SJSU ERFA News, Spring 2017

San Jose State University, Emeritus and Retired Faculty Association

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Talking Back to the Mercury News

By Dave Elliott
(Communication Studies, CSU-ERFA Delegate at Large)

I believe there is general agreement among Mercury News readers that it is one of the best papers in our state. It usually provides excellent coverage of contemporary happenings and almost always offers enlightened editorials on the problems facing our society.

But I think there is one glaring exception to the Merc’s general excellence. Paraphrasing Will Rogers, who said “I have never met a man I didn’t like,” it seems that the Mercury News has never met a union it does like. Back in 1959, the Mercury and News ceased publication for four months when its unions held a strike and produced their own newspaper, the San Jose Reporter. Now, 58 years later, we can only wonder what lasting effects that bitter conflict had on our newspaper’s...

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News recently when a person not associated with SJSU in any way committed suicide in the MLK library. Since this was the second suicide in this location, President Papazian spoke at length to the Senate, explaining that short-term remedies were already being discussed and implemented, but more permanent solutions required discussions and planning not only with campus personnel but with City of San Jose administrators, since the library is jointly owned and operated by the two entities. President Papazian also informed the Senate of her involvement in conversations regarding where the prospective BART trains and stations will be located. There are two competing areas, with both locations having sponsors and interested parties. One area is the eastern part of the city, where a large population resides. The other would bring BART downtown, close to the campus. Papazian’s efforts have been focused on pointing out that SJSU is an institution comprised of 18,000 faculty and staff and over 30,000 students.

Much is new on the university grounds. The large auditorium in Old Science had its heating and air conditioning improved, while Dudley Moorhead has been air conditioned and refurbished with numerous cosmetic improvements. Some offices have new linoleum floors, and all have been waxed and improved. The improvements in both buildings were concluded on schedule and in time for classes that resumed in Spring, 2017. Two more of the old red-brick dormitories have been removed and construction of the new Aquatic Center has begun. To protect the newly-occupied Campus Village 2 as much as possible from excessive dust and noise, the administration asked contractors to keep noise levels down in the early morning hours and during final exams at the end of last semester. Also, the eastern end of the student union building, where the book store had been temporarily located, will now house the College of International and Extended Studies (CIES).

Also, the Mercury News reported that the university was interested in purchasing the Camera 12 theater building on First Street, as well as the Starbucks property nearby. Although the university is interested in the Camera 12 property for conversion to student housing, it all depends on whether the owners can accept what the campus can afford—and that is still not known. However, the Starbucks property has already completed a building plan that
Talking Back to the Mercury News

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owners, but it is tempting to entertain the possibility that they are still smarting over that strike.

One rather obvious manifestation of the paper’s negative attitudes about unions and the public employees they represent, is its unequivocal support for Measure B, the pension reform initiative that was championed by former mayor, Chuck Reed, and Sam Liccardo, our current mayor. You may remember that, as many legal authorities had predicted, those provisions in the measure that sought to alter the city’s retirement promises to its employees were eventually found to be unconstitutional. And, even though Liccardo campaigned for mayor on a promise to appeal that court’s ruling on Measure B, soon after he was elected he decided it would be more expedient to negotiate a new contract with the city unions. When supporters of the original measure forced Liccardo to go back to the electorate for approval of the new contract, it was put to a vote and approved in the last election. It’s obvious now that Reed and Liccardo should have negotiated with the city unions from the outset, rather than bypassing them with Measure B. But the Mercury News was committed to doing exactly that. This sad misadventure cost our city dearly. It reduced public safety by depopulating our police and fire departments, and created bitter resentments between the citizens of San Jose and its employees that could linger for years.

And now the beat goes on, at the state level. In recent weeks, the Mercury News has published a spate of editorials urging radical reforms in our CalPERS retirement system. All of these editorials require response, but I will limit myself to just two of them. On January 17 and 19, the Merc published twin editorials asking for changes that could result in the dismantling of our present pension system. I will respond to the first of these editorials in this article and plan to comment on the second in the next issue.

The January 17 editorial was entitled, “Supreme Court should enable pension reform.” In it, the Merc reported, with considerable satisfaction, that two appellate courts recently ruled that state lawmakers have the authority to alter retirement promises that were made to current employees, so long as the benefits they end up receiving are “reasonable.” Wouldn’t this be grand? If this were to happen, the after-career security public employees were promised when they were first hired, and upon which they planned for the future, would no longer exist. Depending on the prevailing political and economic climates, “reasonable” could mean anything.

