

PRIDE IN SELF-SUFFICIENCY TINGES RESIDENTS' GRATITUDE FOR HELP

STANFORD, EAST P.A. UNEASY PARTNERS

By **Thaai Walker and Kim Vo**

Mercury News

In East Palo Alto, they praise Stanford University for helping the city's children prepare for college. They credit the technology center, founded by a Stanford grad, for teaching them Web design. They thank Stanford-educated lawyers with fresh flowers and bowls of jello salad for fighting their legal battles for free.

But East Palo Alto residents also say Stanford takes as much as it gives — that it seems Stanford scholars travel down University Avenue only to study poverty, crime, health and other socioeconomic issues.

That paradox is at the root of the complex relationship between the elite university and the struggling city where Stanford has played an integral role for decades.

Stanford students and alumni say they are just trying to do some good where it is most needed. But in East Palo Alto, where a desire for self-determination runs deep, gratitude often collides with pride.

"The feelings run everywhere in this city, from 'We hate them' to 'We love them,'" said council member Sharifa Wilson, whose son



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Stanford law grad Suzanne McKechnie Klahr, center, talks with Aimee Escobar, 15, left, and Lapria Kelly, 14. McKechnie Klahr faced challenges in founding her East Palo Alto non-profit agency. See her story on **Back Page**.

attends Eastside College Preparatory, founded by Stanford graduates.

"We love them because they put resources

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into the community; because they provide brainpower and money. The hate part comes because people have felt that Stanford has used us as a lab — that they only want to do research and use us as guinea pigs.”

In this 2.5-square-mile town where there never seems to be enough money for basic services, the drug clinic, the technology center, the community development non-profit center, the small business incubator and the only high school were all founded by someone from Stanford.

And this fall, Stanford will open a free legal clinic to replace the beloved East Palo Alto Community Law Project. Founded by Stanford students, the law project closed in August after nearly two decades because of money troubles.

Lawyer training priority

The law school's dean has called the new clinic “a gift to the community.” Residents are grateful, but the plan has rekindled feelings of being used because Stanford has made clear that training future lawyers is its priority.

Stanford's involvement in East Palo Alto stems from a tradition of public service and the feeling that privilege carries with it a mandate of social responsibility. Professors and idealistic students — rich and poor — feel moved to address the harsh contrasts between their campus and the city just a bike ride away.

“We all believe in the goodness of what we're doing,” said Jesse Moya, who volunteered while a Stanford undergraduate and now oversees a program that brings East Palo Alto youngsters to the university for classes and tutoring.

The university began playing a major role in East Palo Alto during the civil rights movement, when black students traveled across Highway 101 to — as one alumnus from that era put it — uplift their own. Dozens of programs have flourished since.

There's often no specific person or event that residents blame for their unease about Stanford. Rather, it stems



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A mural that will hang at Stanford this fall was created by teens at the East Palo Alto Mural Project. Project board member Stephen De Berry said the lilies with roots leading back to the university symbolize Stanford programs that have flourished in East Palo Alto, and the man's skeptical expression conveys the question: “What do you really want?”

from loose memories of being interviewed for research papers or having their experiences collected for some Stanford-sponsored study, such as health care and African-American women. It has arisen from watching students tramp through town for a lesson on gentrification.

In many ways, the perception is a byproduct of the power imbalance that colors any relationship between benefactor and beneficiary.

Sources of resentment

Some resentments grew from watching those with Stanford ties come in with money and support that have eluded residents. Eastside College Preparatory High School, for example, receives significant donations from outside the city, while Shule Mandela Academy, a private school founded by a resident, closed in 1999 after failing to attract

similar support.

Others feel programs have been imposed without anyone asking what the community needed. City leaders, for instance, were offended in 1994 when Stanford MBAs launched Start Up, now a respected business incubator, without consulting the community.

And some residents say they have sometimes been disappointed by well-meaning but unreliable students who sometimes start but don't finish projects.

