanitation and restrictions on tobacco use and sales, also account for most of the 30-year gain in life expectancy achieved in the 20th century, according to a 2008 report from the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative, a collaboration of eight Bay Area public health agencies.

Lives are longer

In 1900, a person born in the United States could expect to live for 47 years; by 2000, that life expectancy leapt to 77 years. Advances in medical care, including the introduction of vaccines and antibiotics, accounted for about five years of that increase, the report stated. Still, a Journal of the American Medical Association mortality study did underscore that the leading reasons behind premature death and health — smoking, poor diet, lack of physical activity and alcohol abuse — are rooted in behavioral choices.

But before pointing to these as solely individual choices, the study authors cautioned that knowledge alone isn't always enough to bring about healthful behaviors.

Family, friends, teachers or church members, among other social connections, provide invaluable support for adopting a healthful lifestyle, the authors state. Equally important is the availability of nearby resources such as safe places to exercise, community centers, good schools, grocery stores and libraries.

Public health officials leading the charge to close the gap in health disparities insist that resource-poor communities have a far smaller menu of healthy-lifestyle options from which to choose. And there's too disproportionate a burden of diseases in these communities to ascribe it only to irresponsible behavior or bad decisions. Compared with a white child born in the Oakland hills, a black child born in West Oakland is five times more likely as an adult to be hospitalized for diabetes, twice as likely to die of heart disease or cancer, and three times more likely to die of a stroke.

Disparities' causes

People are quick to blame others for lifestyle choices that lead to illness, said Dr. Anthony Iton, senior vice president for Healthy Communities with the California Endowment in Oakland.

"But it's important to look at the cumulative impact of having the deck stacked against you," said Iton, who recently left a position as director of the Alameda County Public Health Department, where he pioneered numerous initiatives for reducing health disparities.

Neighborhoods low on the socioeconomic ladder typically lack grocery stores and other commercial outlets, parks in which to relax or let children play, safe areas to walk or bike, trusting relationships with neighbors and law enforcement officials, quality schools, convenient transportation or businesses offering employment.

"The infrastructure in these areas has been denuded," Iton said.

The surges of stress and fear people encounter over the years add up, explained Adler, with UC San Francisco, creating a form of physiological wear and tear called "allostatic load" that can trigger disease processes.

"It's a little of this and a little of that," she said.

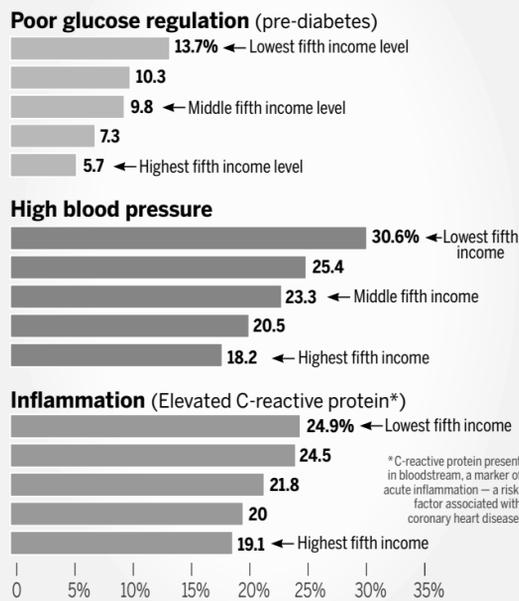
Stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline are crucial in a crisis. They sharpen the mind and bring sugar to the muscles to provide energy to fight or flee.

"But if you're constantly encountering these stresses, you're spending too much time with your body in this highly aroused state," Adler said. Over time, this can strain a number of organs and tissues — with many potential consequences — and it's especially hard on the cardiovascular system.

Income and health

According to a recent health study, people with lower incomes were more likely to have an early onset of several diseases.

Frequency of early signals of disease risk, by income level



Julie Rettig, 55, writes checks for bills in her two-story Castro Valley home in October. Rettig and her husband clip coupons and have cut back on luxuries, such as dining out, to save money for necessities.



Calixto Orantes, center, and his 17-year-old son, Julio, walk in October to Scotty's Market on 105th Avenue in the Sobrante Park neighborhood of East Oakland.



Richard Angelis, of Walnut Creek, bikes every Saturday with a group of friends in Alamo.

High-risk community

Oakland's Sobrante Park, about two miles east of Oakland International Airport, was a thriving community in the 1950s, residents remember. There was a supermarket, variety store, hair salon, barber shop, gift shop, laundromat, shoe store, restaurant, post office and a nearby park.

But in the 1960s, one by one the stores closed, and the post office shuttered. Today, only a liquor store remains.

The area's main gathering place, Tyrone Carney Park, was fenced off in 2002 after a homicide there. It created a community eyesore until frustrated residents took matters into their own hands, tearing down the fence in late October, although the city reinstalled it Nov. 23. The neighborhood's only other

open space, a "mini-park," hasn't had a restroom for years.

Orantes lives down the street from the main park in a small rented home with his wife, Edel, 46, and 17-year-old son, Julio.

Orantes used to keep pit bulls to protect his family and home — which burglars twice broke into during the 12 years they've lived there. But the landlord wouldn't allow him to keep the breed. The family's new dog, a Chihuahua, at least barks at disturbances, he said.

While he looks for work, a food bank at a neighborhood church helps the Orantes family stock their kitchen shelves. Calixto and his wife, Edel, also grow squash, and maintain a fruit tree.

Edel has diabetes, as does her husband. In addition to his anxiety, Calixto has hyper-

tension. He had colon cancer surgery when he was 45. The couple focus on eating well, and he won a church cooking competition with a "Chicken Jacon" recipe handed down through his family.

They don't have a car, and Edel said she has been robbed twice at bus stops in the area, once at gunpoint. "The stress level is high because we all the time are thinking something is going to happen to us, with the high crime in East Oakland," she said.

This fall, she received a \$1,500 grant from an Oakland nonprofit, CEO Women, to start her own home-based business. She plans to open the office services business in January, which she hopes will ultimately allow the family to move out of the area.

Middle-class worries

Rettig doesn't worry about crime in her Castro Valley neighborhood, but finances are a constant concern. She raised two children in her two-story home, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2002, and the end of a 22-year marriage in 2004 left her watching every dollar. She remarried in 2006.

Rettig worries about the proposed closing of the hospital where she works. A new job means lower seniority and maybe less desirable shifts. She and her husband, Dan Dwyer, 61, still watch expenses carefully, clip coupons and never eat out. Sales at the window treatment business her husband owns cycle with the economy.

She once dreamed of putting her children, now 20 and 22, through college. But she revised that dream to letting them live at home for free and paying for their health insurance, so long as they stay in school and cover their other expenses.

The middle class, who typically have ample food, convenient transportation and safe neighborhoods, are still sicker and dying younger than wealthier Americans.

Top of the scale

Inside his Walnut Creek home, Angelis appeared surprised that his unpretentious neighborhood boasts the longest life expectancy of any ZIP code in Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

"It's one of the funkier neighborhoods in Walnut Creek," he said, which was part of its appeal.

It's been much easier to enjoy his passion for biking since he and his wife moved there 14 years ago from the Oakland foothills. Here, Angelis can ride from his home to join friends on the area's many bike routes, or take a walk after work.

Still, they strain to help pay college costs for their son, now a sophomore. They're also paying off a loan for college expenses for their daughter, who graduated in 2008. While he feels relatively secure in his job as a service adviser at a BMW dealership in Berkeley, he regards few positions as immune from downsizing.

And while he loves his neighborhood and its many amenities, such as a nearby farmers market and several grocery stores, including one famed for its gourmet offerings, he dislikes his work commute.

"Maintaining this lifestyle is a stress," he said. "Things keep going up and up."

Stress is everywhere

Iton affirmed that those higher on the social ladder aren't inoculated from stress.

"Even if you're upper income, you're worried about job loss, dealing with the stress of long commutes, having to have two incomes," Iton said.

But he and others also believe the stress of the wide health disparity itself accounts for part of the United States' lowered life expectancy, in comparison to most other wealthy nations.

"To me, this inequality is a corrosive force that harms all of us," said Leonard Syme, an emeritus professor of epidemiology at UC Berkeley who in the 1950s pioneered the field of examining the social factors behind health disparities.

"It makes us feel like we're not on a winning team," he said.

SHORTENED LIVES

A series of stories exploring health inequities in the East Bay.

■ **TODAY:** East Bay life expectancies linked to neighborhoods.

■ **MONDAY:** The geography of asthma and heart disease.

■ **SUNDAY, DEC. 13:** Closing the inequity gap.

■ **MONDAY, DEC. 14:** Personal responsibility and social action.

How East Bay health inequities were examined

By Sandy Kleffman and Suzanne Bohan
Staff Writers

Death certificates and hospital reports provided the base on which to study the East Bay's striking health inequities.

Staff writers Sandy Kleffman and Suzanne Bohan produced the Shortened Lives series as a project for the California Endowment Health Journalism Fellowships, administered by the University of Southern California Annenberg School of Journalism.

Epidemiologist Matt Beyers, of the Alameda County Public Health Department, did the statistical analysis and mapping for the newspaper group.

To explore how life expectancy varies among ZIP codes, Beyers used death certificate data from 1999 to 2001 for Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

He then took population breakdowns from the 2000 U.S. census and adjusted the life expectancy numbers to compensate for age differences among ZIP codes. This was necessary so that areas with a large percentage of seniors or young children would not skew the results.

The listed cause of death provided the basis for determining heart disease and cancer mortality rates. Beyers computed an annual rate per 100,000 population for each ZIP code, and adjusted the numbers to compensate for age differences in each area.

He decided to use death certificates from 1999 to 2001 because he could obtain age breakdowns by ZIP code for that period from the 2000 census. In recent years, life expectancies have probably climbed slightly and rates of heart disease and cancer deaths have probably dropped slightly. But the disparities among ZIP codes have not changed significantly, he said.

To determine asthma hospitalization rates, Beyers obtained hospital reports from 2002 to 2004 for Alameda County from the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development.

Chuck McKetney, director of the Contra Costa County Community Health Assessment, Planning and Evaluation department, gave Beyers similar data for Contra Costa County hospitals.

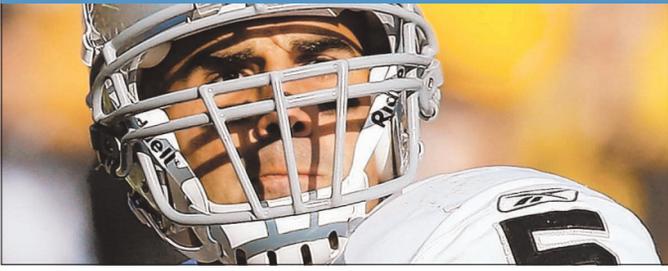
Beyers then computed annual asthma hospitalization rates for children age 14 and younger per 100,000 population. To adjust for age differences among ZIP codes, he used population breakdowns from Nielsen Claritas, a marketing and demographic research firm.

Others who made major contributions to this series include Bay Area News Group online editorial assistant Daniel Willis, who prepared the online maps, news artist Dave Johnson, who did the graphics, and photographers Jane Tyska and Sean Donnelly. Dave Dorsey, a private Web consultant, assisted Willis with the online maps.

This series was edited by projects editor Mike Oliver, deputy metro editor Andrew McCall and Executive Editor Kevin Keane.

