

THE Piedmont

Piedmont's community newspaper since 1916

Friday, October 8, 2010

402

50 cents (tax included)

Sports Bishop O'Dowd football team shuts down Arroyo [B1]

Inside Columnist Bill Mann looks at Michael Krasny's popular radio talk show. [B3]

City Council examining diversity concerns

Questioning of two Piedmont High students prompts discussion of community perceptions, police training, policy

By Linda Davis
Correspondent

The questioning by police of two Piedmont High students — one African-American and the other Ethiopian — in March has escalated into a full-scale examination of commu-

nity perceptions and policing policies regarding treatment of people of color.

People of all cultures packed Monday night's City Council chambers to speak at a hearing about a March 11 incident involving two Piedmont High juniors.

That afternoon, Carison Wade, an African-American, and his friend Essey Adhanom, who is Ethiopian, were walking home from school with their backpacks along Blair Avenue.

Essey told the council Monday night that when they stopped to

rest on a lawn, a "lady was staring at us."

"I told Carison 'I bet she's calling the police,'" said Essey, "She was kind of hiding in the bushes."

The anonymous caller phoned police to say two black juveniles were acting suspiciously, knocking on doors and looking into cars. Police dispatched two units to the scene. The boys were questioned, produced their student IDs and provided their descriptions for a field interview card, ending the matter.

Responding officers were Sgt. Mike Munoz, Officer Catherine

Carr and then-officer-in training Willie Wright. Munoz is Hispanic and Wright is African-American.

The boys told the council Monday night that they were scared and felt intimidated.

"They said they did not ring any doorbells and did nothing wrong."

"When they left, I was angry. I have lived here my whole life," Wade said.

Interim Chief John Hunt said the parents of both students came to the police station that day to inquire why their children were stopped. He said he told them it was in response

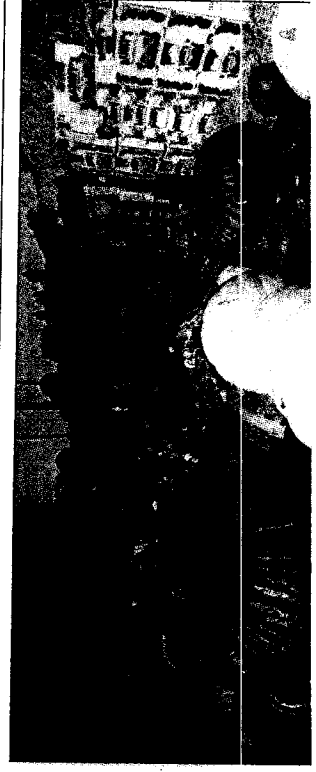
to an anonymous caller. Hunt said neither family filed a complaint and things were quiet for a few months.

In June, Hunt was contacted by Maude Pervere of the Piedmont Appreciating Diversity Committee. They discussed the incident and another one in December 2008 when a black Piedmont High janitor was held at gunpoint with a K-9 dog after he accidentally set off an alarm at the school around 2 a.m.

Hunt said in both cases officers were doing their jobs and following

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Police

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police procedure.

In July Hunt, City Administrator Geoff Grote, Wade's mother, Cheryl Wade, and her friend Joyce Hicks met to review the transcripts of the police call. Shortly thereafter, Councilwoman Margaret Fujioka asked that a discussion of the incident be put on a council agenda. Hunt met again with members of the Appreciating Diversity Committee to discuss keeping lines of communication open.

The City Council has charged Hunt with looking into specialized diversity training for his officers, producing community bulletins outlining police procedures and analyzing current police policy and procedure. Hunt said he has received no formal complaints about police harassment in the two years he has served as acting chief. The council members will gather more information and look at police policy and will discuss their findings at a council meeting by the end of the year.

Speakers were emotional at Monday night's meeting.

"Why did you call this a suspicious-person incident? Responding to silly calls from racial bigots," Cheryl Wade told the council. "Being detained for five minutes is an eternity, being approached as if you are guilty of something. They were afraid to see three officers come up to them."

Kobi Eshun, a four-year Piedmont resident and man of color, said he experienced two encounters with police. Three units showed up to question Eshun in February 2008 when he was at a playground with his family in Piedmont. In April 2009 he was questioned at his own home after he was walking around his property wearing a hoodie.

"The police demanded to my wife what I was doing there. It made me wonder why in hell I moved here," Eshun said, adding it saddened him that the boys had a simi-

lar experience.

The affluent, predominately white city has about a 3 percent African-American population. Piedmont has two black officers, one Hispanic officer, one Asian reserve officer, two Hispanic and two black dispatchers, plus two black part-time parking officers on its 26-member police force.