“Once they wanted to get deeply involved in our problem with high school dropouts in the 1980s,” said resident Ruben Avelar. “They built up expectations but they didn't follow through.”

Skepticism has eased over the years, partly because Stanford has tried to address it. One campus minister runs a student tour that covers the city's history and introduces students to residents and organizations. The Haas Center for Public Service, which oversees many undergraduate volunteer efforts, offers students cultural sensitivity training.

“We take very seriously our responsibility to educate our students to enter any community with knowledge and respect,” said Suzanne Abel, external relations director at Haas.

Even so, what happens with the new legal clinic will test how far the Stanford-East Palo Alto relationship has come.

“The feelings run everywhere in this city, from ‘We hate them’ to ‘We love them,’ ”

— SHARIFA WILSON,
EAST PALO ALTO COUNCIL
MEMBER

DOING GOOD WORKS IN EAST PALO ALTO

Stanford University and its graduates have played major roles in many programs and institutions affecting East Palo Alto.

- Eastside College Preparatory High School
- Free At Last (drug rehabilitation clinic)
- Start Up (business training center)
- Plugged In (technology center)
- Community Development Institute (community assistance center)
- Ravenswood Reads
- East Palo Alto Tennis and Tutoring
- Barrio Assistance (tutoring/mentoring program for the city's Latino children)
- I Have a Dream (Stanford MBAs subsidize the college educations of some East Palo Alto children.)

Source: Stanford University

Expanding legal clinics is part of Stanford's strategy to make its law school the nation's best. Still, officials have made efforts to reach out locally.

Dean Kathleen Sullivan has met with the mayor, and in July visited East Palo Alto to give an update about plans for the clinic.

After the program is running, she said, the law school intends to form a community advisory board. She offered her e-mail address and invited residents to contact her. Then she made her apologies; she was late for a Stanford engagement.

Sullivan ducked out, so she missed Barbara Mouton. Mouton, the city's first mayor, strode up to the microphone. She was sorry the dean would not hear what she had to say.

“Stanford can lead if it desires,” she said. “But we want the community to be part of this. If Stanford has complete control, we're going to come up second.”

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Self-interests

But the law school has made it clear the new clinic will serve fewer clients than the defunct law project. With fewer services, they say, students can get more in-depth training.

“Stanford has Stanford's interest at heart. Let's be honest,” said William Webster, an East Palo Alto resident who works on campus and was a supporter of the law project. Webster and others have opened a community law clinic to complement Stanford's clinic.



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Anabel Segura, left, of East Palo Alto is greeted as she arrives at her dormitory on the Stanford campus. The first in her family to attend college, she walks with her father, Jorge, and mother, Gabriela, above.

Student's ties to Stanford open doors to 'endless opportunities'

When Anabel Segura left her family's East Palo Alto home Thursday for a Stanford dormitory, she became the first in her family to attend college.

Segura, 18, is familiar with the vast campus. Her childhood was peppered with Stanford-sponsored programs she credits with helping her get into the prestigious university.

"Once you get connected with Stanford, there's all these endless opportunities," she said. Financial aid covers most of the \$38,000 annual bill.

Segura's experience illustrates how East Palo Alto children can cross paths with Stanford at every step of their education. For decades, boys and girls have traveled to the campus for programs, including architecture and Aztec dance, golf and photography.

Back home, children are often tutored by Stanford students. As teenagers they can attend Eastside College Preparatory, founded by Stanford graduates. Or they can go to East Palo Alto High in Menlo Park, co-founded by the Stanford School of Education.

Some feel the university could do better at recruiting students from East Palo Alto. Since 1997, only six have entered Stanford as freshmen, including Segura and two others this year.

Stanford students who work with

East Palo Alto youngsters try to convince them that they, too, can go to Stanford.

"They smile when you tell them, 'When you're at Stanford...'" junior Diana Vizcarro says of the children she works with in the East Palo Alto Stanford Academy, a program for promising middle school students.

