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**Alameda Sun Almanac**

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Today	6:48	19:23
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# City Manager Settles into Position

A one-on-one interview with Eric Levitt after four months

**Jessica Mei**  
 Alameda's new City Manager, Eric J. Levitt came into office on April 12. The *Alameda Sun* interviewed Levitt recently and asked questions about his new role, challenges and plans for the city. The City Manager is appointed through the City Council. Roles of the City Manager include: providing policy support and recommendations to the Council and leadership and direction for all city departments. Levitt comes with 18 years of city management experience at his former position in Simi Valley, Calif., Janesville, Wisc., and Sedona, Ariz., making Alameda the fourth city he's served as City Manager.

**Part One**  
**Sun:** How are you liking the job so far?

**Levitt:** I really like it. I think it's great. I think the community is a very engaged community, which is very great for the city. The City Council has a vision, and working

with them to move their vision forward has been a great experience. The department directors are very strong here, so overall I think it's been going very well.

**Sun:** What do you see as the city's greatest challenge right now?

**Levitt:** Housing is a huge challenge, providing affordable housing and tenants being able to maintain affordability in their rent. The Council is also trying to address housing affordability, homeless issues facing the city and issues with transportation and traffic. We are also dealing with the development of Alameda Point while maintaining community character.

**Sun:** In what way do you see you, yourself making the most significant impact on this city?

**Levitt:** I've been a city manager for 18 years and Alameda is my fourth city I've served as City Manager. Something I've learned is that I tend to work with the community — specifically the Council — to implement the Council's

goals, establish those goals and help them implement those goals moving forward. That's how I see myself. I am an implementer and strategist.

When you look at major areas such as climate action, which is one of the challenges that we're facing, it's a big project. The implementation and organization of the resources and communication of those resources is very important. With climate action, housing programs and the development of Alameda Point, I can bring different elements of my experience such as: ground-build development at Janesville, (an industrial city), working with the commercial sector and district in Sedona and working with residents. That's how I see myself fitting in and working with the Council. I believe in the partnership approach.

**Sun:** Before we move on to the next question, can you elaborate on the specifics of climate action?

**Levitt:** We have a new plan called the Climate Action and Resiliency Plan, which will deal with how to lower the impacts of greenhouse gases, protect our community from sea-level rise and deal with transportation issues. Climate action is both trying to help improve the environment and help our residents within the plan. One thing that has already occurred from climate action is that Alameda Municipal Power has been working to move all electricity to sustainable or clean energy, essentially making Alameda carbon neutral to combat climate change. I think greenhouse gases, sea-level rise and transportation are the main focuses of the Climate Action and Resiliency Plan.



City Manager Eric J. Levitt buddied up with A's mascot Stomper at a town hall meeting to discuss the team's new stadium with Alamedans in May.

**Sun:** What projects or initiatives would you like residents to know about or especially pay attention to?

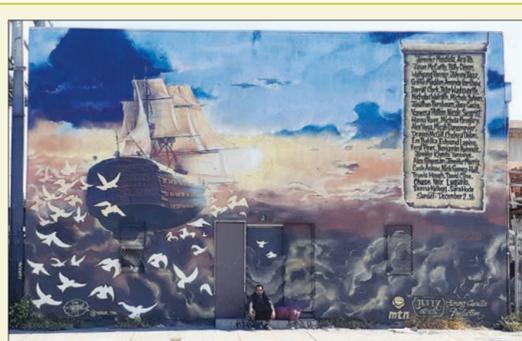
**Levitt:** Climate action is a major one. We're dealing with sea-level rise, greenhouse gases and we also have a stormwater initiative for property owners. I'd like to mention construction of our new park from Main Street to Webster Street, and the new Krusi Park Recreation

center, which should open in the early 2020s. We are working on a two-lane boat ramp and launch facility, construction has already begun. The city is also working in partnership with the school district on the construction of two pools for a future city aquatic center.

We also have the active transportation plan and are working on finding alternative modes of transportation and dealing with congestion. A key element in the transportation plan is the Seaplane Lagoon Ferry Terminal which we hope will be online by fall 2020. We have a \$750,000 grant that we're working on to improve issues with the homeless population. The city is working with nonprofits, such as Operation Dignity to improve the situation for the homeless.

Part two of this interview will appear here next week.

Jessica Mei is an Alameda Sun intern. She can be reached at [editor@alamedasun.com](mailto:editor@alamedasun.com).



The Ghost Ship sails on in this mural on East 12th Street in Oakland. The doves represent the 36 people who lost their lives in the Dec. 2, 2016, fire.

## Ghost Ship Trial Concludes

**Ekene Ikeme**  
 The two men charged with 36 counts of involuntary manslaughter for the 2016 Oakland Ghost Ship warehouse fire received different outcomes at their criminal trial Thursday, Sept. 5.

No verdict was reached on charges against Derick Almerna, the master tenant of the warehouse. The 12 jurors could not reach a unanimous decision. Ten jurors found him guilty, while two found him not guilty, according to reports. Alameda County Superior Court Judge Trina Thompson declared a mistrial in Almerna's trial. A hearing on a possible retrial for Almerna is scheduled for Oct. 4, according to the Alameda County District Attorney's Office. Almerna is scheduled to attend the hearing.

The two jurors who voted "not guilty" believed responsibility should fall on the warehouse's landlord, Chor Ng, not Almerna, according to reports.

The second defendant, Max Harris, was acquitted of all charges. Harris, the creative director of the warehouse space, was released from Santa Rita Jail in Dublin after his acquittal. Almerna will remain in custody at the jail until his retrial hearing or until he posts bail, set at \$750,000.

