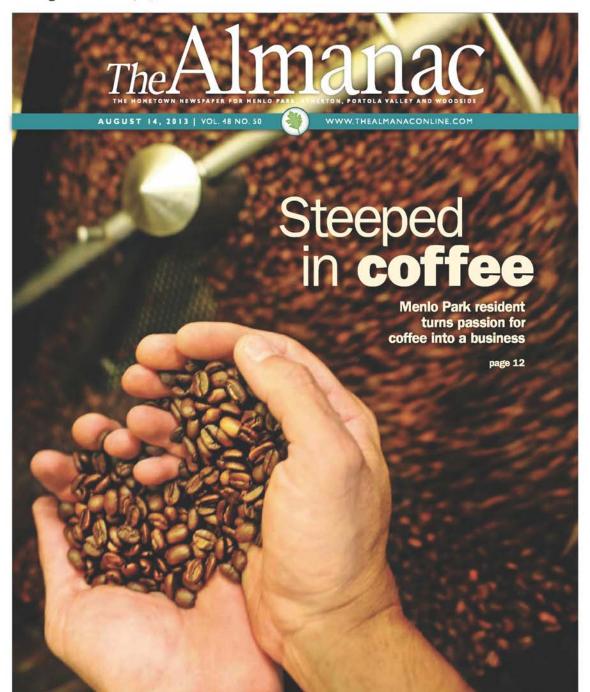
Burglaries and thefts are rising in the area | Page 7



Steeped in coffee



Menlo Park resident turns passion for coffee into a business

By Barbara Wood | Photos by Michelle Le

ou could say Oscar Nunez, the proprietor of High Note coffee, has coffee in

Although Mr. Nunez, 42, was born in State Island, until the age of 10 he lived just outside San Pedro Sula, Honduras, where his

Pedro Sula, Honduras, where his relatives have been growing coffee for more than a century. "Coffee has always had a place in my life," says Mr. Nunez, who now lives in Menlo Park and imports and roasts the beans and sells them at farmers' markers in Woodside Pownlad Valley. kets in Woodside, Portola Valley, Daly City, San Carlos and Palo Alto. He also wholesales coffee around the world, including to such places as China and Poland, and to local restaurants

Boston University, where he received a degree in environmental science in 1993 and worked as a barista at Terroir Coffee. Owner George Howell was one Owner George Howell was one of the first to roast and sell single source coffces. At Terroir, Mr. Nunez says, "I started to see the value of coffee as a business."

Mr. Howell, something of a legend in the coffee world, was a mentor for Mr. Nunez.

But it wasn't until years later, after, Mr. Nunez speni a dozen.

after Mr. Nunez spent a dozen years policing companies for com-pliance with state environmental rules, and after a few more years atter Mr. Nunex spent a dozen years policing companies for come and family, but, once again, Mr. plance with state environmental rules, and after a few more years with his heart. "My girffrend consulting for big box companies really thought we could make a

He sources his beans directly from growers all over the world, many of whom he met through are certified as "fair trade," which means that producers are paid at least a minimum price and do not use child labor

pesticides or herbicides.

Today Mr. Nunez imports cof-fee from Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Costa Rica, Peru, Brazil, Indonesia (Java, Sumatra and Sulawesi), Ethiopia, Congo, Burundi, Kenya and Tanzania, in addition to Honduras. He visits coffee-growing regions looking for quality and quantity, Mr. Nunez says. He tries to work with smaller farm

ers and pays them directly for their coffee. "The travel is a lot of fun," he says. "The sleeping A special goal is to get the world to realize that Honduras grows high quality coffees. "It's become sort of a social mission statement

to try to produce a quality cup of Honduran coffee," he says. He got even more into cof-fee when he started roasting beans in a borrowed roaster know what his wholesale beans tasted like. At first he just gave the finished beans to friends





One source of the beans is Honduran Capucas, a co-op his relatives belong to.



Oscar Nunez imports his beans directly from growers all over the world



Freshly roasted Indonesian Sulawesi coffee beans on the left, and the uncooked beans on the right.

STORY

There is a little art, a little science to it. What is his favorite coffee? "Don't tell my family," he laughs, "but my Brazil Cerrado. I always roast it light and it's just one of my favorite coffees." The Cerrado also has a low acid level, he says, and is smooth and creamy.

Mr. Nunez, who offers tastes of several

of his coffees at the farmers' market, is trying to convince the public to try lighter roasted coffees. "Everyone wants it dark," he says. "but I'm trying to move them away from that."

Light roasts not only have more caffeine, he says, but are more flavorful with more apparent fruit and floral notes.

As for his dream future, Mr. Nunez says he'd love to open a cafe with a European-type menu, coffee roasting on site, with roasting classes, and, maybe, film nights on travel to coffee-producing regions. Plus, space to store the coffees he wholesales to other roasters. And lots of bicycle parking, since he is an avid rider. Where? Preferably right here on the Midpeninsula, maybe Woodside or Portola Valley.

Just how much coffee does Mr. Nunez drink? Maybe enough to be another reason to say he has coffee in his blood -"ridiculous, copious amounts of coffee,"

Barbara Wood is a freelance writer from Woodside whose daughter worked for High Note Coffee this summer and brough home lots of beans, convincing her tha light roasts do let you brew very highly caffeinated, but delicious, coffee. B