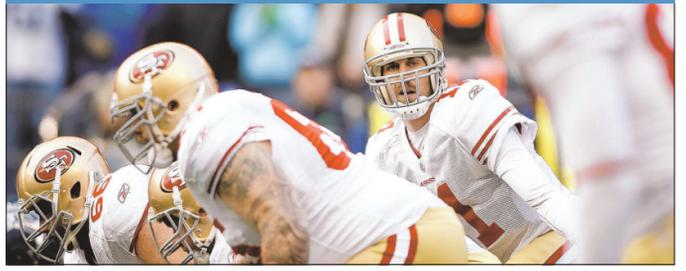
Reach Sandy Kleffman at 925-943-8249 or skleffman@bayareanewsgroup.com. Reach Suzanne Bohan at 510-262-2789 or sbohan@bayareanewsgroup.com.

SPORTS: GRADKOWSKI, RAIDERS TOP STEELERS IN DRAMATIC FASHION



TIMEOUT: MEAN TO THE LEAN THIN PEOPLE TAKE THEIR SHARE OF ABUSE

SPORTS: 49ERS FALL TO SEAHAWKS ON LAST-SECOND FIELD GOAL



CENTRAL COUNTY

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MONDAY PROFILE

Moraga resident cultivates civic duty

■ 67-year-old founded citizens' network to help educate people about town's issues

By Jonathan Morales

jmmorales@bayareanewsgroup.com

MORAGA — When Edy Schwartz first addressed the Town Council in 2005 as president and founder of the Moraga Citizens' Network, the mayor made his thoughts clear about the new group.

"(Former Mayor) Mike Majchrzak basically said that people aren't interested and (the group will) be gone in three months," Schwartz said.

That sentiment, she said, came not because the council had any interest in keeping their actions

See **PROFILE**, Page 11

MORNING REPORT

A return to Pearl Harbor

Japan attacked the U.S. on Dec. 7, 1941. Sixty-eight years later, a man who was at Pearl Harbor that day returns to the site for the first time since World War II.

GOP bind: Embrace Maldonado, or reject him

■ Lieutenant governor nominee could reshape party, but his voting record worries some

By Steven Harmon

sharmon@bayareanewsgroup.com

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's choice of Sen. Abel Maldonado for lieutenant governor was essentially a political challenge to his fellow Republicans: Expand the party, or continue to wither on the vine of ideological purity.

Maldonado's confirmation is largely in the hands of legislative Democrats, who must decide by mid-February if they will accept his nomination. The Santa Maria Republican's long-term prospects, however, could be decided by GOP activists who have held

See **GOP**, Page 11

SHORTENED LIVES WHERE YOU LIVE MATTERS



JANE TYSKA/STAFF

RICHMOND, 94801: Johnny Fulmore, walking along Truman Street in North Richmond, has suffered a stroke and two heart attacks since 2002. Heart problems are common in his neighborhood.



SEAN DONNELLY/STAFF

OAKLAND, 94621: Manuel Lino-Rivas, a trucker out of work because of new rules at the Port of Oakland, discusses his plight Aug. 13. His neighborhood has the East Bay's second-lowest life expectancy.

Health problems persist when options are limited

■ East Bay ZIP codes lacking middle-class amenities have higher rates of asthma, heart disease and cancer

By Sandy Kleffman and Suzanne Bohan

Staff Writers

In some hardscrabble East Bay neighborhoods, people die of heart disease and cancer at three times the rates found just a few miles away in more well-to-do communities.

Children living near busy freeways in Oakland are hospitalized for asthma at 12 times the rate of

young people in Lafayette's wooded housing tracts.

The East Bay's striking health inequities extend far beyond life expectancy and involve more than differences between the rich and the poor. Disparities exist up and down the East Bay's socioeconomic ladder, according to data compiled by the Alameda County Public Health Department for Bay Area News Group.

Middle-class communities in Dublin, Castro Valley and Fremont have higher heart disease death rates than wealthier neighborhoods in Walnut Creek and Berkeley, but lower rates than struggling areas of East Oakland and North Richmond.

These facts have led public-health leaders to advocate to equalize opportunities for healthful living, instead of focusing only on a never-ending battle to treat disease.

Alameda and Contra Costa County health leaders have stepped outside of their traditional roles to

tackle the root causes of ill health. That means attempting to ensure people have clean air to breathe, decent housing, walkable neighborhoods, well-maintained parks, violence-free streets, and grocery stores with fresh fruits and vegetables.

"Your choices are shaped by the options you have and the environment you live in," said Dr. Wendel Brunner, Contra Costa County public health director. "We want to create an environment that sup-

See **HEALTH**, Page 10



SEAN DONNELLY/STAFF

OAKLAND, 94608: John Fitzpatrick Jr., 10, who has a severe case of asthma, stands at the door of his family's home Nov. 3 in Oakland. Fitzpatrick's neighborhood has one of the highest child asthma hospitalization rates in the East Bay.

ONLINE

Go to ContraCostaTimes.com/ life-expectancy.

■ **LIVE CHAT, NOON TODAY:** Two experts — former Alameda County public health director Anthony Iton and Larry Adelman, executive producer of the "Unnatural Causes" documentary series — answer questions about health inequities.

■ **VIDEO:** Profiles of East Bay residents.

■ **INTERACTIVE MAP:** Check disease rates in your ZIP code.

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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL: Who's in the playoffs? Complete brackets at ContraCostaTimes.com/high-school-sports.



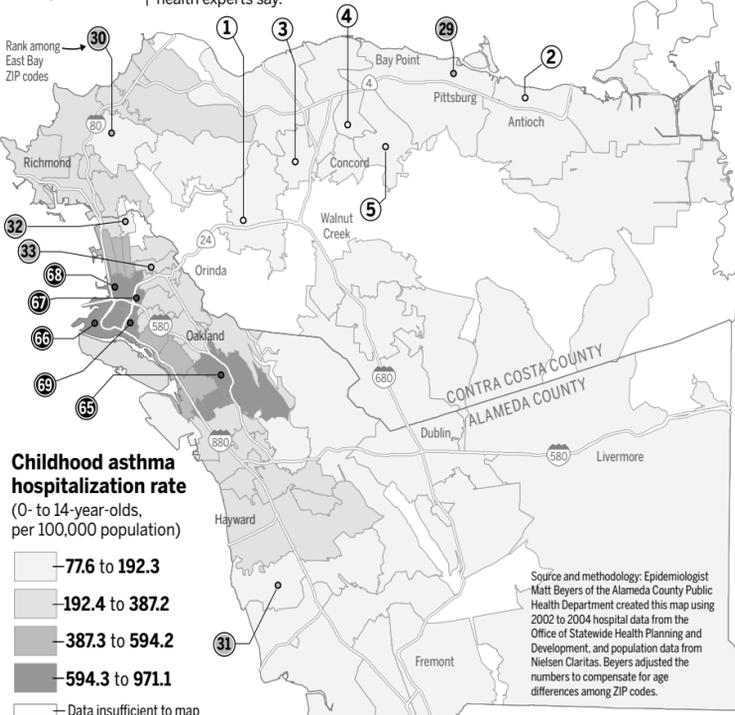
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Childhood asthma disparities

Children living near the Port of Oakland and the city's busy freeways are hospitalized for asthma at up to 12 times the rate of young people in other East Bay ZIP codes. Exposure to diesel exhaust, industrial emissions, and aging homes with mold and mildew can aggravate breathing problems, health experts say.



- Lowest 5 (best) ranking**
(with ZIP code) and hospitalization rate
1. Lafayette (94549) 78
 2. Antioch (94531) 78
 3. Pleasant Hill (94523) 83
 4. Concord (94519) 93
 5. Concord (94521) 94

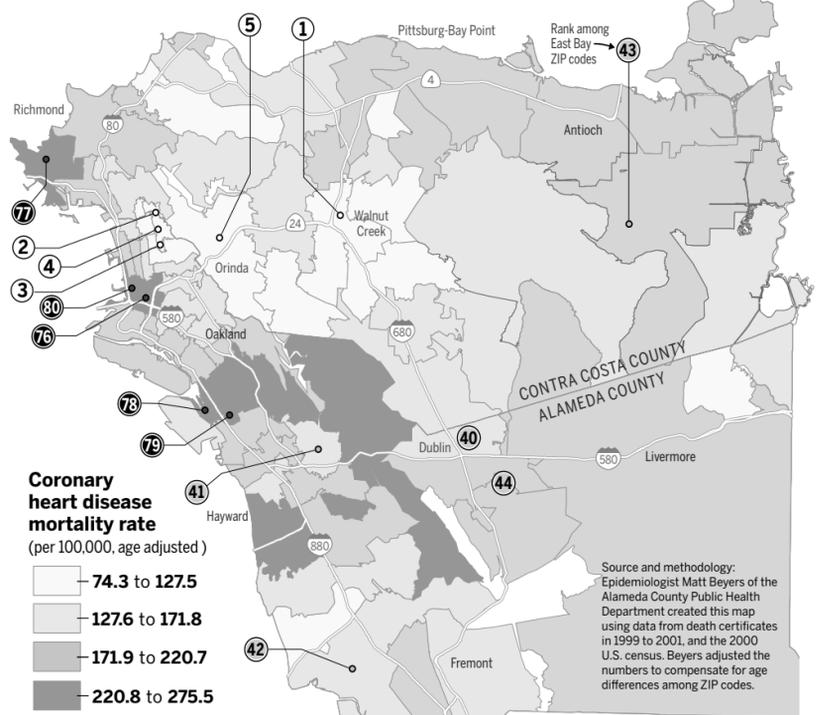
- Middle 5 ranking**
29. Pittsburg (94565) 182
 30. El Sobrante (94803) 187
 31. Union City (94587) 190
 32. Berkeley/Kensington (94707) 192
 33. Berkeley (94705) 221

- Highest 5 (worst) ranking**
65. East Oakland (94603) 753
 66. West Oakland (94607) 892
 67. North Oakland (94609) 905
 68. North Oakland/Emeryville (94608) 932
 69. Downtown Oakland (94612) 971

DAVE JOHNSON/STAFF

Heart disease rates

In some low-income East Bay ZIP codes, people die of heart disease at three times the rate of those living in wealthier neighborhoods just a few miles away. Whether people have access to healthful foods and safe places to exercise can play a role. A growing body of evidence also suggests that living with chronic stress can strain and damage the heart.



- Lowest 5 (best) ranking**
(with ZIP code) and heart disease rate
1. Walnut Creek (94596) 74
 2. Berkeley/Kensington (94708) 92
 3. Berkeley (94704) 96
 4. Berkeley (94709) 97
 5. Orinda (94563) 105

- Middle 5 ranking**
40. Dublin (94568) 171
 41. Castro Valley (94546) 172
 42. Fremont (94538) 178
 43. Brentwood (94513) 179
 44. Pleasanton (94566) 181

- Highest 5 (worst) ranking**
76. North Oakland (94609) 243
 77. North Richmond (94801) 245
 78. East Oakland (94621) 249
 79. East Oakland (94603) 274
 80. N. Oakland/Emeryville (94608) 276

DAVE JOHNSON/STAFF

Health

From Page 1

ports individuals in making good choices."

The new direction also means addressing the health-sapping economic stresses and lack of opportunity and power that plague some communities, said Dr. Anthony Iton, who recently left his position as Alameda County's public health director to head an Oakland foundation's health disparities program.

Iton changed jobs in part because of his frustration at being unable to win widespread political support for such public health initiatives.

