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The BayArea

INDICATORS

Consumers Pay the Price

The consumer price index in the Bay Area has remained flat in this recessionary year, though grocery costs dipped 3.1 percent and electricity rose 13.1 percent, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported Thursday. Here are other developments affecting local pocketbooks.

> Bay Area commuters can expect

an increase of at



Ieast \$1 in the costof crossing all seven local toll

bridges beginning July 1, transportation officials say.

The Bay Area Toll Authority, which manages the bridges, is expected to make a decision in January on how to close a projected annual budget gap of \$140 million. Every option before the authority raises tolls for passenger cars by \$1, to \$5.

In addition, members of the agency's staff say they are leaning toward a first-time charge of \$3 for car pools.

And if you use the Bay Bridge, brace yourself for the possibility of a \$6 rush-hour toll.

Bay Area resi-

dents are joining

in a countrywide

scramble to re-



HOUSING finance or take out new mortgages, local bankers say, as interest rates continue their enticing downward slide. As rates on 30-year fixed mortgages

dropped below 5 percent, refinancing applications have flooded in, said Brad Blackwell, a Danville-based sales manager for Wells Fargo.

"We've seen as much volume in the last three weeks as we've ever had," Mr. Blackwell said. In Antioch and Fairfield, sharp plunges in home values have pre-empted refinancings and there has been a surge in home sales, he added.

Most owners choosing to sell are still finding prices depressed. Figures released Thursday by DQ News showed the median price of a home sold in Solano County was 24.5 percent lower last month than in September 2008. In Napa County, the drop was 18 percent; in Contra Costa County, 12.7 percent; in Santa Clara County, 11 percent. San Francisco home values, down 3.7 percent, fell the least.

The New York Times

New Oakland Police Chief Inherits a Force, and a City, in Turmoil

By JESSE McKINLEY

Anthony W. Batts was enjoying a successful run as the head of the Long Beach police when a headhunter called last winter and asked if the chief's job in Oakland had any appeal. Mr. Batts said no.

Then, he said, came March 21, when a recently released parolee, Lovelle Mixon, shot and killed four Oakland police officers and cemented the city's reputation as the violent crime capital of the Bay Area.

Sitting at the officers' funeral, Mr. Batts said, he changed his mind. "I decided that I'd like to help," he said.

On Monday morning, Mr. Batts will start one of the toughest jobs in American law enforcement, taking over a department demoralized by its losses and distrusted by many it is charged to protect.

While his task is straightforward — get his officers to believe in him and themselves and get his community to do the same the problems are complex: a city already dealing with underperforming schools, an entrenched crack cocaine trade, deadly gangs and a 17 percent unemployment rate. Never mind the surfeit of parolees and probationers who are often entangled in violent crimes.

There are fewer than 800 officers in this city of 404,000. Long Beach, a city of 465,000, has more than 1,000. In Oakland, the force operates under a cloud. The behavior of a group of rogue officers a decade ago led to years of federal oversight, and the city continues to pay millions each year to settle police-related lawsuits. Other Bay Area cities have their own crime dramas - a new chief in San Francisco, charges of racial profiling by the police in San Jose, the Jaycee Dugard case in Antioch — but Oakland's ocean of problems seems wider and deeper. And Oakland officials say it is exactly Mr. Batts's record of managing several problems at once that appealed to them.

"I wanted a police chieff." "I wanted a police chief that was committed to reform, committed to community policing, and one that recognized that public safety is a multidimensional problem," Mayor Ron Dellums said. "We are not going to arrest our way out of this."

Mr. Batts's crime-fighting record is impressive. In seven years as the chief in Long Beach, he helped drive down the violent crime rate to its lowest level in nearly 40 years.



Kevin Arias investigated shooting deaths in East Oakland on Oct. 8. The city is considered the violent crime capital of the area.

"But when you look at the

Not that the force isn't trying,

and having some success. In fact,

with the notable exception of

crime rate," Mr. Batts said, "they

are upside down."

Long Beach and Oakland are both busy port cities with bluecollar roots and almost identical poverty levels. Each has large white, black, Asian and Latino communities. Mr. Dellums called them mirror images.



this time last year, Oakland has actually seen double-digit crime reductions thus far in 2009, including murder (down 19 percent from 2008), robbery (down 18 percent), arson (down 27 percent), larceny (15 percent) and auto theft (23 percent), and smaller reductions in assault and burglary.

But how will Mr. Batts keep the crime rate going down while convincing city residents that the police force is on their side? It seems almost certain that he will call for an expansion of community policing. It is an idea that Oakland has tried and even underwritten — with a 2004 ballot measure that resulted in 63 new "problem-solving" officers — but that Mr. Dellums wants Mr. Batts to expand.

"He understands how to do it on the ground," the mayor said.

That said, veterans of big-city policing say the mayor must also do his part. "You need the political will to get it done," said Howard Safir, the former New York City police commissioner. "You need the guy at your back." Batts and Cynthia Renaud outlined his approach in Long Beach. In particular, he suggested that quality-of-life crimes like vandalism be more vigorously pursued by patrol divisions that draw on diverse skills, like those of nuisance abatement officers.

In one case he cited, officers and community leaders in Long Beach sealed off and collectively monitored a crime-plagued pedestrian bridge. Crime there dropped, he wrote.

Some of these ideas have been used to varying degrees in Oakland. But senior members of the department say they expect bigger changes. "Any time you have a change at an executive level, in any organization, you have a chance for new ideas and new beginnings," said Howard A. Jordan, the acting police chief.