Residents are vigilant about strangers in their neighborhood, but often the calls are unfounded and determined to be a handyman, domestic worker, salesperson or gardener. Burglars and muggers do hit Piedmont periodically, and police get a lot of calls from concerned residents.

Numerous speakers Monday night called for better communication and review of policies. The newly-formed Public Safety Committee will address issues at its upcoming meetings.

"This is a sensitive issue," Joyce Hicks said. "It resonates with me."

"This experience made me ashamed to be a Piedmonter," Kate Mitchell said. "My light-skinned, freckled-faced boy has never been stopped."

Hunt said he could not provide statistics on how many white juveniles were questioned this year compared to juveniles of color. To do so, he would have to manually read each incident report containing the subject's description to determine the ethnicity of the juvenile.

Lois Corrin, who organizes the annual Martin Luther King Jr. commemoration in Piedmont, said she was heartened by the diverse turnout at Monday's meeting and hoped for a positive outcome.

Millennium teacher Richard Meyers has a racially-mixed family.

"School is clearly an unwelcoming experience for some (minorities) who just leave. It just happens to them as outsiders," he said.

The public is invited to attend the next Public Safety Committee meeting at 5 p.m. Oct. 27 in the police department conference room.

Calendar

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■ **East Bay Moms** — Meets Friday mornings. Planned activities for parents with their infants and toddlers, including a hike or stroller walk. Featuring mom's day out, indoor play sessions, retreats, family day, Music Together classes and more. 510-653-7867, www.eastbaymoms.com.

■ **Education Not Incarceration** — Oakland chapter works to empower youth and stop them from being pushed from school into prison. Volunteers needed. People of color, women, migrants, LGBTQ and working-class candidates encouraged to apply. 510-868-1870, www.ednotinc.org.

■ **Feldenkrais Classes** — 10-11 a.m. Fridays. Feldenkrais lessons can help one reduce pain, find movement possibilities and increase comfort. All ages/physical abilities welcome. Downtown Oakland Senior Center, 200 Grand Ave., second floor hall. Free. Details: 510-238-3284.

■ **Friends of Beaconsfield Canyon** — Canyon restoration, 9 a.m.-noon Saturday; last Saturdays monthly. Help reduce fire hazard and restore area by removing invasive plants and trash, planting native seedlings, extending trails. No experience necessary. Bring work gloves, water bottle and garden tools if you have them; wear sturdy shoes and long pants. Meet at end of Beaconsfield Place in Piedmont Pines. Richard, 510-531-1237; richard@rkcommunications.com.

■ **Friends of the Montclair RR Trail** — Trail Maintenance, help reduce fire hazard, 9-11 a.m. every third Saturday of the month, all ages welcome, wear long pants and sleeves, bring water and tools if you have them, meet on the trail at the benches by the Snake Road bridge, for group work days call Carolyn, 510-406-7186, montclairRRTrail@gmail.com.

■ **Friendship Circle** — Meets 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Wednesdays. A nondenominational group for older adults. Group offers day trips, holiday celebrations, entertainment and speakers. Oakland Senior Center, 200 Grand Ave. 510-530-1725.

■ **Harmony Center** — Sunday Spiritual Celebration, 11 a.m.-noon, Sundays. Friendly and open-minded spiritual community that supports you on your spiritual and life path. Free. Oakland Veterans' Hall, 200 Grand Ave., Oakland.

Details: Dani
www.joyfulha

■ **Jack London Market**, 9 a.m. Free Yoga, 9:30 Sundays. Free cooking local chef, first each month. and tours with educator, 11 a.m. and Sunday at London Plaza St. www.jackl

■ **Lakeview Tea** 7-8 a.m. Thursday. public speaking Pavilion, Cafe Room, Summit Bill, 510-451-2127, www.lakeview2767.com

■ **Mandana Community Center** — Information regarding well-being all presentational by health professional Tuesday, 3989 595-9690, www.mandana.org/homepage click on link for

■ **MOMS Club** and their babies children welcome park days, special nights out and calendar offerings throughout the 8606, http://www.land.itgo.com.

■ **Montclair 4th** 4-6 p.m. third Monday. Montclair Recreation Center, 6300 Moraga, county4h.org.

■ **Mothers & More** — Meets 7:30 p.m. first and third days monthly. Church, 5201 F 8563, http://www.mtripod.com.

■ **Museum of Contemporary Art** — Drop-in art sessions with hands-on activities with revolution. 528 Ninth St. 510-462-2222, www.mocha.org.

■ **National Organization** — Oakland/Alameda meetings, 6 p.m. monthly. 510-231-1234

■ **North Oakland Representative** is at College Ave., at how this nonprofit community can help in their homes

■ **Nourishing the Connection** — Work sessions 6 p.m. second and fourth days monthly. Each w

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