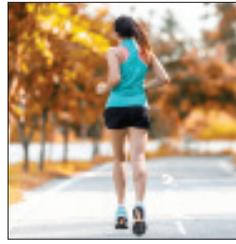




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Los Altos Town Crier

Vol. 73 No. 50 • 50 cents

losaltosonline.com

WEDNESDAY • December 16, 2020

Community news for Los Altos, Los Altos Hills and Mountain View since 1947

Schmidt claims Hills council seat by one vote after recount

By Megan V. Winslow
Staff Writer/meganw@latc.com

Yes, every vote truly does count. Following a manual Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters recount of the Nov. 3 election results, business owner Lisa Schmidt won the third and final seat on the Los Altos Hills City Council, beating competitor Jay Sutaria by a single vote.

Schmidt described her excitement after hearing the announcement via an email from Virginia Bloom, assistant registrar of voters, at approximately 12:15 p.m. Monday.

“I’ve tried to take a Zen-like approach to this,” Schmidt said. “I really hoped I’d win, of course, but I had to say, ‘Well, if it doesn’t happen, it doesn’t happen and there’s

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Blazing a trail Fligor elected LA’s first Black mayor

By Eric He
Staff Writer/erich@latc.com

Back in 2016, Jeannie Bruins remembered passing Neysa Fligor on the campaign trail. They were both running for Los Altos City Council – Bruins to keep her seat, Fligor for the first time. And though they were technically rivals, Bruins couldn’t deny gravitating toward Fligor and even vouching for her candidacy.

“When you’re out there on the campaign trail, it’s all about ‘me.’ You’re the competition,” Bruins said. “But every time she and I would pass each other, I’d be, like, ‘Neysa, I can’t help myself.’”

Fligor lost her bid for council that year in heartbreaking fashion – by six votes. After a brief stint on the El Camino Healthcare District Board of Directors, she tried again in 2018. This time, not only did she claim a council seat, but she also won the most votes and every precinct in Los Altos to become the

city’s first Black council member.

Last week, Fligor further cemented her spot in the record books when she was elected the city’s first Black mayor in its 68-year history.

“Somebody’s got to break the barrier and be the first,” said Bruins, who departed the council last week after serving two terms. “I cannot think of a better person to be the first in Los Altos.”

A symbolic moment

In an interview the morning after her election, Fligor said that for her, winning a council seat in 2018 was more important than being chosen as mayor.

“Everyone knew I was a Black female running for Los Altos City Council,” she said. “The mayor is a rotated role. It doesn’t take away the symbolism or significance. But in 2018, they voted for me. That, to me, said a lot about our residents and the fact that they embraced diversity.”



COURTESY OF CITY OF LOS ALTOS

Santa Clara County Supervisor Joe Simitian swears in Neysa Fligor, pictured with her family, as Los Altos mayor.

But Fligor, who also works as a tech executive at Hewlett-Packard, understood the gravity of her mayorship. The number of Black residents in Los Altos is a fraction of 1%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, or roughly 150 out of a population of 30,000.

“I know a lot of people are proud of me being mayor and what that represents, and I take it very seriously,” Fligor said.

“I think, for me, it’s even more important to make sure I do this well. I represent the entire community. But I also know that when I speak, I do represent the 150 Black families in Los Altos in the sense that I’m the first, and people look to me for that kind of representation.”

The timing is also significant. This year, there were important

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In-person classes on hold as LASD faces staffing shortage

By Zoe Morgan
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The Los Altos School District has paused all in-person classes and moved back to fully remote learning this week as a result of high numbers of staff absences.

All students who had been attending in-person classes returned to learning from home beginning Monday. Starting next week, the district will be off for winter break, during

which time administrators plan to assess staff availability and consult with health officials as COVID-19 cases rise in the broader community.

“We are experiencing a high number of staff absences, as we sometimes do during the winter months, stretching our staffing levels very thin,” Superintendent Jeff Baier said in an email to families Friday afternoon. “Whereas normally we could

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Defendant in Los Altos murder case sentenced

By Megan V. Winslow
Staff Writer/meganw@latc.com



MEGAN V. WINSLOW/TOWN CRIER

Defendant Edgar Geovani Lainez-Portillo learns his fate at his sentencing hearing last week.