Examining asthma rates reveals a stunning pattern. By far, the most hospitalizations occur in low-income communities near the Port of Oakland, along busy Interstate 880 in East and West Oakland, and the convergence of freeways near North Oakland and Emeryville.

The medical staff at Children's Hospital Oakland has worked for more than a decade to bring down asthma hospitalizations, with limited success.

Asthmatic children seek emergency room help there 5,000 times a year.

Nearly one-fourth of them will return within 12 months.

■■■■ Asthma colors much of John Fitzpatrick Jr.'s young life.

Bronchiolitis first hospitalized the easygoing fifth-grader when he was eight months old. Since then, he has returned to the emergency room so many times his family has lost count.

"He had some scary times when he was younger," said Mindy Benson, the asthma program manager at Children's Hospital Oakland who has treated John for many years. "It was really hard to get his asthma under control."

Now 10, John attends Santa Fe Elementary School. He lives in a two-bedroom rented house in the 94608 ZIP code with his brother, mother and grandmother.

This North Oakland ZIP code has the East Bay's second-highest asthma hospital-

ization rate. Highway 24 and Interstates 580 and 80 pass close by. Nearly 200,000 cars and trucks use the I-80/I-580 interchange each day.

"Where they live, every day there is soot on the window sills," Benson said. Soot is also in the air that neighborhood children take into their lungs.

Asthma occurs when airways become restricted, making breathing difficult. Numerous triggers exist, including auto exhaust, industrial emissions, tobacco smoke, dust, mold, pets, weather changes, even strong emotions.

John routinely takes six medications to help control his asthma and uses a nebulizer 10 to 15 minutes every morning before he goes to school, and again at night before he sleeps.

"The stuff that works for him has real terrible side effects," including causing frequent headaches and nosebleeds, said his mother, Dorothy Littman. "But he needs that."

John keeps an inhaler in his backpack and sometimes has to stop playing during school recess to use it.

He loves basketball and baseball but has to limit his activities because of breathing difficulties.

"I'll be wheezing," he said. "It's not fun because I want to run, and it slows me down."

The inability to sustain prolonged physical activity has affected his weight. During a recent doctor's visit, he was chagrined to learn that at 4 feet 6 inches tall, he weighed 102 pounds.

"He's gotten extremely overweight," Benson said.

Benson, who has analyzed asthma statistics for years, has noticed a link with low-income communities.

West Oakland youths breathe in diesel exhaust from trucks, trains and ships at the port, and the aging homes near the waterfront become magnets for mold, she said.

John and his mother lived in West Oakland during the first few years of his life. John is allergic to mold and mildew. It was a constant struggle to keep it out of the home.

"No matter how you clean



SEAN DONNELLY/STAFF

John Fitzpatrick Jr., 10, receives an asthma treatment in July at his home in Oakland. The Fitzpatricks live in ZIP code 94608, an area with one of the highest child asthma hospitalization rates in the East Bay.

it, it still comes back," his mother said.

John sees Benson once a month to help control his asthma. Because his mother does not own a car, they ride three buses to reach the clinic. John misses a day of school each time, and his mother takes a day off from her job providing home care for the elderly.

Volunteers from the American Lung Association gave Littman a special vacuum and anti-allergen solution to help control dust in their home. But that is a difficult task. Their house has no bedroom closets, so "we've got baskets and tubs with clothes in them because there's nowhere to put stuff," she said. It accumulates dust.

John's older brother walks him to and from school each day. They pass through an industrial area where at times, "it smells like tar or primer or something," his mother said. "John's thrown up a few times on the way to school."

He knows exactly how often. "It's seven times," he said.

■■■■ Despite the asthma triggers, many families in John's neighborhood cannot afford to move, so county leaders are seeking ways to lessen the exposure to health threats.

One policy that many believe contributes to the high asthma rates is a truck ban on Interstate 580 in the upscale Oakland hills. This funnels large volumes of truck traffic through low-income communities lining Interstate 880 in

in order to support the whole region's economic benefit."

Realigning economic benefits and public health concerns creates new challenges, however. Changes can affect people's livelihoods. Just ask trucker Manuel Lino-Rivas, who lost his job partly because of a victory over toxic emissions at the port.

■■■■ Rivas is worried. A widower, he has no idea how he can continue to support his 9-year-old son and 14-year-old twins.

"I am broke completely," he said, sighing over a stack of bills.

The family rents a three-bedroom house in the 94621 ZIP code of East Oakland, an area with the East Bay's second-lowest life expectancy: 72 years. Rivas moved to the United States in 1980 from El Salvador. For two decades, he worked as an independent trucker at the port.

That ended this summer when his 1989 truck, purchased several years ago for \$12,000, broke down. Now, it makes no sense to fix it.

Beginning Jan. 1, the port will ban all trucks manufactured before 1994. Trucks built between 1994 and 2003 will be required to have filters for particulate emissions. The goal is to eliminate the worst-polluting rigs.

Rivas supports such goals. His own health, he said, was jeopardized as he sat breathing fumes among idling rigs. But he wants better solutions for the truckers.

"I have 22 years working in the port — half of my life," he said. "I don't have nothing. I'm an old man. I'm 56 years old. I go to any factory, and they don't give me job. I pray my Lord I'll drive very soon."

He is not alone. As many as 1,000 truckers could be out of work beginning Jan. 1. A grant fund set up to help them buy new rigs or install filters ran out of money, leaving many with nowhere to turn.

Rivas, who averaged about \$24,000 annually as a trucker, says he cannot afford to buy another rig at \$60,000 to \$80,000 for a 2004 or '05 model. Even if he could afford it, he said, in five years that rig, too, would become obso-

lete. At that time, only trucks built after 2007 will have access to the port.

Iton and others seeking changes are well aware of the truckers' plight.

"They're extremely low-wage," he said. "They have no health insurance. They have no workers' compensation. They have very limited access to social services that they may need. Many of them are low-income immigrants that are working under those conditions because that's the only work they can find."

"The goal is not to put the burden on the backs of the truckers," Iton said, "but to put the burden where it belongs: on the entities making the profits from the business."

For that reason, a coalition of groups aims to have trucking companies, instead of the independent truckers, bear the responsibility of buying and maintaining clean rigs. The groups want the port to have the power to create operating agreements with trucking firms, which would hire truckers and give them health care and other benefits.

The Port of Los Angeles last year adopted a similar program, which has been credited with removing several thousand dirty trucks from service. But it and the Oakland port campaign are on hold pending the outcome of a lawsuit by the American Trucking Association.

So for now, truckers such as Rivas remain independent.

In July, when Rivas developed a gall bladder problem, he decided it would be cheaper to pay \$450 for a round-trip flight to see a doctor in El Salvador than to rack up hefty bills in a hospital emergency room here.

In his native country, he spent \$20 for an ultrasound and \$20 for medication prescribed by a doctor who told him he had inflammation. He figures it would have cost him at least \$3,000 for an emergency room visit in the United States.

"That's the only way I can take care of my health," he said.

See HEALTH, Page 11



JANE TYSKA/STAFF

Andres Soto, former project director for the West County Healthy Eating and Active Living Collaborative, checks out fresh produce offerings Oct. 27 at the El Campesino Market in Richmond. Access to healthful food is important for longevity, he says.



JANE TYSKA/STAFF

"I was unable to move, talk or do anything," North Richmond resident Johny Fulma, relaxing at home Oct. 20, recalls about a stroke he had in 2002. He has since suffered two heart attacks while living in a neighborhood where heart problems are common.

Health

From Page 10

Twenty-one miles northwest of Rivas' home lives Johnny Fulmore. At age 52, he has had a stroke and two heart attacks. In his North Richmond neighborhood, heart problems are not unusual.

The 94801 ZIP code has the East Bay's fourth-highest heart disease mortality rate. It includes Richmond's Iron Triangle, named because it is bounded on three sides by railways.

Fulmore has lived here nearly all of his life.

His stroke occurred in 2002 while he helped erect a scaffold on the Bay Bridge, a profession he held at various locations for 20 years.

"I was unable to move, talk or do anything," he recalled. Co-workers rushed him to a hospital emergency room.

A year later, he had his first heart attack. Doctors told him he had blocked arteries and performed an angioplasty.

In December 2008, he had his second heart attack. "That one was a little more severe," he said. He had another angioplasty.

In March, doctors did two more angioplasties to ward off additional problems.

The heart difficulties transformed Fulmore's life. He now deals with migraines. Hot weather bothers him. He tires easily, and he takes medication to lower his blood pressure.

His health problems also have affected his livelihood. Unable to continue as an ironworker, he takes odd jobs when he can find them. Recently, he has been on-call as a driver for a funeral home.

"I did construction for so long, that was a hard adjustment," he said. "A pretty nice income was gone. It's been a strain at times, but you keep going on."

Many factors contribute to some communities' high rate of heart disease. Genes and lifestyle choices, including whether people eat healthful foods and exercise, play a role.

But other factors have more to do with the neighborhood than with individual choices, health experts say. How easy is it to eat healthfully and to work out? Do people have access to fresh



"The biggest stress," says Johnny Fulmore, of North Richmond, seen Oct. 20 on a trail near the Chevron refinery, "is just keeping up with day-to-day living and not having normal employment at your disposal." Health problems have affected his livelihood.

fruits and vegetables and safe places to exercise?

A growing body of evidence suggests another important factor: chronic stress. This can include everything from job and financial struggles to difficulty paying a mortgage, coping with racism, lacking control over one's life, and worrying about the future.

Stress causes the body to prepare to flee or fight, scientists have found.

Hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol flood the body. Glucose levels rise. The heart rate jumps, and the body remains in a heightened state until the perceived

threat passes.

Repeated stress over long periods revs up the cardiovascular system, strains the heart and increases cholesterol and plaque. That can lead to hardening of the arteries, stroke and heart attacks.

For Fulmore, "the biggest stress is just keeping up with day-to-day living and not having normal employment at your disposal."

The North Richmond area shows signs of the economic struggles many of its residents experience. The median household income here is \$24,131, compared with

\$73,125 in Point Richmond, the hilly enclave a few miles away.

A couple of doors from Fulmore's house are what he calls "great big eyesores": two boarded-up, abandoned homes where vandals have removed pipes, brass, electrical wiring, toilets and sinks. The property has been vacant for years.

Economic forces have stripped the neighborhood of other vital resources. It can be difficult to find healthful food in the area, which is dotted with small neighborhood markets.

At the Mom, Pop and

Son's store on Filbert Street, owner Nagi Alkahlil carries no fresh fruit or produce. When he tried to do so, he said, the health department gave him a hard time because he did not meet safe storage regulations.

"I'm doing pretty good with this," he said, pointing to shelves filled with chips, canned goods and sodas.

Fulmore was in good shape before his heart problems began. An athlete most of his life, he ran regularly and lifted weights.

"I never had major health problems," he said.

While working in construction, he often ate hamburgers, burritos and french fries from food trucks. Not exactly the most healthful lunch, he acknowledges.

"Put some butter on it and fry it up, and that's what they gave you," he said.

Healthful eating rarely rises to a priority in his neighborhood, he said.

"A lot of people are just too busy thinking about: How am I going to make it through this day?"

Fulmore now drives two to three miles to shop for fresh fruits and vegetables at larger chain stores. He regularly visits a farmers market near City Hall. But traveling such distances is not easy for people who lack cars.