Actually, the issue at stake in these current court rulings is the additional pension credit that some employees have purchased (called Airtime), and not their basic pension awards. Airtime allowed people to purchase pension credit to augment and sweeten their pension awards. Although the legislature and the governor justly ended Airtime in 2012, some public employees legally purchased it and should be entitled to its benefits. But the Merc hopes that if these rulings against Airtime claims are affirmed by the California Supreme Court, they will serve as precedents for limiting basic pension awards to what is “reasonable.” However, the “California Rule,” which the State Supreme Court created in 1955, clearly affirmed that, “By entering public service an employee obtains a vested contractual right to earn a pension on terms substantially equivalent to those offered by the employer.” As a result, I cannot believe the Supreme Court will confirm what the appellate courts have decided, and it is stunning that our newspaper thinks it should.

The break in faith that is envisioned by these appellate rulings would not be tolerated in any other context, but the Merc thinks this would be quite acceptable for public employees. How long would a bank last if it informed its investors when their CD’s reach maturity that they are only worth what the bank considers reasonable, at that time? President Trump once suggested that our country could avoid paying all of what it owes to its creditors by simply negotiating “better deals,” and this provoked outrage throughout the world of finance. What the appellate judges in this case are suggesting, and what the Merc clearly favors, would be much worse than this. Under the conditions they favor, there would be no negotiations; the legislature would simply decide, unilaterally, what is “reasonable” for public employees.

By providing unqualified support for Measure B, with which city officials sought and secured permission from local citizens to renege on pension promises, and by favoring appellate rulings that seek to substitute what others think is “reasonable” for what was promised, our hometown newspaper has sent a strong message to all of us: What is fair in other contexts does not apply to public employees.
Iceland is a hot travel destination

By Scott Rice (English)

I have long been fond of Iceland, a regard so acute that I can spell Reykjavik without looking it up. And if that does not qualify me as an Icelandophile, I have read all of the English translations of the two great Icelandic crime writers, Arnaldur Indridason and Yrsa Sigurdardottir. On December 28, then, Mary Beth and I took our daughter, EJ, off on a week-long sojourn to Iceland so we could experience the country’s four-hour winter days and so that EJ could behold its stark beauty for the first time. And there was Reykjavik’s famous New Year’s Eve fireworks orgy, an event that draws tourists from our East Coast (we kept bumping into people from Boston—they talk funny).

After a seven-hour flight from Seattle deposited us at Kaflavik Airport at 6:30 AM in a freezing rain, we took a fifty-kilometer taxi ride into Reykjavik to the City Center Hotel where we had stayed on a former visit. Once the site of the best beer bar in Iceland, it sits across the street from the Drunk Rabbit, a rollicking Irish-style pub (I have the T-shirt). And next door to the Rabbit is an icewear store that is home to Baktus, one of Reykjavik’s celebrity cats whose adventures are widely followed on Instagram (mostly he just walks back and forth across the street, or crouches in doorways. If you think about it, the Kardashians don’t do much more, except that they do it in see-through clothing).

On previous trips, we had taken the obligatory Golden Circle tour to lakes, geysers, waterfalls, and geothermally heated greenhouses where much of the country’s vegetables are grown. And we had visited the famous Blue Lagoon, another geothermal wonder.

It being winter, though, we thought it appropriate to take an all-day excursion to an ice tunnel in Iceland’s second largest glacier, located about 100 kilometers north of the capitol. The drive along the “highway” lured us into a sense of security, then we left the pavement and our off-road vehicle earned its name. Our oversized French-built SUV with earth-mover tires bounced and jolted us over the roughest terrain I’ve seen since the Falkland Islands (where we saw tractors hauling SUVs out of cavernous ruts). Hemorrhoid sufferers need not apply. Despite the over-sized tires, our driver had to deflate them in the deep snow, then re-inflate them later. By the time we arrived, shaken and stirred, we were happy to descend, jump up and down to settle our organs back into place, then embrace the wind chill.

The interior of the glacier was toasty by comparison, although my toes were numb after the quarter-mile stroll. Our guide, a looming, red-haired Valkyrie, lectured us on the formation of glaciers, showing striations in the walls marking each year’s snowfall (there is a line of volcanic ash deposited by the Grimsvotn eruption in 2011). We learned the difference between crevices and crevasses (the former in rock, the latter in ice). And she treated us to an earnest lecture on the threat of global warming, saying that she had given the same talk to some hostile Americans who turned out to be Trump supporters. Much of the world’s drinkable water, she said, originates in glaciers. And so when the glaciers finally all melt . . . . I was just grateful that global warming is a liberal hoax.

