

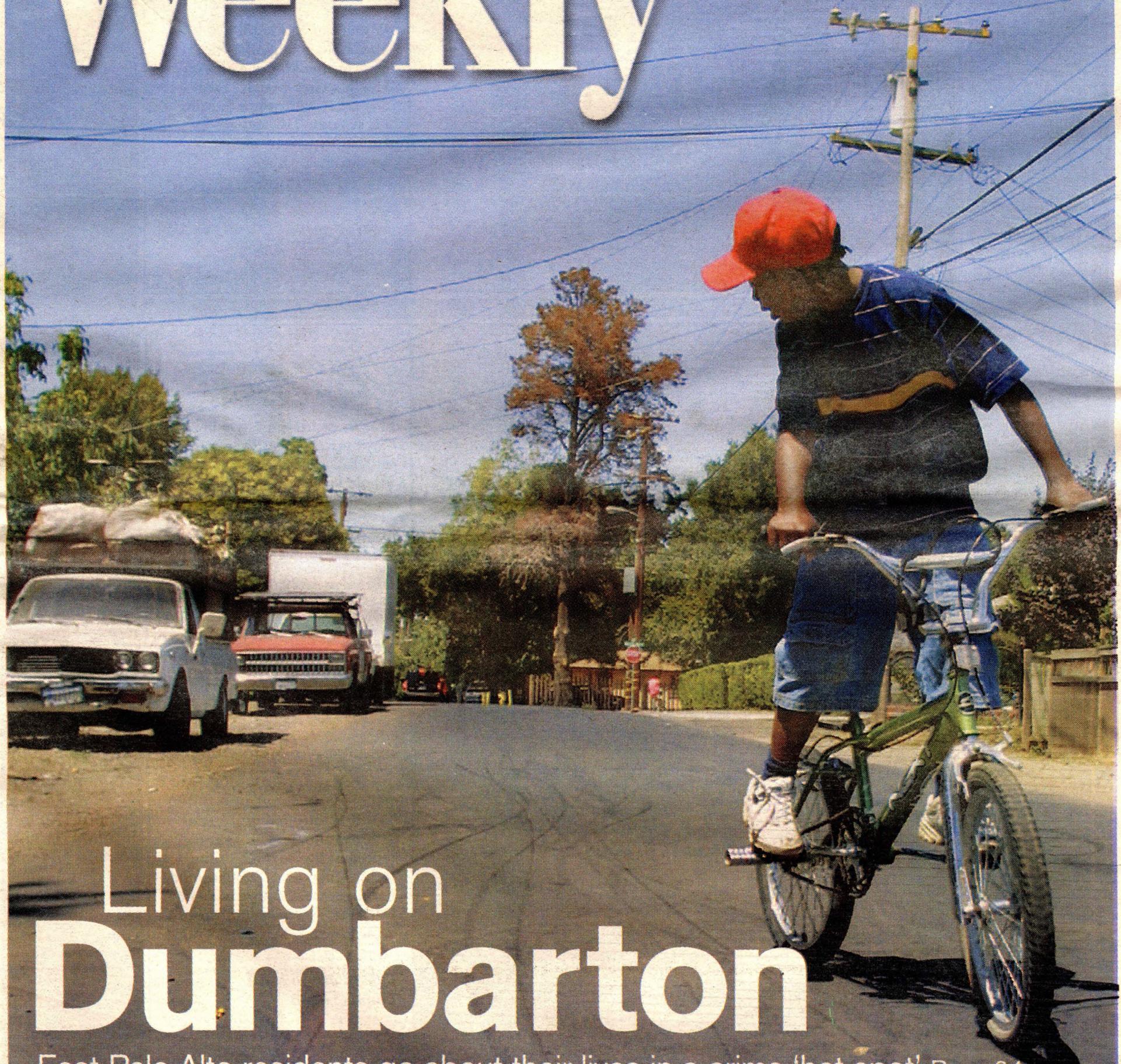
**Palo
Alto**

*****CAR-RT LOT**C008
0011836 07/22/2003
WILLIAM WEBSTER
480 E OKEEFE ST APT 307
EAST PALO ALTO CA 94303-2191

XXIV, Number 85 • Wednesday, July 23, 2003 ■ 50¢

Weekly

**...piece of the
Mayfield pie**
Page 3



Living on **Dumbarton**

East Palo Alto residents go about their lives in a crime 'hot spot' Page 24

**Paly volunteers
shut out** Page 9

**IKEA frustration
remains** Page 16

**Tennis without
Serena** Page 19

Living in a hot spot

Dumbarton residents cope with drug dealers, reckless drivers on daily basis



Residents were evacuated from the portion of Dumbarton Avenue near Cesar Chavez Academy after a woman alleged she was stabbed inside her home. The incident turned out to be somewhat of a hoax.

by Bill D'Agostino

Photographs by Kate Robertson

With loose gravel under his feet and blue skies above, 9-year-old Jerson Cano walked home from school along Dumbarton Avenue with his mother.

Jerson passed Migue Cabrera I Sais, the neighborhood's silver-toothed ice cream man, who pushed his small cart. He innocently drifted by small groups of men who appeared to be selling drugs. The men lingered near the street's corners and cautiously approached strangers who drove by.

Jerson passed the intersection of Dumbarton and Lilac Lane, where a 21-year-old man was killed in February, and he adjusted his baseball cap and listened to the birds chirp.

He recalled playing soccer in the road with his friends, although some parents in the neighborhood would never dream of even letting their small children walk on the street without supervision.

A number of incidents have sparked that fear in recent years, including shootings, drug dealing and speeding cars that mimic scenes from the movie "The Fast and the Furious." One early morning in June, Jerson's nearby school, Cesar Chavez Academy, locked down its classrooms after a SWAT team was called to the neighborhood. A woman alleged she had

been stabbed inside her home on Dumbarton Avenue.

The incident turned out to be a hoax of sorts: The drunk woman's son locked her out, and she received stab-like wounds trying to climb through a broken window before calling the police. But the fear of families who live on the street — that something bad could happen at any moment — is all-too-real.

Dumbarton Avenue, with its abandoned refrigerators, smatterings of crumpled litter and surprisingly high rents, is one of the city's crime hot spots, according to Police Chief Wes Bowling. Drug dealing is rampant, gangs are occasionally active and the police receive between five and six calls a week for shots fired.

