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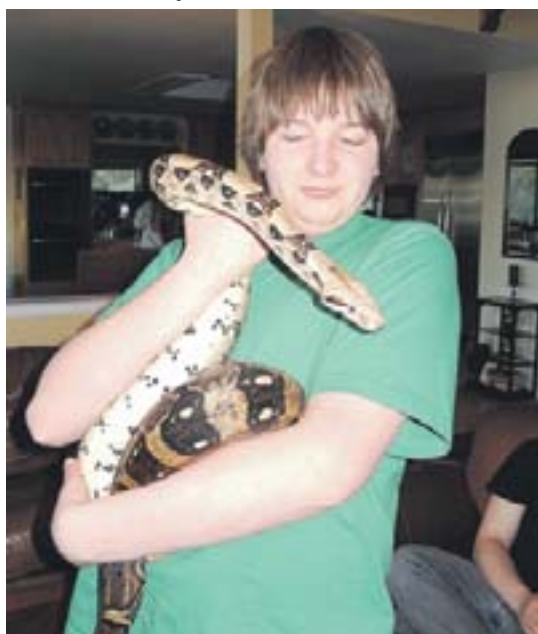
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Orion Academy Students Get Cozy with Reptiles

Submitted by Michelle Barker



Orion Academy student Julian Joseph with a slithery friend. Photo provided

Orion Academy students Fiona Fahey, Julian Joseph, Abby Stypula, Evan Wilmouth, P.J. Gibbs, Cole Beaty, Leighlin Geis and Henry Nanstad – and many creatures – came to the Walnut Creek home of Julia Barker and her family Dec. 8 for the Orion Reptile Party, which was one of the offerings from the auction at the Moraga school's Fall Fiesta that occurs annually in September. Orion Academy strives to educate secondary students with NLD, Asperger's Syndrome and other neurocognitive disorders in a program that equally emphasizes academics, social competency and pragmatic language development. Besides the students, the other guests included a giant African millipede, two tiger salamanders, a bearded dragon, a Mexican rosy boa, a red-tailed boa, an Argentine red tegu lizard, and a 12-foot albino Burmese python. The students all got to touch or hold these live creatures. Plus Jungle James, of Jungle James Animal Adventures, provided a wonderful educational program about each of the creatures, with many of the knowledgeable students chiming in with facts that they knew about the various animals. Besides the animals, the cupcake and ice cream sundae bars were also a big hit.

THE APP RAP

By Eric Pawlakos

App: TextSecure by Whispersystems
For: Android phones
(coming soon for iPhones)
Price: Free

Not a day goes by without some headline alerting us to the spying technologies that can be used today, including the ability to access an individual's email. You assume your text messages are only being read by the person you sent them to, but you can't know for sure. However, if you ever have the need, or desire, to send an encrypted text message from your smartphone, then you should take a look at TextSecure. It is a very straightforward app. You can send text messages to any recipient who is also using TextSecure, with the knowledge that your text will be encrypted and not readable by anyone but the recipient. To ensure full privacy, this app encrypts the text messages over the air so they can't be intercepted and read. They are also encrypted on your phone. The app is simple to use. Once your personal passphrase is inputted, you can turn the app either on or off. The option

exists to copy all your existing text messages to TextSecure and have them encrypted. This is really handy if you ever lose your phone or leave it sitting around where someone else might sneak a peek. Even if you never want to send an encrypted text message, TextSecure's ability to encrypt the text messages saved in your phone makes it an app worth having.



Eric Pawlakos is a sophomore at UC Davis, majoring in statistics. He is a member of the UC Davis rugby team, and enjoys playing guitar in his spare time.

TEEN SCENE

Celebrate Diversity!

By Konnie Guo

The Miramonte High School Diversity Club is working along with the leadership class to bring knowledge to students about the many holidays celebrated during the month of December in addition to Christmas, such as Hanukkah and Kwanzaa.

"It's important to be aware of other cultures and traditions, and not be narrow-minded," said Diversity Club officer Lina Mathkour, "especially since the United States is becoming more and more diverse each year."

Seventeen-year-old Rachel Breen celebrates Hanukkah and is proud of her Jewish heritage. "I'm glad to celebrate Hanukkah because it's a unique and fun holiday," she said. "It's a time to admire miracles and appreciate freedom." Hanukkah celebrates a victorious revolt that liberated the Jewish people in the second century BCE. Led by a man named Judas Maccabee, the Jews were able to successfully return to their Holy Temple in Jerusalem. As tradition states, the Menorah had to be lit to purify the temple, but there was only enough oil to last a day. Miraculously, the oil ended up sustaining the Menorah's flame for eight days and nights, which is honored today within Jewish households when lighting a new candle on the menorah each night. This year, Hanukkah coincided with Thanksgiving, a convergence that will not occur again for another 75,000 years.

Kwanzaa was established in 1966 to recognize African culture, and is a week-long celebration that focuses on seven core values: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. During the week, a kinara, or candleholder, with a total of seven candles is lit to represent these values. There are three red candles on the left, three green ones on the right, and one black candle in the center.

The Diversity Club is looking to spread more awareness to students by planning lunchtime activities during the month, and will be reminding everyone who is celebrating the holidays – be it Christmas, Hanukkah or Kwanzaa – to remember one thing: while the traditions may vary, the spirit of the holidays remains the same.

Konnie Guo is currently a junior at Miramonte High School in Orinda. She is an avid reader, and during her spare time, enjoys playing the piano and doing volunteer work.



Teen Scene is YOUR voice. If you have something to say or have writing skills and want to be part of our Teen Scene team, email our Teen Coach, Cynthia Brian, Cynthia@CynthiaBrian.com.

The opinions expressed in Teen Scene are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly.

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Personal

Can anyone give me info for whereabouts of **Justin Ruhle's mother**? I have not seen her for 10 years since Anandi and Justin's wedding. I think she remarried. Please call Michelle Heart, 707-889-6486

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