Museums, castles and art galleries are all very nice but you experience the soul of a country when you dine at its cafes and restaurants. Thus, we took our first serious meal at the Three Frakkar (Three Frenchmen) which draws celebrity chefs from all over the world. My course was roast tenderloin of horse, something I justified because a horse stepped on
my foot when I was fourteen. Later at another restaurant, I had reindeer but I drew the line at eating whale or puffin (no whale or puffin has ever stepped on my foot). And to top off the tenderloin of horse which was, well, tender, I sampled Iceland’s famous hákarl (shark that has cured or ripened or, okay, rotted in the ground). Without the curing, the flesh is toxic. Unlike the crocodile I had in South Africa, the shark did not taste remotely like chicken; in fact, it was disappointingly bland, if quickly sating. But I can say that I have eaten rotten shark (after all, given the chance, a shark would eat me).

Weather cancelled our snowmobile ride across a glacier, a disappointment to my daughter but a relief to me (I did not want to risk falling into a crevasse). But we saw the fireworks display, the greatest Reykjavik may ever stage. The European Union recently passed a law to limit the amount of fireworks that can be set off on future New Year’s Eves and the Icelanders responded by purchasing over 650 tons of fireworks to explode for this year. As a result, we stood on a hilltop and for about forty-five minutes could see fireworks exploding horizon to horizon in every direction.

And the trip had a value added. In a Reykjavik bookstore I discovered Iceland’s newest crime writing star, Ragnar Jonasson whose Snow Blind was a number one best seller in Australia (I like the Aussies, too).

So as we bade a fond farewell at Kaflavic, I resolved to return to explore more of Iceland’s wonders. Next time I hope to drive up to Siglufjordur to see the herring museum.

In Memoriam

• Lee Walton (Kinesiology, ’96) passed away peacefully from cancer on December 20, 2016, at the home he built in Morgan Hill, with his family at his side. He was 81 years old. Lee was born in Centerville (Fremont), CA, and grew up with a love of sports and the outdoors: water polo, scuba diving, hunting, fishing and traveling. He was an Army Ranger who retired as a Captain, and later served as Company Commander of his Reserve Unit in Hayward. Lee was both a student and then a professor at SJSU. As a student athlete he played water polo from 1953-56 and was named First Alternate to the 1956 Olympics. He was voted into two Halls of Fame by 1958. As a water polo coach at SJSU, he had even greater success with the school’s teams. He coached 25 players to All-American status, with one Olympian and 12 players on the US National Team. His teams won National Collegiate championships in 1968 and 1972 and competed with the USSR team that won the Olympics that same year. Lee was honored as Northern California Water Polo Coach of the Year five times. He wrote numerous articles for Water Polo Magazine and helped develop that sport’s Decathlon. He coached teams for different countries, including the US, Puerto Rico and Australia, winning awards and gold medals. In retirement, he continued teaching scuba diving for SJSU, after having volunteered in the ’70s to help clean the ocean floor of war debris and live ammunition in Micronesia to make the habitat safer for sea life and divers. Lee’s love of the outdoors never abated and he hunted with family and friends in the marshes near Gustine, CA, where he spent this past Thanksgiving Day hunting for pheasants. He leaves behind his wife of 65 years, Susan, a son and daughter and three grandchildren.

• Alden Voth (Political Science) passed away on December 22, 2016, of Alzheimer’s disease at the age of 90. He was born into a Mennonite family and his faith in the power of love and peace deepened after his illness was diagnosed, whereupon “he touched many lives with a smile and a song.” Born on a family farm near Walton, KS, he attended a one-room country school, graduated from high school in three years, went on to Bethel College, then earned an MA degree in Economics from the Univ. of Iowa at Ames. He completed his Ph.D. in International Relations at the Univ. of Chicago in 1959. He taught at Upland College in S. Calif. before joining the Political Science faculty at SJSU in 1963. After a two-year stint teaching Economics and Political Science at the American University of Cairo (1965-67), he returned to SJSU to continue teaching, writing and lecturing. His family wrote: “In his spare time Alden enjoyed running, tennis, watching college basketball and saving money.” He is survived by his wife Norma, his daughter Susan and three brothers in Kansas.

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The Holiday Celebration

Above are Adnan Daoud and Bob Wilson

Above are Mike Adams and Bob Gliner.

At right: Edith Crowe, Tracy Elliott (Library Dean) and JoBell Whitlatch.

Photos by Dennis Wilcox

Below are Judith Hurley, Dave Elliott and Tim Hegstrom.

Above are Dick Ellefsen and his daughter Wendy Glazier
Chat Room . . .

This edition contains news about travels and activities taken from the membership renewal forms. Members are invited to send additional news about themselves to Gene Bernardini at geebernard@comcast.net or by snail mail at 775 Seawood Way, San Jose, CA 95120.