Fulmore also leaves his neighborhood to exercise, preferring to walk at the scenic Richmond Marina, although he could visit a park five blocks from his home. "I'm not going to go there because there's a lot of hanging out," he said. "I don't think people in the neighborhood utilize the park as much as they would if they felt comfortable."

In October, a 35-year-old man was fatally shot while sitting in a car at the nearby Shields-Reid Park.

"We've probably had 16 shootings in this area alone this year," Fulmore said.

Many local parks are underutilized because of run-down equipment and a lack of maintenance, said Andres Soto, former project director for the West County Healthy Eating Active Living Collaborative, or HEAL.

During a recent walk through Lucas Park in the Iron Triangle, Soto pointed to a vacant slab where a park building had been torn down. The tennis courts lacked nets,

SHORTENED LIVES

A series of stories exploring health inequities in the East Bay.

■ **SUNDAY:** East Bay life expectancies linked to neighborhoods.

■ **TODAY:** The geography of asthma and heart disease.

■ **SUNDAY, DEC. 13:** Closing the inequity gap.

■ **MONDAY, DEC. 14:** Personal responsibility and social action.

an empty sand pit spread where play equipment once stood and cracks zigzagged across the basketball court. At midday, no one was there.

"This park is hardly used anymore," Soto said. "It used to be full of activity."

Despite the challenges, glimmers of hope exist in this neighborhood. Community residents concerned about high asthma rates have succeeded in restricting flare emissions at the nearby Chevron refinery.

The HEAL project, with a grant from Kaiser Permanente, is working to set up physical education programs in local schools, encourage businesses to provide more healthful lunches, improve park maintenance, and organize walking groups.

On 23rd Street, grocery stores have sprung up with an array of healthful foods. The El Campesino Market offers apples, melons, fresh fish, radishes, cucumbers, pineapples, bananas and baked goods.

Young Latinas, many of them immigrants, walk their children to school and stop at the markets on their way home to pick up fresh meats and produce for the evening dinner.

Fulmore has noticed more homeowners, as opposed to renters, moving into the area.

"We have a lot of problems here," he said, "but there's a lot of good, productive people."

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Profile

From Page 1

from the public, but because few residents in the town of about 16,000 made a habit of attending meetings or getting involved in local issues.

The council, as a result, did little to seek input from the public, she said.

Four years later, those habits have changed, and many say Schwartz, a 42-year Moraga resident, is a big part of the reason.

The citizens' network reaches more than 700 residents, primarily through e-mail blasts that let people know about upcoming town meetings and that provide brief synopses of agenda items.

Residents attend those meetings in ever-greater numbers, often mobilizing large groups in a matter of days.

"The culture in town is a lot healthier, I think, now than it has been in the past years," said Councilman Mike Metcalf, who has served since 2004. "Folks are there."

Schwartz has since stepped down from the citizens' network to become the head of the Chamber of Commerce. But the network's current president, Ellen Beans, said Schwartz's ability to network and understand issues were key factors in the group becoming so strong so quickly.

"She's always looking for what's working, and giving energy and support to what's working," Beans said. "And if there's a problem, she really works hard to find solutions."

Schwartz started the network in 2005. Iraq held an election that January, and she was moved after seeing Iraqi women, many of whom had just voted for the first time, raise purple ink-stained thumbs in pride.

"Here were these people in Iraq that were trying to have a democracy, and how hard it was and what they were having to go through in order to vote for the first time," she said. "It just got me thinking about, well, we have a democracy, and what are we doing



SUSAN TRIPP POLLARD/STAFF

Edy Schwartz founded the Moraga Citizens' Network to educate residents on local government issues.

with it?"

She gathered a group of about 25 people to discuss ways to put that democracy to work in Moraga, and the citizens' network was born. The goal: Provide unbiased information about town issues and encourage residents to get involved.

"It wasn't about a cause. It wasn't about anything like that," Schwartz said. "It was about, if we have this democracy, let us use it and let us start in our own town."

The group was met with skepticism by council members, some of whom wondered if the group truly was as nonpolitical as advertised.

"There were some people who thought (Schwartz) was a dangerous person, but all she was really trying to do was try to get people energized and interested," Metcalf said.

Despite the skepticism, the citizen's network went to work. They convinced staff to update the town Web site and make staff reports and minutes available online.

When the Planning Commission was starting to discuss the future of Moraga's downtown, the citizen's network got the word out, and residents packed a workshop at Saint Mary's College, Schwartz said.

"It has been a great tool, a great organization for getting the word out to the wider community about what's go-

EDY SCHWARTZ

■ **AGE:** 67

■ **HOMETOWN:** Moraga

■ **OCCUPATION:** President, Moraga Chamber of Commerce; founder and former president, Moraga Citizens' Network; former teacher

ing on in town," said Mayor Dave Trotter.

Schwartz, who used to teach elementary school, has a history of getting people together to discuss the issues. She helped work on the town's incorporation in the 1970s, meeting with residents over coffee and talking to them about why she thought Moraga should become a town.

She also helped raise money to build a library and create a town rescue unit.

Now she's doing similar things as president of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce — bringing different constituencies together to discuss the town's business goals and ways of working together to bring them to fruition.

Schwartz stepped down as head of the citizens' network when she took over the chamber two years ago. The chamber's pro-business advocacy, she said, would interfere with the network's goal of objectivity.

Getting everyone involved and making sure their voices are heard is challenging, she said, but ultimately a good cause in a town like Moraga.

"We're small, and because we need to rely on each other, I think that builds a strength in community," Schwartz said. "It forces us to get to know one another and to work together."

Majchrzak eventually warmed to the Moraga Citizens' Network. At the State of the Town Address in 2007, he acknowledged his first impression was wrong, and then encouraged everybody to get involved with the group.

The former mayor died in May, but in an e-mail about Schwartz earlier this year to Bay Area News Group, he said, "Moraga is a better place with her involvement."

GOP

From Page 1

him in disdain since he voted earlier this year for a tax hike — but may need him if they are to win in a statewide race.

"He may not be tremendously popular among Republican activists and may have a tough time in a Republican primary, but this is somebody who has a better chance in succeeding in a statewide race than just about any other Republican legislator," said Thad Kousser, a UC San Diego political science professor serving a fellowship at the Hoover Institution. "Even more important, he has a chance for reshaping the Republican Party image."

It's been a tough image for Republicans to shake — seen as hostile to Latinos and other minority groups — since they led the 1994 campaign to deny public services to illegal immigrants under Proposition 187. Maldonado represents a rare opportunity for Republicans to elevate a person of color from their ranks, observers said, as they try to stanch steady declines in GOP registration, and as Latinos represent the fastest growing demographic group in California.

A Latino Republican — particularly one with moderate credentials and a reputation for taking on his own party on tough issues such as taxes and minimum wages — could force Latino voters to rethink their views of the GOP, some observers said.

Republicans are at a historic low 31 percent registration, compared with a 44.6 percent registration rate for Democrats and 20 percent for those who decline to state.

If he is confirmed, Maldonado would have to run in the GOP primary in June, but as the incumbent lieutenant governor.

A special election primary for his vacant legislative district would be held in mid-April, followed by a June 8 special general election. Senate Leader Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, has raised concerns over the cost of holding special elections — as

much as \$4 million. But many believe Steinberg was merely positioning himself for upcoming budget negotiations — seeing what he might get in return for Democrats' support of Maldonado.

The very reason Maldonado was tapped — for showing independence and supporting Schwarzenegger by voting for a \$12.5 billion tax increase earlier this year that most of his colleagues rejected — could make a vote for him a bitter pill for GOP voters to swallow.

"So far, the dissatisfaction over his tax vote carries more weight than his potential appeal to Latino voters," said Jack Pitney, government professor at Claremont McKenna College. "He broke with Republicans on the highest profile vote."

For Republicans, however, the damage of rejecting Maldonado — either with crucial no votes in a confirmation battle or in a primary — could cleave deeply into any hopes the party has in reviving its moribund standing in the state.

"It's the pettiness of not recognizing the bigger picture," said Patrick Dorinson, former communications director of the Republican party who now identifies himself as a libertarian political strategist, referring to GOP activists who have voiced opposition to Maldonado. "Conservatives have got to start understanding what it means to win elections. Why you'd go against a guy who's Latino when Latinos are going to be a majority in the state, I just don't know."

Latinos who have followed his career see Maldonado as a bridge between partisans, said Tony Estremera, the northern vice chairman of the Latino Water Coalition and member of the Santa Clara Valley Water District.

"They would vote for him because of his record, his positions and his life story," said Estremera, a Democrat, "and because he's sensitive to our issues and what our needs are. He grew up on the east side of Los Angeles as a child of immigrants and understands some of the problems people have."

Others, however, say that Republican lawmakers considering Maldonado's nomination and voters who may face the choice in a primary should focus on whether or not he matches up to the party's philosophy rather than what a Latino could offer to the ticket.

"Ethnic makeup doesn't trump what the issues are," said Rob Stutzman, a GOP consultant and former communications director for Schwarzenegger. "If Abel is able to be nominated, he would be a great general election candidate. But it's silly to hand someone the nomination based on his ethnic profile."

Democrats also face some risk in rejecting a moderate Latino. They could rattle Latino voters — some of their core constituents — for being insensitive to their desires to have a Latino holding a statewide office observers said. Democrats, though, could counter that they're protecting the interests of a Democratic Hispanic, Sen. Dean Florez, of Fresno, who is also running for lieutenant governor.

Florez was one of Steinberg's earlier supporters when he ran for leader last year, which has put Steinberg in something of an awkward position. But, if Maldonado is confirmed, his legislative seat would open up early, offering Democrats a chance to edge closer to a two-thirds majority. If Democrats capture Maldonado's seat — which has a five-point registration advantage for Democrats — and are able to win another winnable seat being vacated by Sen. Jeff Denham, R-Merced, next year, their caucus would grow to 27, enough to approve budgets and taxes without GOP help.

For his part, Maldonado, on a whirlwind tour of the state since being nominated last week, said he recognized the potential power of his presence on a statewide ticket.

"I'm not a candidate for only Hispanics but I do know there are a lot of Hispanics who feel they're going to have a voice," he said.

THE SUNDAY TIMES

\$1 plus tax

Sunday, December 13, 2009

200 Volume 98, Number 196

A&E: TOP 25 ALBUMS OF THE DECADE



SPORTS: ALABAMA'S INGRAM BEATS OUT GERHART FOR HEISMAN



AS MUCH AS \$168 IN MONEY-SAVING COUPONS INSIDE

8 held in violent campus protest

■ Crowd outside home had UC Berkeley chancellor and his wife fearing for their lives

By Kelly Rayburn

krayburn@bayareanews.com

BERKELEY — As many as 70 protesters, many carrying torches and smashing windows, attempted to storm UC Berkeley Chancellor Robert Birgeneau's on-campus residence late Friday in a violent act condemned by university officials and student activists alike.

Eight people, including two UC Berkeley students, were arrested on suspicion of rioting, threatening an educational official, attempted burglary, attempted arson, felony vandalism and assault with a deadly weapon on a police officer, the university said.

Some protesters threw incendiary objects at the house in an attack that left the chancellor and his wife fearing for their lives.

The group was apparently protesting student fee hikes and budget cuts. The demonstrators chanted "No justice, no peace," as the chancellor slept. His wife woke him up about 11 p.m.

See **PROTEST**, Page 7

Jeweler, suspect each had setbacks

■ Merchant relocated to Alamo after trouble in Pinole; man accused in Dec. 3 robbery faced loss of home

By Robert Salonga

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ALAMO — It was out of character for Thomas Paul Bennett, but he was desperate.