"We get a lot activity there," Bowling noted.

Neighbors, in response, are of two different minds. Some do nothing about the crime — either out of fear, hopelessness, apathy or a rare sense that things really aren't that bad. After all, most of the violence is between drug dealers and lawful citizens appear to be safe.

"There seems to be more or less a code that people live by," Stanford biochemist Matthew Footer said. "That is, if you don't get in their face, you're fine."

Footer is one of the few on the other side of the debate and bemoans his neighbors' inaction. He is actively try-



Police say the constant turnover of renters has made this residence a haven for criminal activity.

ing to improve things even as he admits that since moving to the street in 2001, he has gotten used to the neighborhood's all-too-familiar crime.

"I've seen dealing now every single day of my life for the past three years," he said. "It's like, 'OK there's a dealer.' It just becomes part of the everyday thing. In some ways, it's kind of sad."

Neighbors who have lived on the street longer than Footer note that things have gotten quieter in the last few years, like most of East Palo Alto. The soon-to-be-open IKEA, along with other developments, promise brighter days.

Still, many worry that any slight increase in crime could balloon into rampant lawlessness, like what occurred in 1992, when frequent shootings gave the city its reputation as a crime haven.

Today's tough economic times, a few fear, could bring about that reality, especially since there is a reduction in government services — even as the city's promising construction boom continues.

Most ominously for those nervous residents, San Mateo County recently slashed more than \$500,000 in aid it had been giving East Palo Alto to help the police patrol crime hot spots.

"That will make us an easy target for more crime," worried Dumbarton resident Martha Monje.

(continued on next page)



Local children hang out on their bikes.



Dumbarton resident Martha Monje said her son once found a bag of crack cocaine on their property.

Dumbarton Avenue

(continued from previous page)

Last month, Monje's 17-year-old son found a bag of crack cocaine on their property after a drug dealer ran through their backyard, fleeing police.

"There's nothing we can do to stop it," she complained, sitting on a colorful beanbag chair inside her home.

