

Turn to a CPA for help with taxes

By Carol Anne Carroll
CORRESPONDENT

As the 1099s, W-2s, and other alien-sounding forms arrive at your mailbox, you might want to consider hiring Jim Hudkins, an Alameda CPA (certified public accountant). Hudkins, a lifelong Alameda resident, says he is "flamboyant by accountant standards. That means I wear blue jeans and work out of my home," he says, laughing.

Taking a more serious tone, Hudkins adds, "But you really don't want anyone too flamboyant as an accountant handling your financial affairs. I try to strike a good middle ground with people. I'm easier to talk to than an accountant in a suit downtown, but I'm very neat and careful about my work."

Hudkins' clients agree. Once they hire him, the vast majority stay with him. "When clients move, I will stay with them as long as they remain in California. It amazes me that some clients are willing to drive two, three hours to get their taxes done."

Hudkins chalks up this loyalty to the attention, service and confidentiality he provides his clients. "Part of my job is to understand that person, where they are coming from, who they are." Exactly who his clients are can be difficult to define.

"I like to try to explain who they aren't," Hudkins says. "They aren't someone with only a bank account and a regular paycheck coming in, with no itemized deductions, no ownership of a home, etc."

Whether people fit that category can be difficult to define, so Hudkins offers a free initial consultation to all prospective clients. "If their return is so simple, they don't need me, I



Alameda CPA Jim Hudkins chalks up the loyalty of his clients to the attention, service and confidentiality he provides them.

tell them right away. But if there are ways to help them with their taxes, I tell them that, too."

Hudkins, who has been a CPA since 1979, is also a licensed real estate broker and registered mortgage broker, giving him special expertise in real-estate related transactions and their impact on a person's taxes.

"Everything on a closing statement affects a person's taxes, but people tend to forget about that until they are ready to sell the property, and their capital gains taxes are higher than they thought," Hudkins says.

Others see Hudkins when they are desperate. He says that, "Often, people will come to me in something of a crisis or panic mode. They tried to do their tax returns themselves, either manually or using tax software, and are lost in forms and schedules they don't really need."

Other people contact Hudkins when a major event happens in their lives: they buy or sell stock or real estate; acquire rental property; purchase a home; or start a business. Hudkins' services also come in handy when dealing with (or avoiding) an IRS audit.

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a CPA brings objectivity to the return. Most people who do tax returns themselves do so very privately.

"The door is closed, no one is watching over their shoulder. People start out with honest intentions, but lose track of reality."

Hudkins adds that returns prepared by a CPA are neater, with fewer mathematical errors as well. But beyond the temptation to use the ducks on your lagoon as dependents, Hudkins says it's his services as a liaison with the IRS that matter the most.

"I look at every return I prepare and evaluate it, wondering what will the IRS think? If I know things will look unusual to them, I'll prepare additional explanations that will usually prevent an audit."

Hudkins cites an example of a client who had decreasing mental function, and as a result, made significant errors on his previous returns. Hudkins had his doctors write letters to explain the situation, thus eliminating some penalties or fines, and avoiding an audit.

Hudkins says putting his clients at ease is his number one goal. "Sometimes people have fallen behind on payments to the IRS, or they owe a lot of money, and they're worried an accountant will judge them. But I'm here to put them at ease and make them feel comfortable."

"I listen to them, focus on them, and respect them as an individual. I think that is just as important as providing them with a neat, accurate return — which I do as well."

Jim Hudkins can be reached at (510) 865-2298. His office is located at 3319 Central Ave. in Alameda, between Eastshore and Farnside.

Here's looking at you

Catching the solo wave

MY SON IS an aspiring surfer. He lives, breathes and dreams the ocean and the waves. This fixation started when he was 14. One day he came home from soccer, which he had been playing since the age of 4, and announced, "I quit. I want to be a surfer."

"Where did you get that idea from?" asked my husband. He had never stepped on a surfboard let alone a wave. The one time he had come face to face with a wild ride on water was when he was 5 and we took him white water rafting down the Rogue River in Oregon.

He screamed once too many times, so we let him out with a member of the team so we could continue our ride. He met us at the bottom of the river a few hours later, happy that he was on dry land and that we had survived the ordeal.

We still don't know where this desire for surfing came from, but it probably surfaced in his imagination the same way being a soccer player did when he was 4. One day he turned to us and said, "I want to play soccer." To our recollection, he had never seen a game, been to a field or watched it on TV.

So we found him a team and off we went into the exhilarating world of bunch ball. At that age, kids only know to do one thing, and that is to converge on the ball like a swarm of bees on a jelly sandwich, missing kicking it as many times as possible and have a wonderful time in the process. It's the trophies at the end of the season that really captivate them.

My son became a fairly decent soccer player. He had a mean left-foot kick, which the coaches loved, and took the opposition teams completely by surprise. But once he reached high school, the competitive spirit was so fierce among the other boys that he lost his enthusiasm for the sport.

He didn't have a killer attitude nor was he big enough to sustain the blows that he kept getting from opposing teams, so the following year he never tried out for the team. By then a friend had in-

Carolyn Rohrig

vited him to go surfing and he knew what he wanted to do next.

What he wasn't prepared for was the ferocious attitude of the surfing world. It's a close-knit, competitive group and very jealous of newcomers. No one helps anyone. No one lends a hand or acts friendly towards you. If you break any of the unwritten rules on the waves, and there are many, you will be insulted, cursed and yelled at.