Segura's introduction to Stanford came during seventh grade when she enrolled in the academy with her mother's encouragement. "Who knows?" Segura recalled her mother saying. "It might open doors for you to go."

After Stanford Academy, Segura headed to Eastside.

Her mother cleans houses. Her father is a restaurant cook. They have taught their children that better-paying jobs exist for those with college degrees.

Others in Segura's family are following her example. Her sister Beatriz attended the academy, and their parents are taking 6-year-old sister Lizet to Stanford for free programs. Segura's cousin, Marisela Alvarez, 15, enrolled in the academy and will attend Eastside this fall. Marisela's brother, 11-year-old Alvaro, just finished his first summer at the academy.

— Kim Vo

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Stanford has a long history of involvement in and connections to East Palo Alto.

1930s: A saloon-studded area in East Palo Alto dubbed Whiskey Gulch becomes a destination spot for Stanford students trying to skirt a state-imposed ban on the sale of liquor near campus.

1960s: Black Student Union mentors East Palo Alto students while pushing the university to prove its sincerity about racism with ethnic programs and by recruiting students and faculty of color.

1970s: Other ethnic-based campus organizations reach out. Omowalee Satterwhite, who earned his doctorate at Stanford, founds the Community Development Institute in East Palo Alto. Latino students create Barrio Assistance.

1984: Stanford law students open the East Palo Alto Community Law Project to serve low-income residents. Over the years, Stanford Law School sends professors and funding to subsidize the non-profit organization.

1985: Volunteerism becomes centralized and flourishes with the opening of the Public Service Center, later renamed the Haas Center for Public Service.

1990s: Stanford students launch organizations that are nationally recognized today, such as Start Up, the tech center Plugged In, the drug rehabilitation center Free At Last and Eastside College Preparatory High School.

2001: The School of Education co-founds East Palo Alto High School.

2002: East Palo Alto Community Law Project closes. Stanford Law School agrees to open a new law clinic.



Webster Lincoln, 15, takes part in a game at a barbecue arranged by Stanford law grad Suzanne McKechnie Klahr, left, for the East Palo Alto students she teaches.

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'Outsider' moves in to be a part of community she wants to serve

It didn't take long for Suzanne McKechnie Klahr to realize that her Stanford background defined her as an outsider in East Palo Alto.

At a community meeting about bringing a bank to the city, a resident took exception to her presence.

"Just what we need," he said. "Another white girl from Stanford trying to empower the community."

McKechnie Klahr, then a law student, took no offense.

She knew residents had spent years watching Stanford students enter the city with good intentions but sometimes also with an attitude of "we know what the community needs."

But from the moment she first volunteered in East Palo Alto in 1996, she knew she wanted to do good work. In this city where people know their neighbors, introductions are important and trust comes slowly, she realized she would be required to give more than just her time — ultimately she had to move in and be a part of the place she wanted to serve.

Her experience highlights the challenges sometimes faced by those who enter the city with Stanford on their résumés.

"There are people who for good reason are resentful of the historical role Stanford has played in East Palo

Alto," said McKechnie Klahr, 29. "But there are also significant contributions that have been made."

After law school, McKechnie Klahr passed up a job at a law firm and founded Businesses United for Investing, Lending and Development, a non-profit agency that grooms East Palo Alto teenagers into young entrepreneurs.

Her university connections helped her bring in private donors, mentors and volunteers.

Still, residents feared she was just another do-gooder who'd be gone tomorrow.

That feeling eased with time.

"People started introducing me not as 'the Stanford student,' but as 'Suzanne,'" she recalled. "There's something really ironic in trying to lose the Stanford image."

Every so often, though, she would be reminded she was an outsider. So she moved in.

In March 2002, she and her husband bought a restored farmhouse on a rutted street on the city's west side. That move meant a lot to residents and her students.

"A lot of our teachers are not from here, so it's hard to communicate with them," said Devonna Jones, 14. "But Suzanne's here. She knows what you're going through."

— Thaa Walker