The jury deliberations faced several twists en route to last Thursday's decision. The trial began on April 30. The jury began deliberating on Aug. 1. On the 10th day of deliberations,

Thompson dismissed three jurors from the case for misconduct. Almerna's defense attorney Tony Serra said one of the jurors consulted with a firefighter for advice who was not a witness in the case, then shared the information with the two other jurors, according to reports. The three dismissed jurors were replaced by alternates.

Thirty-six people died in at the Oakland warehouse fire Friday, Dec. 2, 2016 including Alameda native and Alameda High School (AHS) graduate, Johnny Igaz ("Ghost Ship Blaze Claims AHS Grad" Dec. 6, 2016). He graduated from AHS in 1999. Igaz was a DJ who used the name "Nackt." He was at the warehouse playing his music between sets of live music. Thirty-five of the deceased were attending the music performance and one was a tenant living in the warehouse.

In 2014, Ng leased the warehouse on 31st Avenue in Oakland to Almerna. Almerna planned to create an artists' colony within the space. He also rented out space for people to live. The tenants created a maze of living spaces. The building's occupants added an entertainment venue on the second floor. With no permits to fuss with and no inspectors to please, the tenants turned the warehouse into a maze with no way to escape in an emergency.

Several of the victim's family members have filed civil lawsuits against the City of Oakland for failure to inspect the warehouse.



The Ghost Ship warehouse still stands on 31st Avenue in Oakland with a memory tree crafted to resemble a weeping willow. Mourners still leave mementos on or beneath this symbolic tree.

## 211 Can Help

### Sun Staff Reports

Dialing "211" in Alameda provides individuals and families in need with a shortcut through what can be a bewildering maze of health and human service agency phone numbers. By simply dialing 211, those in need of assistance can be referred — and sometimes connected — to appropriate agencies and community organizations.

Dialing 211 helps direct callers to services for, among others: the elderly, the disabled, those who do not speak English, those with a personal crisis, those with limited reading skills and those who are new to their communities.

### How 211 works

211 works a bit like 911. Calls to 211 are routed by the local telephone company to a local or regional calling center. The 211 center's referral specialists receive requests from callers, access databases of resources available from private and public health and human service agencies, match the callers' needs to available resources and link or refer them directly to an agency or organization that can help.

### Types of referrals offered

**Basic Human Needs Resources** — including food and clothing banks, shelters, rent assistance and utility assistance.

**Physical and Mental Health Resources** — including health insurance programs, Medicaid and Medicare, maternal health resources, health insurance programs for children, medical information lines, crisis intervention

services, support groups, counseling and drug and alcohol intervention and rehabilitation.

**Work Support** — including financial assistance, job training, transportation assistance and education programs.

**Access to Services in Non-English Languages** — including language translation and interpretation services to help non-English-speaking people find public resources.

**Support for Older Americans and Persons with Disabilities** — including adult day care, community meals, respite care, home health care, transportation and homemaker services.

**Children, Youth and Family Support** — including child care, after-school programs, educational programs for low-income families, family resource centers, summer camps and recreation programs, mentoring, tutoring and protective services.

**Suicide Prevention** — referral to suicide prevention help organizations. Callers can also dial the following National Suicide Prevention Hotline numbers which are operated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) and 1-877-SUICIDA (1-877-784-2432) for service in Spanish.

Those who wish to donate time or money to community help organizations can also do so by dialing 211. To learn more about 211 services specifically available in Alameda, visit [www.211.org](http://www.211.org).

## Alamedan Arrested, Arraigned

### APD plays role in county robbery investigation

#### Dennis Evanovsky

On Tuesday, Sept. 4, Alameda County District Attorney's office arraigned seven alleged participants in a series of robberies of United Parcel Service and Federal Express drivers as the drivers delivered merchandise.

According to the DA, the alleged robberies — at least 61 of them — began on Dec. 6, 2018, and lasted until Aug. 21. Prosecutors allege the robbery crew rented vehicles and followed the delivery truck drivers as they were dropping off packages. The DA's office stated that the alleged robbers rushed the drivers, grabbed boxes of merchandise and ran to their rented vehicles.

"In some cases, force or fear was used in the crimes," District Attorney Nancy O'Malley stated in the release announcing the arraignments.

Alameda Police Department (APD) was among the agencies that arrested the individuals involved. Among the men arrested and arraigned was Alameda resident Cornelius Ronnell Brown. Police also arrested Isaiah Langley in Lake Forest, Ill. The Oakland Raiders signed Langley in June and cut him from the roster last month. The Indianapolis Colts signed Langley, but waived him when they learned of his arrest.

During the arrests, authorities confiscated six weapons — including an assault rifle — and other evidence. Four suspects remain at large.

## Learn Physics at Library

### Sun Staff Reports

On Monday, Sept. 16, at 2 p.m. the Alameda Free Library is hosting a Social Science presentation titled, "The Most Famous Equation."

Around the world, people recognize that E=mc<sup>2</sup> oozes cosmic wisdom. But what does this "most famous equation" really say? What are energy and mass? And what makes the speed of light, c, so important? Using little more than common experience and ninth-grade math, Einstein's "special relativity" gem can come to life with surprising insights into the nature of reality.

This free educational program is being facilitated by Tucker Hiatt, physics teacher and founding director of Wonderfest (wonderfest.org). In 2006, Hiatt won the Amgen Award for Science Teaching Excellence and from 2008 to 2014 he was a visiting scholar in the Stanford Chemistry Department.

This program will take place in the Stafford Room at the Main Library, 1550 Oak St.

For more information on this and other library programs, visit [www.alamedafree.org/events-directory/calendar](http://www.alamedafree.org/events-directory/calendar) or contact the Alameda Free Library at 747-7713.