- **Dolores Escobar-Hamilton** (Dean, College of Education) has just co-authored a biography for children: *The Awesome Miss Seeds*. It’s the story of Corinne A. Seeds (1889-1969), a remarkable teacher, born with disabilities, whose courage, determination and vision enabled her to become a leader in progressive education. As a professor at UCLA and principal of the university’s Elementary Laboratory School for over 30 years, she was Dolores’ professor, mentor and the subject of her doctoral work. Her personal story of challenges overcome and successes attained has not been told outside of a select circle of colleagues, students and friends. Dolores and her co-author have dedicated the book to all the children who have benefitted from her reforms and will be inspired by her accomplishments. It is available at “authorHouse” and Amazon.com.

- **Patricia Nichols** (Linguistics/Language Dvlpm't, 2000) is now glad to receive news from our ERFA Newsletter at her home miles away in Ashland, OR. She was especially grateful to read the Fall issue which contained the editor’s “evocative obits of our beloved colleagues” and for Nils Peterson’s related prose-poem about his wonderful relationship with his late friend Steve.

- **Harry Powers** (Art, ’95) recently took part in an art exhibition entitled “The Butterfly Effect” at the Palo Alto Cultural Center (Sept.-Dec, 2016). It included one of his pieces from the 1970s made from sheet acrylic called “Survivor.” Harry’s work can be seen on his website: harrypowers.com.

- **Kathy Carmona** (Special Ed, ’96) had a wonderful trip to Australia and New Zealand where she found “gorgeous scenery” and “friendly people.” She says “My nephew and I had an educational and hilarious time. At first our fellow travelers thought we were married, since I’m only eight years older. Our group was very helpful and fun.”

- **Bobby Crafford**, (Assoc. Member) is living in Santa Cruz and says she is “fortunate to be very healthy and busy, maintaining and improving our small rental garden complex.” She continues to stay closely in touch with her family, both in Los Gatos and in Poland.

- **Charlene Archibeque** (Music, ’05) appeared at the ACPA meeting in Georgia last June, then taught the summer Conducting Workshop at SJSU. This Spring she’ll be making more appearances in Texas and Arizona, and will be a Visiting Scholar at the Univ. of Colorado.

- **Jill Cody** (Recreation Management, ’06) spoke to the Santa Clara County Democratic Club a few days ago about her recently published book, *America Abandoned: The Secret Velvet Coup That Cost Us Our Democracy* (Amazon). She is in demand as a speaker as a result of her book’s timely analysis of how wealthy, controlling interests—an oligarchy of billionaires—constitute a powerful threat to our democratic institutions, which have been seriously eroding. She provides a welter of well-researched evidence to support her unabashed progressive views, with a series of political activities at the end of each chapter designed to fight back.

- **Calvin Stevens** (Geology, ’98) once again calls our attention to his recently published novel entitled *The Swan of Tuonela: A Life in the California Desert*. The experiences of its fictional character are based on actual events of that time and place. It can be found on Amazon under the author’s name, Cal Stevens.

- **Joe Boudreau** (History, ’03) informed friends and colleagues of his wife June’s passing in early January. Although June had been in fragile health for some time, she was taken quickly and unexpectedly in a medical crisis. She was a Licensed Psychologist and Counsellor who, after retirement, enjoyed accompanying Joe to ERFA events.

- **Manjari Ohala** (Linguistics/Language Dvlpm’t, ’14) and her husband, John, travelled to India for personal and professional reasons. Invited by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Guwahati, Assam, she gave a talk on her research and consulted with students working on the endangered languages of that region. She and John were also able to attend family weddings and then tour a wildlife sanctuary where they were lucky enough to cross paths with a tiger in the wild. They were able to take a close-up photo of the magnificent creature from the safety of their safari jeep.
is unacceptable to SJSU and therefore, while the location is conveniently close to the campus, we have no control whatever over that site.

Finally, the Academic Senate debated vigorously a proposal to make the Senate Chair’s position an automatic two-year term of office. Currently, the Chair has the option of serving two years only by informing the senate of that choice in the second semester of his/her first term. Then, a vote must be taken (with the chair absent from the body) and if a super-majority agrees, the chair may serve for a second year. Since this policy has been in effect for about a dozen year every chair willing to serve a second year has been given the super-majority. But when the new proposal for an automatic two-year term came up for a vote, it was narrowly defeated. I made one of the final arguments against the proposal, offering historical information about one chair, many decades ago, who allowed everyone to talk as often and as much as they wished, believing that a consensual compromise would emerge to everyone’s satisfaction. As a result, Senate discussions went on ad nauseum, to little effect. That year the SJSU Senate resembled very much the United States Senate during the past several years.

In addition to a docent-led Museum tour, you’ll hear from an actual Rosie the Riveter about her WW II experiences.

Send in your reservations quickly; tour numbers are limited.