His Thanksgiving had been shrouded by a notice from the county telling him that unless he rustled up tens of thousands of dollars to settle debts on his \$2.5 million Alamo home, it was going up for auction four days before Christmas.

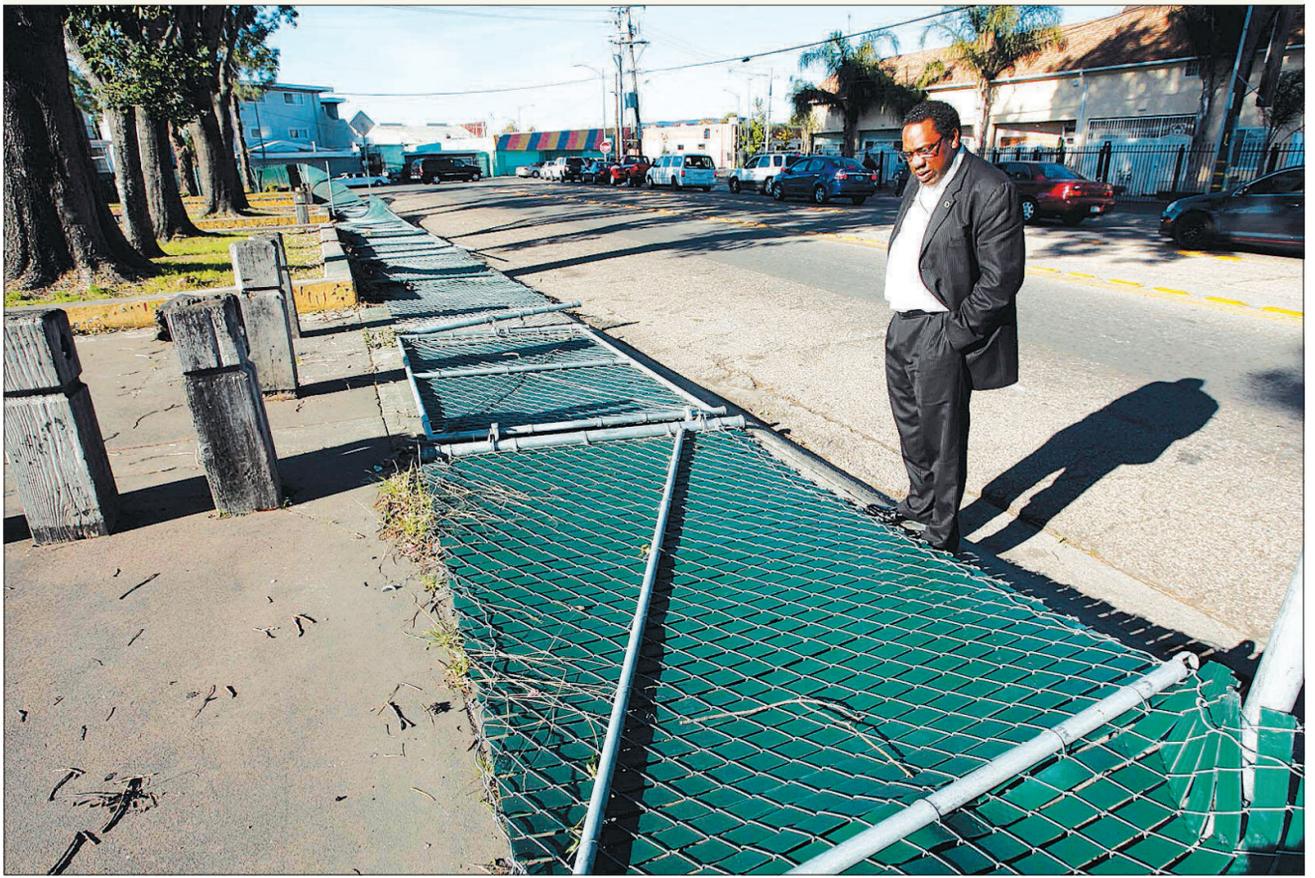
A week after that notice was filed, Bennett's desperation steered him to the Alamo Jewelry Mart, where authorities say he tried to rob owner Oscar Her-

See **SHOOTING**, Page 7

SHORTENED LIVES WHERE YOU LIVE MATTERS

"What will deteriorate your health is fear, stress, not getting a lot of sleep if they're worried about somebody breaking into their home, even if they have alarms."

— THE REV. JEFFREY PARKER, OF EAST OAKLAND



JANE TYSKA/STAFF

The Rev. Jeffrey Parker, of the Community Reformed Church, stands at an entrance to Tyrone Carney Park, a community eyesore that has been fenced off since 2002 in the Sobrante Park area of East Oakland. Residents tore down the fence in October but it was soon rebuilt.

Reclaiming health

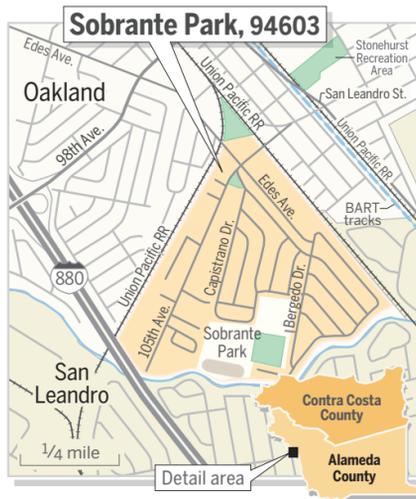
■ East Oakland residents are fighting to improve their neighborhood — and their lives

By Suzanne Bohan and Sandy Kleffman

Staff Writers

A CHURCH BOARDROOM seems like an oasis in an area so crime-ridden that iron fences topped with spikes protect most homes. Inside the church, residents settle into padded leather chairs to plan a better future for the East Oakland neighborhood of Sobrante Park. They want to reduce crime, decrease neighborhood blight, and reopen a park closed years ago after a homicide.

"It's been known as a very dangerous area," said the Rev. Jeffrey Parker, who left a comfortable home in Berkeley when he moved to Sobrante Park four years ago to lead the neighborhood's only church.



It's the relationships formed around the conference table in the Community Reformed Church that create the momentum for change.

One-fifth of Sobrante Park's 2,800 residents live in poverty. It has far higher rates of asthma hospitalizations and diabetes, and deaths from cancer and heart disease, than more affluent East Bay neighborhoods.

Residents here live on average 71.2 years, according to an Alameda County database of disease prevalence and life expectancy. They have the lowest life expectancy of any ZIP code in the East Bay.

The database reveals that disease rates drop and life-expectancy increases each rung up the social ladder. Residents in a Walnut Creek neighborhood 12 miles away, for example, live on average 87.4 years, more than 16 years longer than those in Sobrante Park.

Public health experts widely agree that poorer neighborhoods — which lack grocery

See **HEALTH**, Page 10

ONLINE Go to ContraCostaTimes.com/life-expectancy.

■ **LIVE CHAT, 8 A.M. THURSDAY:** Former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher will answer questions. ■ **VIDEO:** Profiles of East Bay residents. ■ **INTERACTIVE MAP:** Check your ZIP code.

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Manage finances, manage health

By Sandy Kleffman
and Suzanne Bohan

Staff Writers

In an unusual move, Contra Costa Health Services employees have begun to advise low-income families on the best way to manage their finances.

The innovative approach, dubbed BEST, is needed, health leaders say, to tackle the East Bay's widespread health inequities.

In the program's first phase, county health employees who

visit pregnant women and young mothers in their homes will assist them with their financial concerns and help them apply for public benefits, repair their credit ratings, open checking or savings accounts, and use prepaid debit cards.

So what does this have to do with health?

"Improving families' financial status will increase their access to health care, improve their housing situations, offer opportunities to live in safer

and healthier neighborhoods, increase their food security, and enhance other protective social and environmental factors," a county report states.

Contra Costa is tackling health inequities on several fronts, often by partnering with community organizations, notes Concepcion James, manager of the county's Reducing Health Disparities unit. Programs include:

- Working in 2006 with a Latina action team in the

Pittsburg and Bay Point area. Members discovered that their drinking water had a higher concentration of trihalomethanes than water in other East County communities. At high levels, trihalomethanes can increase the risk of some cancers. Health department staffers helped residents understand the complex data and persuade the Public Utilities Commission to delay a rate increase.

- Helping to set up peer support groups led by local residents

in low-income African-American and Latino communities for those with asthma, diabetes and other health conditions.

- Forming a coalition to address the low rate of early diagnosis of breast cancer among African-American women. The group succeeded in nearly eliminating the gap.

- Providing interpreters via video and phone and training staffers to work with people from a variety of races and cultures.

SHORTENED LIVES

A series of stories exploring health inequities in the East Bay.

- **DEC. 6:** East Bay life expectancy linked to neighborhoods

- **DEC. 7:** The geography of asthma, heart disease

- **TODAY:** Closing the inequity gap

- **MONDAY:** Personal responsibility and social action

How East Bay health inequities were examined

By Sandy Kleffman
and Suzanne Bohan

Staff Writers

Death certificates and hospital reports provided the base on which to study the East Bay's striking health inequities.

Staff writers Sandy Kleffman and Suzanne Bohan produced the Shortened Lives series as a project for the California Endowment Health Journalism Fellowships, administered by the University of Southern California Annenberg School of Journalism.

Epidemiologist Matt Beyers, of the Alameda County Public Health Department, did the statistical analysis and mapping for the newspaper group.

To explore how life expectancy varies among ZIP codes, Beyers used death certificate data from 1999 to 2001 for Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

He then took population breakdowns from the 2000 U.S. census and adjusted the life expectancy numbers to compensate for age differences among ZIP codes. This was necessary so that areas with a large percentage of seniors or young children would not skew the results.

The listed cause of death provided the basis for determining heart disease and cancer mortality rates. Beyers computed an annual rate per 100,000 population for each ZIP code, and adjusted the numbers to compensate for age differences in each area.

He decided to use death certificates from 1999 to 2001 because he could obtain age breakdowns by ZIP code for that period from the 2000 census. In recent years, life expectancies have probably climbed slightly and rates of heart disease and cancer deaths have probably dropped slightly. But the disparities among ZIP codes have not changed significantly, he said.

To determine asthma hospitalization rates, Beyers obtained hospital reports from 2002 to 2004 for Alameda County from the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development.

Chuck McKetney, director of the Contra Costa County Community Health Assessment, Planning and Evaluation department, gave Beyers similar data for Contra Costa County hospitals.

Beyers then computed annual asthma hospitalization rates for children age 14 and younger per 100,000 population. To adjust for age differences among ZIP codes, he used population breakdowns from Nielsen Claritas, a marketing and demographic research firm.

Others who made major contributions to this series include Bay Area News Group online editorial assistant Daniel Willis, who prepared the online maps, news artist Dave Johnson, who did the graphics, and photographers Jane Tyska and Sean Donnelly. Dave Dorsey, a private Web consultant, assisted Willis with the online maps.

This series was edited by projects editor Mike Oliver, deputy metro editor Andrew McCall and Executive Editor Kevin Keane.

Reach Sandy Kleffman at 925-943-8249 or skleffman@bayareanewsgroup.com. Reach Suzanne Bohan at 510-262-2789 or sbohan@bayareanewsgroup.com.

Health

From Page 1

stores, pharmacies, doctor's offices, post offices and parks — largely explain the wide gap in life spans.

The trying conditions ring up a toll in chronic stress that triggers numerous diseases, health experts say.

