

# Reader's Forum

## Your Turn

READERS RESPOND TO THE TIMES

### Chevron deal is good

By John Marquez

This past National Night out, residents asked me about the Chevron Project. I explained that the project has restrictions and that the community derives benefits from it. Many were happily surprised and appreciated the explanations, and understood that my priority is the public's health and safety.

I voted to approve the conditional use permit (CUP) because it restricts air toxic pollutants and greenhouse gases; limits the type of crude refined to light crude (not heavy or dirty crude); reduces sulfur dioxide emissions; and requires ground-level monitoring in Atchison Village, North Richmond and Point Richmond.

I supported the project because I believe it is important to replace the existing 60-year-old machinery and equipment, which is known to be polluting.

In supporting the project, I also voted to approve the following community benefits agreement: \$6 million for a community health plan; Brookside Health Clinic to enhance access to health care and treatment for low-income seniors and low-income working families; \$11.25 million for the Safe Richmond Initiative to increase the number of police officers, train firefighters, and to implement a violence prevention strategy through the Office of Neighborhood Safety; \$10 million to fund nonprofits and community

programs.

The Chevron Project also will provide training for our residents and jobs for 1,200 construction workers. These benefits are a limited list, but I believe they are important to Richmond's most affected residents.

Finally, I have met with and listened to all parties concerned with the Chevron Project (including three times with the state attorney general) and advocated for the conditions and community benefits that improve the environment of our most affected residents.

As an elected representative, I believe that to make good policy decisions, I have to listen to all points of view and meet with all concerned parties.

As vice mayor, I take my role very seriously. The Chevron Project is Richmond's largest project in more than a decade.

When Richmond's mayor refuses to meet with businesses for ideological reasons, Richmond's businesses turn to the vice mayor. And, I am more than willing to step-up to the plate and represent Richmond's best interests.

I sincerely believe that my voting to approve the CUP and the community benefits agreement was the proper thing to do and in the best interest of our most affected residents and the entire city.

*Marquez is vice mayor of Richmond.*

### Double standard is showing

By Dan Bruton

This is regarding Clarence Page's column "Edwards' sin against journalism" Aug. 15.

Page's double standards are showing, not to mention is outright panic that the mainstream media is finding it increasingly difficult to keep a lid on stories that do not propagate your biases.

The fact is that the entire Fourth Estate chose to ignore a major story about a presidential and vice presidential candidate for nearly a year (in election year no less), and may have inadvertently influenced the outcome of the Democratic Party primary (in

charges.

These charges against McCain, by all accounts on the record since, have been said to be baseless.

So let's check the score. While the New York Times is ignoring the allegations against Democrat Edwards, it is breaking nearly identical stories about Republicans McCain and Eliot Spitzer, and just before that, Republican Sen. Larry Craig (some true, some not).

Page then goes on to denigrate the only publication to get it right, for nearly a year no less, while all others looked the other way, (to their right) is only mak-

GUS KRAMER | *From the community*

## Now is the time to buy real estate

AS THE assessor of Contra Costa County since 1995 and a student of the real estate market of the East Bay since 1971, I've never felt more compelled and stronger about advising anyone and everyone who ever thought about getting into real estate to do it now.

Real estate professionals and economists have been watching the real estate market since it peaked in the summer of 2005. Every summer since then, pundits have come out and said, "Oh it can't get any worse." Well, I have good news and bad news. The good news is that real estate has never been more affordable in Contra Costa County. The bad news is that values are probably going to still go a little bit lower until the end of 2008.

So why is now a good time to buy?

Just like the stock market, you can never catch the absolute bottom. Professionals in the stock market refer to this as trying to catch a falling knife. If you are looking for a home to live in, now is the time to start looking for that home and finally find your dream.

You are never going to find it more affordable than today. Yes, values may continue to go down a little bit and if you ask for a nice long escrow, let's say 60 to 90 days (which has become the norm with bank-owned properties), you may be able to negotiate a little more consideration for closing costs, etc., right before escrow closes since the market is still in a downward turn.

The other thing that's going to happen is that the Federal Reserve Bank wants to curb inflation and that can affect interest rates. As a result, now is also a good time to get into an investment house or a house you want to live in because if there is any loss in the value it will be made up by the locking in to a lower interest rate today. After all if you are looking for that dream home to live in for a long time, and the market continues to go down even only 5 percent, that's barely a real estate commission and remember the seller pays that commission, not you. So go out and find that dream home!

In Brentwood, I have a friend who bought a house in October of 2007. It's a beautiful home in Brentwood on the golf course, with four bedrooms, three bathrooms, a three-car garage and a pool. This house sold for \$890,000 in August 2005. In October 2007, he pur-



SUSAN TRIPP POLLARD/STAFF FILE

THE CONTRA COSTA County assessor is encouraging people looking for their dream home in this area that now is the best opportunity to make a good investment.

chased the house for \$530,000. He was dancing on his granite counter tops, doing the Irish Jig that his ancestors had perfected many years ago.

In March of this year, he called me quite upset and said his neighbor's house was selling for \$395,000. Now, had my friend lost any money? No, you don't lose money until you sell the home. He still has that dream home, his wife is still happy, his children are elated and he still lives in Brentwood just two miles from his office in downtown Brentwood.

In Antioch, there was recently a two-bedroom, one-bath house listed in the old part of town for \$129,000! We haven't seen values this low since sometime between 1998 and 2000. In the price range below \$275,000 in Antioch, Brentwood, and Oakley, sellers are getting multiple offers.

Homes above \$400,000 are still having a tough time getting offers and sometimes owners are going begging.

If you ever thought about buying real estate as an investment or rental, now is the time. Buying a house for under \$300,000 with today's interest rates and soaring rental rates at a premium due to foreclosures, you could actually have a positive cash flow. When

the demand comes back for these properties, the escalation of values of the lower-end homes of under \$300,000 are going to be the ones that appreciate the fastest. There are other bargains in other areas in Contra Costa County. Two boutique condo projects have been built in downtown Martinez. One of the projects starts at \$350,000 and the other starts at \$400,000. The units range from 1,400 to 1,700 square feet per unit. In downtown Pleasant Hill and Walnut Creek, there are two very nice condo projects starting in the \$400,000 range. From the project in Walnut Creek, you can literally walk out the front of your facility and be in a very nice table-service restaurant or movie or probably drive to where you work in downtown Walnut Creek in a matter of a minute or two.

In San Ramon, there are three condo/single family projects that are offering real bargains to first-time buyers with affordable prices you haven't seen in that area since 2003.

In the city of Richmond on the water, there is a beautiful planned unit development and condo project selling in the \$400,000-\$500,000 range.

I really don't have a big place in my heart for motiva-

tional speakers or cheerleaders, but there has never been more opportunity to invest in real estate than there is now. God knows the stock market isn't the place to be and real estate is definitely bouncing off the bottom and will be heading north hopefully in the next year to 18 months.

I feel so strongly about the market going up that if you buy property in the next year and it doesn't appreciate, I promise you I will not raise your property taxes.

*Kramer is the Contra Costa County assessor.*