

# Lifecycles

## An outstanding local volunteer

By Kathleen Alexander  
East Palo Alto Today

The Nonprofit Board Leader Award is given annually to recognize to the achievements of outstanding nonprofit board members in the Bay Area. This year the award went to Melieni Falemaka Talakai of East Palo Alto and many felt that it could not have gone to a more deserving person.

On Thursday, April 29<sup>th</sup> at the Volunteer Center's *Hats Off* event in San Francisco, Talakai was invited by Kate Kelly, CBS reporter, and MC to come up on stage to receive the Nonprofit Board Leader Award. During the presentation of the award to Talakai,

Kelly stated that she had served on the Board of Ravenswood Family Health Center since 1999 when the board was formed to oversee the development of the new community health center. In the fall of 2000, she was asked to assume the role of chair of the board. Ten years later, Talakai is serving her second term as board chair. During Talakai's tenure on



Photo courtesy Kathleen Alexander  
**Melieni Falemaka Talakai**

the board, the Ravenswood Family Health Center grew dramatically from a staff of 13 in 2001 to a staff of 115 employees. The center now operates five sites, including the new state-of-the-art dental clinic and the Center for Health Promotion on Bay Road across from the main clinic.

In speaking about Talakai, the center's CEO Luisa Buada observed, "Melieni is a natural

born leader. She sets the tone for our meetings, characterized by warmth and mutual respect, knitting together our diverse multi-ethnic board. She is remarkably committed." Luisa recalled, "When we were planning a silent auction for our 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration, Melieni decided to offer to put on a Polynesian Affair as a way of raising money. At her own expense and in the very limited space of her home in East Palo Alto, with one cutting board, she and her 5 children whipped up a huge feast including a dish wrapped in giant banana leaves, fresh fruit, and Ahi tuna. It was a glorious meal for 30 guests and highlighted Polynesian dances

performed by her daughters and sons. The affair raised \$3,000 for RFHC.

In addition to her weekly involvement at RFHC, Melieni is the co-founder of Taulama for Tongans, a volunteer nonprofit that provides health education to the Pacific Islander community. She also hosts a bi-weekly health education program on KEST 14.50 AM. Her impact is widely recognized. As one of her colleagues at Taulama said, "In the Pacific Islander community, Melieni is the face of health services."

**Kathleen Alexander** is the director of communications and marketing for the Ravenswood Family Health Center.

## High expectations seen at forum

East Palo Alto Today

At the Foundation for a College Education's annual Higher Education Forum, the educational success of East Palo Alto students took center stage. Held at Palo Alto's Garden Court Hotel Friday, March 19, the event featured a keynote conversation between Ted

Mitchell, president and CEO of the NewSchools Venture Fund and a leading voice in local and national education reform, in conversation with Carmen Ochoa, an FCE staff member and graduate of the FCE program.

Ochoa, assistant director of FCE's College Success



**Carmen Ochoa**

Program, graduated magna cum laude from Mount St.

Mary's College with a bachelor's degree in biological sciences and a minor in psychology. She plans to attend medical school this fall and her acceptances to date include the Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California and the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and

Public Health, which has offered her a full tuition scholarship.

Ochoa shared her path to success with a crowd of almost 100 who gathered for an early breakfast. Those guests included former San Jose Mayor Ron Gonzales, who is now president and

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## A way to keep your heart healthy

Dr. Virginia Humphrey, DDS  
East Palo Alto Today

The old saying, "The way to someone's heart is through their stomach," appears to be

accurate.

Researchers have found that people with periodontal disease are almost twice as likely to suffer from coronary artery disease as those with-

out. Many unexplained heart attacks and strokes can be traced back to oral cavities where gum disease is present.

Several theories exist to explain the pathology link be-

tween these two different areas of the body. For example, when we brush our teeth, bacteria from our mouth get into the blood stream and attach to fatty plaque in the blood vessels.

Coronary artery disease is the thickening of the walls due to a build up of plaque. Therefore gum disease may increase the build up inside the vessels, restricting the flow of nutrients and oxygen to the heart.

Secondly, arterial plaque can break away forming clots which can stop the flow of blood causing an infarction which can lead to heart attacks and strokes.

Alternatively, inflammation caused by periodontal disease may increase plaque build up, which can contribute to swelling of the arteries. Since periodontal disease is an inflammatory process destroy-

ing bone, the same reactive process may occur on the lining of the vessel.

Periodontal disease can also exacerbate pre-existing heart conditions, even for people with artificial heart valves. Patients at risk for infective endocarditis may require antibiotics prior to dental procedures.

Your cardiologist will be able to determine if your heart condition requires the use of antibiotics.

Periodontal disease can be treated, controlled, and even reversed in many cases by seeing a dentist or a periodontist.

**Dr. Virginia P. Humphrey, II** is a doctor of dental surgery (DDS). She maintains a dental office at the Ravenswood Shopping Center. You can get more information about her from her ad which is directly beside this article.

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