"What will deteriorate your health is fear, stress, not getting a lot of sleep if they're worried about somebody breaking into their home, even if they have alarms," said Parker, the pastor.

Tensions and changes

In 2004, Sobrante Park's community leaders gained a powerful ally in their quest to reclaim the neighborhood's thriving past when the Alameda County Public Health Department chose it as a laboratory in which to test how social cohesion among neighbors and civic leadership leads to better health and longer lives.

A lack of such social unity often characterizes poorer neighborhoods. About half of Sobrante Park's residents report mistrusting their neighbors. Racial tensions have frayed relationships in neighborhoods where 57 percent of residents are African-American and 34 percent are Latino.

Sobrante Park was once a tidy neighborhood, boasting two parks and a street lined with stores. Businesses began closing in the 1960s, and today one liquor store with packaged foods remains.

Young men gathered on street corners stand out in the largely deserted streets. Speeding cars disturb the night, residents say, as do occasional gunshots. A recent rash of brazen home break-ins has people on edge.

Once there were block parties in the adjacent Brookfield neighborhood, said Dietrich Roberson, a Community Reformed Church member.

"Everybody kind of stays to themselves now," Roberson said. "They're watching their homes. A lot of the people, they are so broke they'll try to rob you."

She and her husband have three Rottweilers, and don't like to stay away from their home for more than a few hours.

Such divided neighborhoods reveal their powerlessness when they fail to band together to fend off unwelcome intrusions, such as a fast-food outlet or an industrial operation. Nor do they as readily demand improvement of inadequate schools, opening or fixing parks or securing more police protection.

So those in poorer neighborhoods remain "underserved," in the parlance of government workers. Yet they pay taxes like everyone else, Roberson said.

"This is sad, because we need parks," said Edel Orantes, who lives in Sobrante Park with her husband and 17-year-old son.

The community's only park, Tyrone Carney Park, has been fenced off since 2002 after a homicide there, creating a community eyesore that frustrates residents.

"We need more police patrolling," so the park can reopen, Orantes said.

Social ties' benefits

The critical first step, one Alameda County health leader said, is creating neighborhood bonds to strengthen the group.

In public health circles, projects like those under way in Sobrante Park are called "community capacity building," and they focus on enabling communities to advocate on their own behalf, moving beyond a charity-based model of community health improvement.

"We feel very, very strongly that helping to strengthen communities is a key component of pre-



JANE TYSKA/STAFF

Margaret Gordon, a Port of Oakland commissioner, looks out across the Bay in October from Middle Harbor Shoreline Park in Oakland. The park was built on the site of the former Oakland Naval Supply Depot and was a concession to residents during an expansion of the port. Gordon has battled for years to reduce pollution at the port.



JANE TYSKA/STAFF

The Rev. Jeffrey Parker, left, counsels Norma Brown at the Community Reformed Church in East Oakland's Sobrante Park neighborhood in October. Parker is a pastor at the church and is trying to make a difference in his community through spirituality and by founding programs that help the neighborhood's poorer residents.

vention," said Sandra Witt, deputy director of planning, policy and health equity for the Alameda County Public Health Department.

Creating stronger social ties offers immediate health benefits. Pioneering research in Alameda County in the 1960s and 1970s showed that social support reduced the harmful physiological effects of stress, increased a person's sense of control and self-worth, and influenced healthier dietary choices, physical activity and smoking reduction.

Since the Sobrante Park project began in 2004, more than 100 residents completed 16-hour leadership courses. Councils formed, or existing ones regrouped. They tackled neighborhood blight, crime prevention, disaster preparedness and strategic planning. The Alameda County Public Health Department awarded Sobrante Park groups grants of as much as \$1,500 to promote healthy eating, physical activity and youth programs.

The department also helps fund an annual spring health fair in Sobrante Park, this year featuring nearly 30 booths.

The Sobrante Park Time Bank has become an esteemed program. Co-founder Paul Butler, 55, said he fields three to four calls weekly about the program.

Currently, 170 residents belong to the Time Bank, through which they exchange with other members services such as pet sitting, child care, car repair, carpentry, computer maintenance, gardening and housekeeping. More than 4,300 hours of services have been exchanged since the Time Bank opened in 2004. The health department provides \$51,000 a year to fund it, mostly to pay salaries.

Butler, who moved to Sobrante Park when he was 5, said his work with the Time Bank built rapport with residents.

NOVEL HEALTH PROGRAMS

- The San Francisco Public Health Department developed the "Healthy Development Measurement Tool," a voluntary approach for assessing health effects of urban development projects. www.thehdmt.org.

- In 2003, the San Francisco Public Health Department conducted a health impact assessment of a proposed 1,400-unit condominium project, which would replace a 360-unit complex called Trinity Plaza Apartments. www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/hia.htm

- In Seattle's High Point redevelopment, which is creating 1,700 affordable and market-rate homes, 60 of those will be "Breathe Easy" homes designed to decrease symptoms of asthma. www.seattlehousing.org/redevelopment/high-point/breathe-easy.

- The California Endowment's 10-year Building Healthy Communities initiative begins this spring. www.calendow.org/healthycommunities.

"Now I see them and I'm hollering at them down the street," he told a group of Shasta County public health officials visiting Sobrante Park to learn about the community-building project.

Work shows progress

The work in Sobrante Park has shown results. Half the people surveyed in 2007 by the public health department said the neighborhood was cleaner than in the previous year. Calls complaining about such blight as abandoned cars and neglected buildings dropped 25 percent from 2004 to 2007.

More people attended neighborhood barbecues or block parties and more felt

prepared for a disaster, such as an earthquake.

Next year, the department plans to repeat the survey. Witt said the Public Health Department plans to sustain the program for years to monitor how it affects health.

Underscoring the social and economic nature of health disparities, Shasta County's recent study of its life expectancies by ZIP code revealed a 14-year gap between adjacent neighborhoods, said Donnell Ewert, director of the public health department for Shasta County, where 87 percent of the population is white.

The intensifying regional and statewide focus on the root causes of poor health has been driven in significant part by support from the non-profit California Endowment based in Los Angeles.

The California Endowment in the spring will begin funding its Building Healthy Communities initiative. It intends to spend hundreds of millions of dollars from 2010 to 2020 building up resource-poor neighborhoods.

Its goal: launching a "prevention movement" by reducing disease rates through community improvements.

Other communities are also moving forward.

The San Francisco Department of Public Health led a "health impact assessment" initiative to analyze the health effects of urban development and social policies. It was based on the same 1969 law, the National Environmental Policy Act, which authorized environmental impact assessments.

The San Francisco public health agency wielded that power lightly but won significant changes in new developments, such as a high-density housing project called Trinity Plaza. The San Francisco Department of Public Health has since created a voluntary checklist to raise awareness of health consequences of projects. Other cities, including Oakland, Galveston,

Texas, and Denver are using the tool to guide their own urban planning.

With assistance from the California Endowment, the Humboldt County Public Health Branch also used a health impact assessment last year to develop its general plan, particularly the transportation element.

Richmond, also assisted by the endowment, adopted a health and wellness element in its draft general plan. It requires the consideration of health effects for city projects and initiatives. If approved next spring, Richmond will be the first government in the state to require such a broad consideration of health effects.

The Oakland nonprofit Human Impact Partners is also advocating for developments that consider health effects. The group, for example, completed a health impact assessment for proposed uses of the Concord Naval Weapons Station.

In need of leaders

At Community Reformed Church, Parker said conditions have improved in the four years he has been in Sobrante Park. But for him, the fenced-off park that greets all who enter the neighborhood is like a wound revealing the community's powerlessness.

"You can see the potential, and it can become this great community park where people could gather, barbecue, where kids play basketball," he said.

"This is just outright nonsense to have a park closed this long in a community," Parker said. "Because what it says to the community is: 'We don't value you; we'll get to you when we want to.' We are off the radar."

Parker's frustration underscores another critical step in attacking health inequities, and that's attaining positions of authority, said a former Alameda County health leader, who started the Sobrante Park program while director of the Alameda County Public Health Department. This fall he left the county to join the California Endowment's Oakland office, where he heads its health disparities initiative.

"I have this formula that to get anything done, you need resources, authority and charm," said Dr. Anthony Iton.

He points to Margaret Gordon, a longtime activist in West Oakland who ascended to become Port of Oakland commissioner in 2007. Gordon, a founding member of the West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project, for years has battled to reduce air pollution from the thousands of diesel trucks that drive daily into the port. West Oakland, a neighborhood of 23,000 next to the port, has the fourth worst asthma hospitalization rate in Alameda County and a cancer risk three times greater than the Bay Area average. Gordon has asthma, as do four of her grandchildren.

"Every day, you hear a truck, see a truck, and smell a truck," she said.

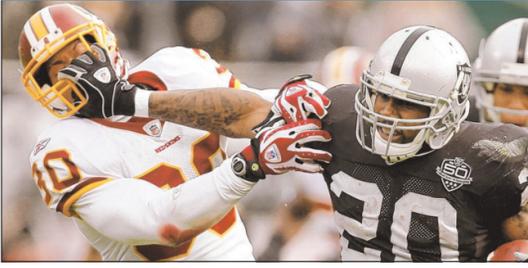
Gordon dreams of rerouting trucks so a buffer exists between port operations and the neighborhood's homes. "The only thing now that's a buffer is a freeway," she said, laughing.

But her humor fades when discussing the inequities she has battled most of her life.

"Let's be clear," she said. "This is a new era of civil rights."

"I've been able to inject the issue of 'you have to clean up the operation.' That's been my rallying call," Gordon said.

When asked what motivates her energetic struggles to improve her community, Gordon said, "If you're a non-participant, you only get what you deserve. If you know you deserve better, you're going to be part of making change."



CENTRAL COUNTY

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

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SHORTENED LIVES WHERE YOU LIVE MATTERS

Prevention at fight's forefront



Dennis Terry takes inventory Nov. 25 at the Mandela Food Cooperative in West Oakland. The store, owned by its employees, offers fresh, healthful food in an area where there aren't many supermarkets.

Reducing disparities crucial to health reform

By Suzanne Bohan and Sandy Kleffman
Staff Writers

Federally funded security guards at dangerous neighborhood parks. Federal grants to poor neighborhoods to build grocery stores or to keep school gyms open after hours. These are the types of unprecedented — yet uncontroversial — disease prevention initiatives whose inclusion has been lost in the rancorous debate over health care reform legislation working its way through Congress.

The prevention provisions mark a victory for advocates and federal lawmakers who for years have unsuccessfully sought more federal funding to close the gap in health disparities and life expectancies

ONLINE

ContraCostaTimes.com/
life-expectancy.

■ **LIVE CHAT, 8 A.M. THURSDAY:** Former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher will answer questions.

■ **VIDEO:** Profiles of East Bay residents.

■ **INTERACTIVE MAP:** Check your ZIP code.

tween those living in a comfortable Walnut Creek area and an East Oakland neighborhood just 12 miles away, where one-fifth of the residents live in poverty.

An adult raised in West Oakland, where 41 percent of residents live in poverty, is also five times more likely to be hospitalized for diabetes than someone raised in the affluent Oakland hills, and is twice as likely to die of cancer.

The House health care reform bill, passed last month, sets aside \$33.9 billion over five years for a prevention and health promotion strategy. Democratic lawmakers are pushing for a vote by Christ-

between richer and poorer Americans.