Still, echoing the attitude of many Dumbarton residents, Monje doesn't think about moving or worry much about raising her kids in a hot spot.

"Anyplace is always going to have problems," she said. "It just depends on the friends you choose."

The Finau family is less optimistic. One of their neighbors had their fence knocked down last month

when a speeding car wildly skidded "donuts" around the corner of Bell Street and Dumbarton Avenue.

"That intersection is popular for the crazy drivers," mother Paea Finau said, half-angry, half-laughing. One of these days, she said, "I'm just going to stand there and throw a brick at them. That's how mad I am."

As Finau spoke, her children — 5-year-old Caitlin and 3-year-old Oteti — were splashing each other in a little plastic pool in their tiny front yard. But Finau doesn't let them play on the street, past the large brown fence surrounding their home.

Fences are a common feature for homes along Dumbarton Avenue, be they black and wrought iron or pink and wooden.

In front of another such railing near the Finau's home, an abandoned auto had a yellowed ticket stuck to its windshield. Apparently, nobody's bothered to tow the car for months.

"When we first moved in here, I thought it was nice," she said. "Now, we're thinking of moving because it's not safe."

Despite their fears, the Finaus pay \$1,800 a month for their two-bedroom house. That's triple what they were paying two years ago for a three-bedroom home in another part of East Palo Alto. Finau recently got a job as a telemarketer to help pay the bills.

The homicide in February sparked Footer, the biochemist, into action. He lived next door to the murder victim: 21-year-old Mitchell Badue, who was shot and killed one early February morning on the corner of Lilac Lane and Dumbarton Avenue.

The first time the two met, "Mitch" proudly showed off his large fish

tank, Footer recalled.

Police and neighbors were trying to help the young man set up a fork-lift company and get out of drug dealing. The week before he was killed, Mitch got his business permit.

"He actually had some promise," Footer said.

Even the police liked him. "He had a lot of respect for people," Officer Johnny Taflinger remembered, quickly adding that he knew, even prior to the murder, Mitch "wasn't innocent innocent."

The gossip around the neighborhood is that Mitch was shot by a rival dealer in a turf war, and while officers say that's just a rumor, they also admit it's a likely scenario.

"He lived a fast life," Taflinger said. "He died a fast life."

Hoping to move the drug trade from his corner, Footer petitioned the city to place speed bumps on the street to slow cars and make the neighborhood less desirable for those purchasing drugs.

"The problem is not all drug dealers," he said. "The problem is 50 percent drug buyers."

Life on Dumbarton Avenue is not all gloom and doom. Living in the area for the past three years, Footer has gotten to know many of his neighbors — a first for him in his adult life.

While people in Palo Alto stay inside and let their paid gardeners take care of their property, residents of East Palo Alto toll outside themselves, tending to their weeds. With everyone working on their gardens, homes and cars in full view, it's easier to get to know someone.

"People care for each other," Footer said. "There's more of a family atmosphere. We invite each other to barbecues and parties and baptisms."

Some suburban trappings can also be found behind the fences.

Tall trees shade basketball nets that stand erect in driveways. Satellite dishes perch on roofs while vegetable gardens decorate the backyards. There's even a few



Five-year-old Caitlin and 3-year-old Oteti Finau play in the gated yard of their home.

Cover Story

Jacuzzi pools resting on some well-manicured decks.

On the other side of the coin is the intersection of Dumbarton Avenue and Bayshore Freeway, the street's most troubled intersection, according to Officer Taflinger. The single-story white stucco home sitting on the uneasy corner has a red and white "No Trespassing" sign on it, but visitors wander in and out frequently.

On the corner, those visitors — usually young men around Mitch's age — wait patiently at all hours for customers to come from Stanford, Palo Alto, Atherton, and all around the Bay Area to purchase their small bags of narcotics.

A few months ago, Taflinger apprehended the young man who most often stood outside the home on charges of marijuana possession. That single arrest took days of work, and culminated in a fight that left the officer with a broken wrist.

"He's already out of jail," the officer sighed, complaining about how hard it is to arrest suspected dealers and keep them away from the city's residential neighborhoods.