One of the biggest mistakes to make is to break in on someone else's wave. As if you can own a wave, but that's one of the unwritten rules. And if you're somebody in the surfing community and you break in on him, then you might as well go down yourself.

My son has taken years of abuse from local surfers. He peddled to and from the beach with his surfboard strapped to his bicycle during his first year of college. Surfers in their trucks laughed at him. Two of his best boards have snapped in two because of high waves and undertows. He doesn't have the best gear and he's not sponsored by anyone. But that doesn't deter him.

Every free moment he has he's in the water in all kinds of weather and conditions. He has improved greatly since he first started and with each success he is determined to get even better. It's just him and God out there with the sea otters and the dolphins.

The last time he came home with banged-up gear and bruised feet, he hugged Calvin and took a long nap on the living room couch. After a hot meal he talked all evening about his latest adventures on the high seas.

His enthusiasm continues to run high for the sport. Calvin says, "That-a-boy! Once you pick up a scent, you follow it with all you've got."

You can reach Carolyn Rohrig by e-mailing her at nash@home.com

Voters will decide Beltline's ultimate fate

By Kristin Bender
STAFF WRITER

ALAMEDA — In November 2002, voters will decide if the Alameda Beltline Railroad Yard — 22 acres of valuable northwest land — will remain as open space.

But for the next two years, the land south of the Marina Village Business Park will remain a place where vernal tree frogs and singing meadowlarks meet hikers, bicyclists and children at play.

The Alameda City Council on Dec. 19 unanimously approved an ordinance that asks voters to decide the fate of the land. Councilwoman Barbara Kerr recused herself from the vote because of a conflict of interest. Her home is 300 feet from part of the property.

"I think it would be irresponsible for this City Council to adopt this (ordinance now) and not allow the voters to be part of the decision," said Councilwoman Beverly Johnson.

Mayor Ralph Appenzato concurred. "As far as I'm concerned, no action will be taken until the people speak in 2002," he said.

Outdoor lovers said the land is a gold mine because it links bike trails from the ferry and Alameda Point and those that lead over the Fruitvale Bridge to the BART station. But developers also have an interest in it for 200 upscale homes.

The voters will now have to decide. There are 52 rail lines in California that have been developed as trails. Another 78 are in the works, according to Rails-to-Trails.

In many communities where they have been proposed, such trails get overwhelming community support, said Kate Bickert, state director of Rails to Trails. Along with the Trust for Public Land, Rails has offered guidance and assistance in finding funding.

"In my experience, Alameda has a lot more support for this trail project than in other places," Bickert said.

The open space ordinance was on the table because 10 percent of Alameda's voters earlier this year signed a petition to turn the former beltline into park land. At its meeting, the council could have approved the land as open space.

Alameda has a dearth of park land, according to a city report. California cities strive to meet standards calling for 3 to 6 acres of green space per 1,000 residents. When Alameda is built out and 52 acres of park land designated in the city's general plan are constructed, Alameda will have only 2.3 acres per 1,000 residents, the report says.

But open space advocates aren't the only ones interested in the land.

Last year, Sun Country Developers in Pleasanton made a reported \$15 million to \$22 million bid on the property. The developer wants to build about 200 single family homes that would be priced from \$400,000 to \$450,000.

Ownership of the land is tied up in court. The land is owned by the Alameda Beltline, but based on a 1924 agreement that created the railroad, the city has the right to buy back the property for the original purchase price plus improvements.

Last year, when the city announced its intention to buy the property, the railroad sued to prevent the sale. The city countersued on the basis that the railroad would be breaking the old agreement. The suits are expected to be settled before the measure goes before voters.

The beltline and its extensions lie south of Marina Village between Constitution Way, Sherman Street and Eagle and Atlantic avenues.

It was once home to railroad tracks used by trains serving companies on the northern waterfront. If development prevails, it will bring the city more than \$1 million in taxes and redevelopment fees.

Why so much cell phone use in Alameda?

DOROTHY EGGERS DeMARRA laughingly wonders, "Why are so many Alamedans hooked on cell phones?"

A good question! They're on the phone while driving, walking, shopping, waiting for the bus... everywhere.

Dorothy, who went to Alameda High in the 30s — "We didn't have one 10th of what kids today have" — says she agrees with late humorist Art Hoppe:

"Half of all cell phone users are probably lonely individuals who've been shushed all their lives — and at last have something to talk to."

Paul Anders, D.D.S., reports one of his patients "looks years and years younger than her actual



Everett Johannes

age" and gives all the credit to "oatmeal for breakfast every morning."

Mabel Kollmyer still lives only a block away from Franklin School, where she taught thousands of us when we were kids.

The beloved educator says "perhaps we're happiest when we help and appreciate the people who happen into our lives."

Mel Sanderson was hale, hardy

and class president during his Alameda High days if this reporter's memory is accurate.

And today as we speak, Sanderson is hale, hardy and chief honcho of the annual clam bake for Old Alamedans (men over 55 who went to school here).

This being the case, we can conclude that when Sanderson gave up smoking Kaywoodies and meerschaums, he found the fountain of youth.

Rose Robles is looking forward to her 100th birthday come July. The lady still loves life and says, "Happiness comes from such things as the daily crossword puzzle, fresh flowers in the room, a little fresh air and sunshine, daily visits with sons Ron and Herb..."

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