A Redwood City man who shot and killed a masonry worker in a south Los Altos backyard earlier this year will serve 50 years to life for the city’s first murder in more than a quarter-century.

Santa Clara County Superior Court Judge Charles E. Wilson II spoke directly to defendant Edgar Geovani Lainez-Portillo Dec. 8 after listening to statements from victim Roberto Rivera’s children and their mother.

“I’m hoping that the time you’re going to be spending – and it is significant, in custody – that you’ll have an opportunity to think about why you’re there,” Wilson said. “As the victim was speaking today, I couldn’t help but think about how painful it is for them to consider what their future is going to hold without their family member. And that is a result of your actions. Let there be no doubt about it.”

Lainez-Portillo, 25, did not speak at the sentencing hearing, but he seemed to nod his head as

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MAYOR

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conversations that took place about racial injustice in America and movements both nationally and locally to address systemic racism.

“To know that Los Altos, a small city in California, just nominated its first Black mayor – that, to me, sends a clear message that we are part of this broader conversation,” Fligor said.

As much as Fligor’s ascension might be significant to Los Altos residents, she noted that it could also change outsiders’ perception of the city.

“People looking from outside who may not know Los Altos well or may have a different impression of Los Altos, they hear from any media source that Los Altos actually has a Black mayor – just think about the impact that has and the message it sends about our community,” she said.

‘A role model’

Fligor, who was born and raised in Jamaica, attended law school at Georgetown University. To pay off her student loans, she started in private practice but always knew



TOWN CRIER FILE PHOTO

Neysa Fligor, holding a sign reading “Justice!,” takes part in a Los Altos protest in June following the death of George Floyd.

she wanted to transition to the public sector. In 2006, Fligor took a job as the deputy county counsel for Santa Clara County, her official introduction to public service. There, she delved into how government functions and how she could best play a role.

Fligor and her family moved to Los Altos in 2010. A month after arriving, she was leafing through the Town Crier and saw advertisements to apply for openings on various city commissions. She applied for the popular Planning Commission and didn’t get selected. But the city council at the time asked if she’d be willing to serve

on the newly formed Grant Writing Committee. She agreed, and soon found herself pulled further into the world of Los Altos public service.

A decade later, Fligor is the city’s foremost public servant. But her life is more than that. She is the mother of two children – a third-grader and a seventh-grader – and is believed to be the first mayor also to have school-aged kids in recent memory.

Fligor said that at drop-offs, other parents would encourage her to run for council to give them a seat at the table. Many of her supporters during both campaigns

were parents, and she remembers that when she sits on the dais. She knows many parents aren’t able to attend council meetings at 7 p.m. on Tuesday nights, because they’re just getting home from work, making dinner, putting their kids to bed and “juggling 100 things, which I completely understand.”

“Obviously, I represent the entire community, but when there are opportunities to mention what I know young families are going through, or if there’s a policy I’m implementing, I want to make sure the policy will work for young families,” she said. “That’s definitely something that I try to emphasize.”

Other parents, friends and supporters saw Fligor’s personality and interests and knew she would be the perfect fit for the council. Her beaming smile, they note, lights up the room – even during the densest of policy discussions.

“She is delightful,” Bruins said. “She is such a role model in terms of being positive and energetic. She can be very serious, but not take herself so seriously. She’s got that contagious enthusiasm.”

Jan Pepper, the outgoing mayor, said Fligor is “very tactful” in the way she presents things.

“Neysa’s great,” Pepper said. “She’s very smart, very capable. I think she’ll do a great job.”

Fligor, like most parents of school-aged children, is adapting to being home with the family during the pandemic – though her third-grader was recently able to return to in-person schooling. She knows these times aren’t easy.

“I’ll be the first to admit: Sometimes balls do drop,” Fligor said. “But the advice I give to parents is, ‘Just keep going.’ If the ball drops – you forget to do something, you forget to order that lunch, you’re supposed to be on a phone call and you forgot – don’t dwell on it. It’s OK. Figure out how to avoid that happening next time.”

And though Fligor declined, with a laugh, to reveal how many hours she worked a day – between parenting, her job and the council – the new mayor wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I enjoy my day job,” she said. “My family, they’re my world. I do enjoy serving Los Altos. I enjoy meetings and policy, and really delving into an issue and figuring out what our options are, the pros and cons. I love the discussion. I really enjoy what I do and I feel so fortunate to be in this position.”



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