In Alameda and Contra Costa counties, for example, there's a 16-year life-expectancy difference be-

See **REFORM**, Page 15

Governor's charter school ties — binding

■ Schwarzenegger using battle for \$700 million in funds to push movement's agenda, critics say

By Steven Harmon

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SACRAMENTO — Charter school advocates were livid. The Assembly's "Race to the Top" legislation was trying to "change the DNA of charters," as one charter school leader put it, by clamping down with "stifling" oversight provisions.



Schwarzenegger

They had little doubt, however, that they'd have a potent weapon to beat back the proposed changes: Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Schwarzenegger's deep ties to the charter school movement haven't been a secret. He has taken at least \$1 million in contributions from charter school advocates, stacked the State Board of Education with charter school educators, overseen since taking office in 2003 more than a doubling in the number of charter schools and steered hundreds of millions of construction bond money to charter schools.

Now, with a potential \$700 million in federal cash dangling before lawmakers who have seen \$17 billion drained from public schools over the past two years, some critics say Schwarzenegger has used the Race to the Top competition to further his long-

See **RACE**, Page 15

ONLINE: Read more about schools and education at ContraCostaTimes.com/education.

INSIDE: Political maneuvering may jeopardize state's chances for education funds. **Page A10**

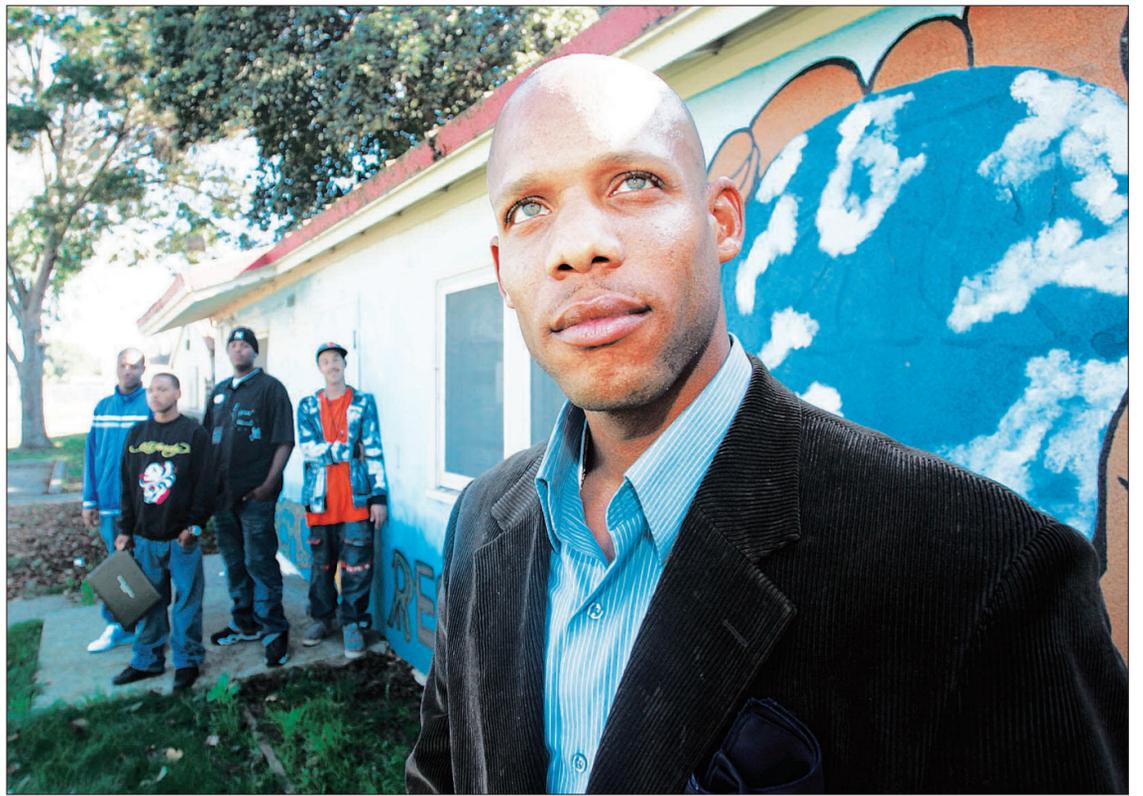
IN MORNING REPORT

Massive spending bill reaches the president

A \$1.1 TRILLION PACKAGE that increases budgets for vast sectors of the federal government awaits President Barack Obama's signature. The Senate on Sunday voted 57-35 to bolster spending in areas such as health, law enforcement and education.

HOMETOWN HEROES

Setbacks become triumphs



DEAN COPPOLA/STAFF

Vernon Williams, seen standing in front of the North Richmond Young Adult Empowerment Center, had been in and out of prison before escaping a life of drugs and crime. Williams now steers Contra Costa youths from the path he once took.

Ex-convict escapes past, forges new path: Transforming lives

By Paul Burgarino

pburgarino@bayareanews.com

Vernon Williams was carefully peeling an orange during a break from work one afternoon at the North Richmond Young Adult Employment Center when Andreae Powell walked into his office.

The student asked Williams for his signature to verify she had permission to leave school early during the day for a work program.

"Hey, girl, before I sign my life away, I've got to see that diploma," Williams said. Con-

fidently, Powell told him she'll earn her GED certificate.

When it comes to vouching for a segment of the youth

VERNON WILLIAMS

■ **AGE:** 34

■ **HOMETOWN:** Pittsburg

■ **CLAIM TO FAME:** Founder of The Williams Group. More information is available at www.twgempowerment.org.

■ **FAMILY:** Twin daughters Akayla and Amara; mother Julie Thomas; sister Alesha Williams; niece Abrea Williams.

■ **FAVORITE QUOTE:** "Your setbacks set you up for your comebacks; so when you come back, you come back stronger."

population many think is unreachable, Williams can talk the talk because he has walked the walk.

After serving multiple prison terms, Williams, 34, has committed himself to keeping at-risk teenagers from a similar path. He is the founder of The Williams Group, a nonprofit that works to curtail gang activity throughout West and East Contra Costa County.

Most people think the youths aren't reachable, "but they're reachable," the Pittsburg resident said.

Williams works primarily

See **HERO**, Page 15



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OAKLAND RAIDERS: Stay up on all things Silver & Black at our Inside the Oakland Raiders blog at IBABuzz.com/oaklandraiders.



Ex-Surgeon General to speak on care reform

■ Live chat begins at 8 a.m. Thursday

By Suzanne Bohan

sbohan@bayareanewsgroup.com

Dr. David Satcher knows the health care reform being debated in Congress won't go far enough toward eliminating health disparities among U.S. citizens, with the poor getting sicker and dying younger.

Satcher was appointed U.S. Surgeon General by President Bill Clinton in

1998, and served until 2001. From 1993 to 1998, he was director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Satcher now heads the Satcher Health Leadership Institute at the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, which provides training in reducing health disparities.

"The big issues in that debate are about access, cost and quality," Satcher said, of health care reform. "It's not adequately addressing of the critical determinants of health."



Satcher

He's referring in part to factors like your job, where you live, and your lifestyle. Together, these account for a majority of the variations in disease rates and life expect-

tancies along the social ladder.

Satcher adds, however, that the health care reform bills do include new strategies for preventing disease, and fund innovative programs for reducing health disparities.

Satcher will be the featured guest at 8 a.m. Thursday for a one-hour Bay Area News Group online live chat.

Join the chat at ContraCostaTimes.com or InsideBayArea.com to pose questions to Satcher on health reform, health disparities and disease prevention initiatives.

Hero

From Page 1

with Richmond-area youths, though he plans to start programs with East Contra Costa County grass-roots groups next year. Williams is also an integral part of a task force seeking to reverse a spike in gang-related crime in East County.

His training program in North Richmond aims to reach youths who are more attracted to the allure of the streets than learning in school.

Using a real-life example of selling "(crack) rocks on the street" teaches a lesson about return on investment, he said; disassembling computers and putting them back together is something tangible the youths can identify with.

One of the those youths is Franko Day. The Richmond 18-year-old has been in the program for about three months and credits Williams and the program with helping him find a job and staying out of trouble.

"(Williams) has been through it on both the good side and the bad side," said Day, who hopes to one day own auto body and barber shops.

Like producing a diamond, Williams said, the programs put "grinding pressure" on the youths to build up their skill sets and eventually return to traditional learning methods.

Williams' single-parent upbringing in Fairfield was like that of many of the youths with whom he works. He was a gregarious child who did things with passion, said mother Julie Thomas. That trait has served him well in trying to help youths now, she said.

"He wants to use his life to help others," she said.

Williams grew up with dreams of playing Major League Baseball and was drafted by the New York Yankees at age 18. He went to New Mexico State to earn an accounting degree before turning pro.

While away from home, he "followed down the wrong path" and started using cocaine, which he continued after transferring to Napa Valley Community College to be closer to home.

Surprising news that he was no longer eligible to play before the season's last game — which cost him a scholarship to return to a four-year school and effectively dashed his baseball dreams — turned him to crime.

The next day, he robbed a home and was arrested on a half-dozen felony charges. Williams spent 16 months behind bars, first in Contra Costa County Jail in Martinez and then at San Quentin State Prison.

After his release, Williams earned a certificate in hospitality management and was eagerly anticipating having a son.

His hopes were crushed when his son was stillborn.

"My life went on a downward spiral. I had a beef with God; I didn't want to exist," Williams said. To dull the pain, Williams used such drugs as cocaine, LSD, Ecstasy and heroin.

He began dealing drugs and made "money by the piles" — enough to afford a condominium in downtown San Jose, expensive clothes and luxury cars.

Eventually, he returned to San Quentin two more times

HOMETOWN HEROES

Hometown Heroes, a partnership between Bay Area News Group-East Bay and Comcast, celebrates people in the Bay Area who make a difference in their communities. In addition to highlighting remarkable individuals, the Hometown Heroes feature aims to encourage volunteerism, raise visibility of nonprofits and key causes in the area and create a spirit of giving.

Read about a new Hometown Hero every other Monday and watch the program on Comcast on Demand at Channel One > Bay On Demand > Hometown Heroes.

Developed in partnership with BayAreaNewsGroup and Comcast

on cocaine-related charges. He also did time at Folsom State Prison before regaining his freedom in 2004.

The "eye-opening" experience of wars inside the prison made Williams vow never to return.

He moved to Pittsburg and began teaching youths to repair computers and their lives. The change was "miraculous," Thomas said.

Williams has tried to get troubled youths back into the community where they can make a positive contribution, said Sal Garcia of the Richmond Office of Neighborhood Safety. Garcia works with Williams on the parole community activity team.

"He knows the road they are traveling, and is trying to show them they can strive for bigger and better things," Garcia said.

Williams works closely with county Supervisors John Gioia and Federal Glover and law enforcement officials.

Along with members of Brentwood-based One Day at a Time and Walnut Creek's John Muir Medical Center, he also tries to connect victims of street crimes with resources while in the hospital and reduce retaliation through intensive case management.

Gang activity has grown rapidly in the Antioch area as homes in the suburbs became affordable to those moving from urban areas, Williams said. The activity has started to trickle farther east into Brentwood and Oakley, he added.

In 2007, half of Antioch's homicides were gang-related, according to statistics from Antioch nonprofit Youth Intervention Network that were confirmed by police.

"The dynamic in that region is just changing," Williams said. "You have these various mentalities and cultures put into one social pot without an understanding of each other."

