

# Showcasing East Palo Alto



DAI SUGANO — MERCURY NEWS

Film Festival organizers: (standing from left) Festival Director William Webster, Elizabeth Jackson, Dorothy Lewis, Patty Jensen, (seated from left) Marje Wallace, Jane Howell, Ruben Abrica, B. Mouton and Omowale Satterwhite.

# Film festival marks city's 20th year

The films cover the city's birth, struggles, its youth, the disparities between it and its wealthier neighbors and works of some residents.

## EVENT ORGANIZERS HOPE TO HIGHLIGHT HOW COMMUNITY HAS GROWN, MATURED

By **S.L. Wykes**  
*Mercury News*

For such a small place — not even 30,000 people — East Palo Alto has had more than its share of publicity. Since its very tightly won battle to incorporate, when 15 votes among residents made the crucial difference, to its less-than-desirable notoriety as 1992's national per-capita murder capital, the city has had to fight not only its very real problems but also a reputation based on stereotypes and the kind of incomplete version of itself most outsiders accepted as the truth.

This weekend, East Palo Alto will showcase itself as it celebrates its 20th anniversary as an independent community, with more than two dozen films that capture everything from the best to the worst.

The film festival, said its director, 30-year city resident William Webster, "is a sign of civic maturity for a community that many people have given short shrift to over the

years for not being able to get its act together on anything. It's an invitation to the world to witness the progress we've made as a community."

Once the decision was made to gather films about the city, it quickly became clear that there were quite a few. The selections include several documentaries on non-profit programs in the city, portraits of important community members and two dramatic films.

The films are grouped in thematic clusters, covering the city's beginnings, its struggles with economic and social challenges, places that have disappeared with new development, the city's youth, the disparities between the city and its wealthier neighbors and some of the creative work of its residents.

Webster has seen all the films and thinks that their unifying thread is "hope — hope

### EVENTS

What's scheduled at the festival this weekend. **PAGE 5B**

See **EAST P.A.**, Page 5B



# EAST P.A. | Film festival spotlights city's growth

*Continued from Page 1B*

springs eternal in the human breast." It's not that East Palo Altans are "trying to conceal the nitty-gritty," he said. After seeing all the films, he said, "I came away from the experience feeling that East Palo Alto is an Ellis Island of the mind, where people can reinvent themselves."

The package of films makes such a complete statement about the city's first 20 years that assistant festival director Jane Howell would like to see them have a life after the

festival, "in libraries and schools at every level."

One film in particular, "EPAttack," (pronounced "Ep-attack"), has had limited public exposure until this weekend. It's a 30-minute work, with local actors and an original soundtrack by local musicians, directed by East Palo Alto resident Teodros Hailye, a University of Pennsylvania graduate and designer. In 1996, when he took a job with a dot-com company, he moved West and chose East Palo Alto because it felt more like his west Philadelphia home than anywhere

else around.

Hailye quickly became friends with the city's musicians and found East Palo Alto to be a creative diamond mine, he said. He started making short movies with his friends and, with a loose script in mind, decided to "capture the insanity of East Palo Alto, this really rich organic place where things that you don't expect to happen, happen."

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