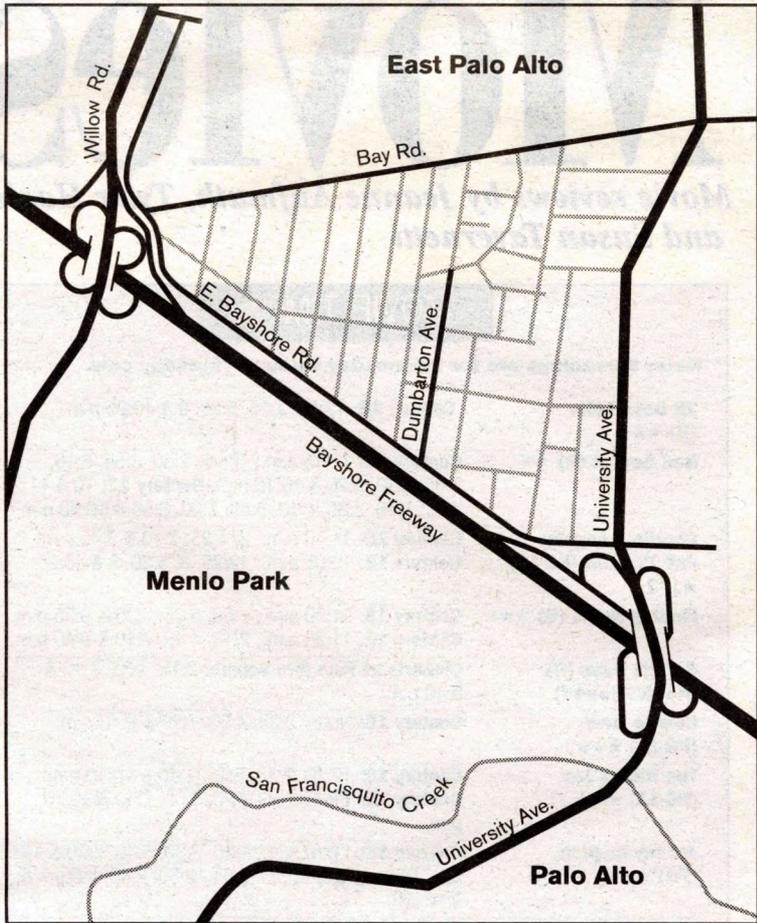
Some people who live along Dumbarton Avenue are contributing to the drug problem, Taflinger said, by too often turning the other cheek.

"We need to clean up the street and make it nice," he added. "But we can't do it by ourselves."

Despite the reputation, some who live on the street insist it's not so bad. Aside from a few isolated violent incidents — an occasional murder or stabbing — the street is tranquil, remarked Ana Quazada, a housekeeper who shares a home on the other end of the street with her sister and four kids.

Others appear to be too scared to speak about the streets' obvious problems.

Police said Realtor Ken Harris has helped evict troublemaking residents, but he's not talking about it. "I'm not going to do any articles on East Palo Alto," he grumbled. "Par-



Some residents say Dumbarton Avenue's close proximity to the freeway has contributed to the crime rate.

ticularly about Dumbarton Avenue."

That type of apathy disappoints Norm Picker, who came to East Palo Alto 20 years ago to start a nonprofit, Bayshore Christian Ministries, to mentor young, poor kids. He lives a block away from Dumbarton, on Oakwood Drive.

Why doesn't he and his family just leave?

Picker, who is white, believes in the idea that when people of different races live near each other, they help break down stereotypes and heal racial wounds.

"As a Christian, I believe God is in me and that just by sitting here, I'm doing some good," he said.

As he walks around the neighbor-

hood and on Dumbarton Avenue pulling his small son in a red wagon, Picker said neighbors give him looks, suggesting he shouldn't be walking outside.

"If I want to come home at 2 in the morning, I should be able to," he said. "There's too much acceptance ... too much saying we can never have a good neighborhood." ■
E-mail Bill D'Agostino at bdagostino@paweekly.com

About the cover

Cover photograph by Kate Robertson



Dumbarton Avenue is rated a 'hot spot' by East Palo Alto police, primarily for suspected drug deals and highly reckless driving. A good portion of the street, however, resembles an average suburban neighborhood.