In the wake of a September shooting just outside Antioch's Deer Valley High School, Williams was part of what he called a street engagement team that works during conflicts to assist or resolve disputes before they escalate.

"I can tell these kids, I've been where you're going, I can tell you about it," Williams said. "There are other options."

Reach Paul Burgarino at 925-779-7164.

Reform

From Page 1

mas on the Senate version, which includes \$15 billion over 10 years for similar prevention and health promotion programs.

In both House and Senate bills, a grant request to open a grocery store in an area without one would qualify as a health program, said Rich Hamburg, deputy director of Trust for America's Health. So would a request for money to hire security guards to watch over a park that residents have come to fear because of crime, he said, or money to keep a school playground open after hours. Nutritionists could be hired to teach students healthful food preparation techniques at home, or how to make good choices when eating out.

The Senate bill authorizes "community transformation" grants that would have a similar aim as the House Prevention and Wellness Trust, Hamburg said.

Seven in 10 Americans support the prevention provisions in the nearly \$1 trillion health care reform bills, according to a November survey by the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

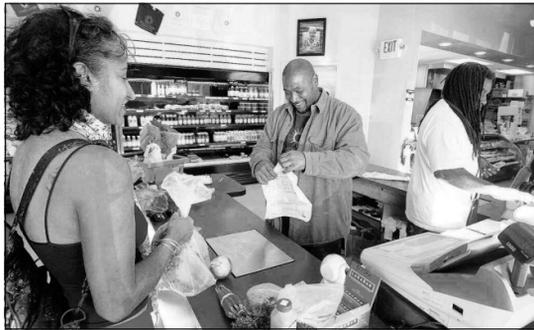
"Support for wellness, prevention and health promotion is strong across parties, across regions, and all age groups," Hamburg said. "Every which way, it has strong support."

During the previous four congressional sessions, Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis, a former House member from Southern California, tried unsuccessfully to introduce comprehensive legislation to fund programs for reducing health disparities with her Health Equity and Accountability Act. Although there was a hearing on it last year, the bill never moved beyond introduction, said Cara James, a senior policy analyst with the Kaiser Family Foundation. Some of its language, however, is now incorporated into the health care reform legislation.

"It has not moved on its own," James said. "So I think the strategy of trying to incorporate it into the larger health reform is probably going to be a better strategy in terms of getting things accomplished."

This year, the Congressional TriCaucus, formed of the African-American, Hispanic and Asian caucuses in the House, reintroduced an act of the same name. Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Oakland, leads the Congressional Black Caucus. Language from that bill also was infused into the House care health reform legislation, Hamburg said.

As a result of these earlier efforts, \$15.4 billion of the



James Bell, center, bags groceries Nov. 25 for customer Stephanie Essig, left, at the Mandela Food Cooperative.

\$33.9 billion earmarked for disease prevention and health promotion in the House bill would fund a Prevention and Wellness Trust. At least \$3.4 billion of that \$15.4 billion trust must be awarded to projects designed to reduce health disparities in low-income communities, although other programs funded by the trust will also address the issue.

The bills also break ground in their flexibility as to what's considered a health program, given the powerful role neighborhood conditions play in disease prevention. It's in poorer neighborhoods, where liquor stores often substitute for the grocery stores, that residents often become sicker and die younger. Higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and other costly chronic conditions also develop in areas where fast-food outlets are the only nearby restaurants, and residents are apprehensive about walking or biking, given high crime rates.

"Regardless of your race or ethnicity, where you live matters," James said. "Access to healthy foods and the ability to exercise matters to your health outcomes. The environmental toxins to which you're exposed matter. The types of jobs that you have matter."

Chronic stress, such as what comes from financial worries or fear of crime, also takes a heavy toll on health. Constant surges of such stress hormones as cortisol and adrenaline, over time, cause physiological changes that can trigger disease processes.

Essential steps

In addition to the unprecedented funding for programs addressing health disparities, both bills provide money for broader prevention efforts, such as increased public health staffing, education and outreach on disease prevention, immunizations and health screenings.

The new programs aren't only to relieve the suffering associated with disease and shortened life spans. They're also a critical step in controlling health care costs, said the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit

dedicated to reducing health disparities.

In a report it released in September, the center estimated that more than \$230 billion in direct medical costs over a three-year period in the United States were due to treating the diseases attributed to health disparities. When factoring in indirect costs, such as lost productivity and wages, absenteeism and premature death, the tab comes to \$1.24 trillion over the same period, the center stated.

Prevention strategies that reduce the prevalence of disease in poorer communities pay off, according to a 2009 analysis by the Prevention Institute and the Trust for America's Health. The analysis found that a \$10 investment per person in proven methods for improving diet, increasing physical activity and smoking cessation pays for itself after the first year, provides 5-to-1 savings after five years, and continues to save into the future.

And with the nation spending \$2.2 trillion a year on health care costs — with three-quarters of that for treating chronic diseases — the country can't afford not to invest more in prevention, Hamburg said.

This expanded focus on prevention has buoyed hopes that a new era in federal health policy is emerging, in which the promotion of Americans' health garners as much concern as the financing of the health care delivery system.

"If you're an ordinary American, what the debate looks like is a conversation among insurance companies and hospitals, and all the stakeholders in the health care delivery system, instead of being about people's health and well-being," said Daniel Zingale, a senior vice president with the California Endowment, a Los Angeles nonprofit with more than \$3 billion in assets. Zingale, a former senior adviser to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, led the governor's unsuccessful 2007 attempt to provide universal health care coverage in California.

"True health reform would not just be about the

SHORTENED LIVES

A series of stories exploring health inequities in the East Bay.

- **DEC. 6:** East Bay life expectancy linked to neighborhoods
- **DEC. 7:** The geography of asthma, heart disease
- **SUNDAY:** Closing the inequity gap
- **TODAY:** Personal responsibility and social action

health care delivery system," Zingale said.

Reasons behind health

Only about 15 percent of these health disparities are linked to a lack of access to medical care, according to Dr. David Satcher, former U.S. Surgeon General and former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Satcher now heads the Satcher Health Leadership Institute in Georgia, which trains public health leaders on strategies for reducing health disparities.

Genetics accounts for another 20 percent of health determinants, he said, while the physical and social environment accounts for 25 percent to 30 percent. Lifestyle choices account for the remaining 40 percent to 50 percent variations in health.

Though the latter figure points to the critical role that individual responsibility plays in one's health, the picture gets complicated when factoring in the options available to people. And there's an interaction among these four variables, he emphasized.

"They don't exist in isolation," Satcher said. "Our social environment influences access to care, it influences behavior. People can't exercise personal responsibility if they don't have safe streets, if they don't have a place to get fresh fruits and vegetables."

"I'm not trying to say that personal responsibility is not a part of this," he added. "I know people who have all the access in the world to fresh fruits and vegetables and safe places, and they still won't take advantage of it. So you've got to have personal responsibility and community responsibility on the table."

Medical care can make a significant difference in prevention efforts, such as the role prenatal care plays in reducing infant mortality.

The anticipation over these groundbreaking proposals is palpable in the public health community.

"We don't know when such an opportunity will come by again," Hamburg said. "And the excitement is around the recognition that wellness and prevention is a primary element of health reform. It's not a nice-to-have, it's a must-have."

Race

From Page 1

term goal of cutting into the powers of traditional public schools while elevating his own sacred cow — the charter movement.

"One can say that the charter school lobby has defined how the governor tries to craft school reform," said Bruce Fuller, director of the Policy Analysis for California Education at UC Berkeley. "Because he's got well-heeled donors that remain very supportive of charter schools, it's a no-brainer for the governor, given his affection for market remedies."

Schwarzenegger has blasted the Assembly's Race to the Top plan for tightening oversight measures for charter schools, calling it a "poison pill" that makes it "impossible for charter schools to survive." He has repeatedly vowed to veto the bill, ABX5-8, if it came to his desk.

Supported by most public school educators, the As-

sembly legislation includes tighter auditing requirements on charter schools than current law, stronger tools for measuring academic progress, and prohibitions against renewing continually failing charter schools.

"We believe charters should be held to the same accountability standards as public schools since they're on the public dime," said Dean Vogel, vice president of the California Teachers Association. "If I believe my charter school is high-performing, I should have a measure to prove it. You've got to demonstrate that high achievement and they don't want to do that."

Schwarzenegger's own plan, SBX5-1, shepherded through the Senate last month by Sen. Gloria Romero, D-Los Angeles, seeks to streamline the authorizing or renewal of charter schools, bolster their ability to obtain state funding, and codify their own standards of auditing.

Supporters don't deny that Schwarzenegger has

been an unapologetic ally of charter schools.

"It's fair to say that Gov. Schwarzenegger has been the most important champion California has ever had for charter schools," said Jed Wallace, president and CEO of the California Charter Schools Association. "He understands and is focused on making sure nothing comes forward that would compromise charter schools."

Under Schwarzenegger, the number of charter schools operating in California has more than doubled — from 382 in 2003-04 to the current total of 809. Though the state is nowhere near its maximum of 1,350 charter schools, he wants to lift the cap — a provision in both the Senate and Assembly bills.

Schwarzenegger has packed the nine-member State Board of Education with five leaders of the charter school movement, including board President Ted Mitchell, who is president and CEO of the NewSchools Venture fund, a national San

Francisco-based firm that provides startup money for charter schools.

Other state board members with ties to the charter school movement are Yvonne Chan, a principal of the Vaughn Next Century Learning Center, which focuses on "conversion" charter schools; Jonathan Williams, founder and co-director of the Accelerated School; Jorge Lopez, executive director of the Oakland Charter Academy; and Rae Belisle, president and CEO of EdVoice, a school reform lobbying group with strong ties to the charter school movement. Belisle defended the constitutionality of charter schools while serving as chief counsel to the State Board of Education.

EdVoice board members have rewarded Schwarzenegger, contributing at least \$1 million to his various campaign committees.

Eli Broad, a co-founder of EdVoice and billionaire Los Angeles developer who has run a Superintendent Academy, which trains CEOs how

to run schools, has contributed \$430,000 to Schwarzenegger.

Don Fisher, the late Gap founder and a co-founder of EdVoice, and his family have donated \$245,000 to Schwarzenegger, and Netflix founder Hastings Reed, also a co-founder of EdVoice, gave \$251,491 in stock to the Proposition 1A-1E campaign pushed by Schwarzenegger this year.

Many of the same donors are beginning to bring Romero, the Los Angeles senator who is pushing Schwarzenegger-backed Race to the Top legislation, into their orbit. Romero, who is running for state superintendent of public instruction, has received at least \$72,000 from various members of the EdVoice board, including \$13,000 from Broad's wife, Edyth, and \$6,500 from Hastings.

The Fisher family, deeply involved in school reform causes, has contributed \$45,500 to her campaign.

EdVoice is likely to dig deep into their political treasury to finance Romero's

campaign through unlimited independent expenditures against state Sen. Tom Torlakson, D-Antioch, who will likely have the backing of public school teacher unions.

"We haven't determined to what degree we'll support her," said Bill Lucia, EdVoice's policy director and Chief Operating Officer, "but Gloria Romero is clearly the strongest candidate for education reform and promising parental choice and not continuing to be apologetic for persistent failure."

CORRECTIONS

The Times corrects all significant factual errors that come to the editors' attention. Telephone numbers for the editors responsible for news content are listed on Page A2.

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A story in Friday's Morning Report about researchers' e-mails and climate change failed to fully identify one of the e-mail recipients. He is Michael Mann of the University of Pennsylvania.