Among the rank and file, meanwhile, the appointment of Mr. Batts — an outsider — has been met with guarded optimism.

"Is he going to be a crime fighter or is he going to be a politician?" said Sgt. Dom Arotzarena, the president of the Oakland Police Officers Association, the *Continued on Following Page*

POWER As Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a bill on Sunday requiring utilities to buy

back renewable energy from private producers at above-market prices, environmental groups and renewable-energy companies prepared for the fight over where the new price will be set.

The more utilities pay for the energy, the more likely there will be a surge in solarpanel installations, though bills might rise, too. Currently, utilities pay roughly 12 cents per kilowatt-hour, and solar advocates want the Public Utilities Commission to make it 20 cents for facilities generating three megawatts or less.

That could increase annual solar-energy production to 750 megawatts, up from today's 14 megawatts, said Bernadette del Chiaro, a lobbyist with Environment California.

Cindy Pollard, a PG&E spokeswoman, said the utility preferred a price set by auction. PG&E will also argue that its purchase costs should not exceed a predetermined total. *GERRY SHIH* Source: Oakland Police Department

THE NEW YORK TIMES

In a 2006 article for the F.B.I. Police Official Law Enforcement Bulletin, Mr. Continue

The 2-Percent Solution Is One Size That Does Not Fit All

The phones wouldn't stop ringing at the office of San Francisco's assessor-recorder. A besieged clerk repeated the same words over and over: "It's too

BARBARY COAST SCOTT JAMES late to appeal." Property tax bills arrived in San Francisco last week. Despite the recession and plummeting home prices, home-

owners are learning that their property values are up, along with their taxes.

Call it the 2-percent solution. Assessors all over California have been addicted to it since 1978 when Proposition 13 capped assessment increases. The most any property value could rise, officially, was 2 percent a year.

Since then, nearly every property assessment automatically goes up 2 percent annually, even if property values are down.

So when Jon Stuber opened a letter in July saying the value of his home had increased, his first reaction was, "No, it didn't!"

Two years ago, Mr. Stuber left a rundown rental, took his life savings and bought a few-frills condo at 15th and Mission. It is rare to be a first-time homeowner

Scott James is an Emmy-winning television journalist and novelist who lives in San Francisco. in one of the world's most expensive cities. Mr. Stuber, originally from modest circumstances in rural Maine, lives a frugal, Huluinstead-of-cable lifestyle.

We have been friends since he moved here a dozen years ago, and I watched him go from slinging hash in a restaurant to managing projects for a biotech firm. He has done hard labor for everything he owns. I was proud of him the day he closed on that condo.

Mr. Stuber bought it in 2007 for \$610,000. No one thinks it is worth that much in 2009, but the city sent him an assessment of \$634,642.

"I'm going to fight," he vowed. "I pretty much found out my property is about \$100,000 less."

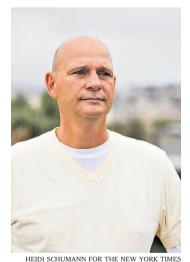
Mr. Stuber is not alone. They are still processing the maelstrom of mail at City Hall, but this could be a record year of about 6,500 property assessment appeals, on par with the recession of 1993. Inspired by my friend's outrage, I studied my own assessment and also filed an appeal.

Homeowners are armed with statistics from Web sites like Zillow.com that show home sale prices down an average of 21 percent in San Francisco from 2008 to 2009. They want more than just a waiver of the 2 percent. If they prevail, it will cost the county more, on some properties, than if there had been no increase.

"We try to be fair," said Phil Ting, San Francisco's assessorrecorder.

Mr. Ting did decrease the assessments on about 5 percent of the properties in San Francisco — 9,997 parcels. But, he said, "everybody who didn't get a decrease went up 2 percent."

Not all assessors take the same approach — though, in fairness, property values elsewhere in the region have taken more of a hit



Jon Stuber is fighting the assessment on the condominium he bought in 2007.

than those in the city.

For instance, Santa Clara County's tax assessor, Larry Stone, reduced the assessments of nearly one in four homes. "If I know someone is over-assessed, why would I look the other way?" Mr. Stone said.

Reductions help those who get them, but an analysis of home sales data for the 2009 tax year shows a price drop in every single San Francisco neighborhood. This explains why people are livid. *Up*? *Is this a joke*?

It is certainly not funny if you try to appeal. To a novice, the paperwork reads like Aramaic translated into gibberish. Then comes the wait. It is expected to take more than a year to process the appeals, and homeowners must pay the contested taxes up front.

Adding to the frustration is that it is already too late to object in many counties. There were warnings, but the problem did not hit home for many people until tax bills arrived — hence the avalanche of incredulous calls to City Hall.

Longtime homeowners are protected from this mess, since Proposition 13 guarantees that their properties are assessed for less than what they are actually worth. But the value of homes bought in San Francisco since 2004, and as far back as 2000 in Santa Clara County, is probably down.

For those homeowners, how can assessors justify any rise? "You're not required to do a 2

percent bump, right?" I asked Mr. Ting.

He stared at me for an uncomfortable moment, like I was blaming him for the anger homeowners feel. Mr. Ting then explained how difficult it was to determine accurate values during this decline, but he said taxpayers might get relief — next year.

"There's talk that there may be no 2 percent across the board," he said.

No more 2 percent solution for anyone. What a concept.

To Our Readers

Starting today, the Bay Area pages will appear every Friday and Sunday, featuring coverage of public affairs, commerce, culture and lifestyles in the region, and providing a complement to The Times's national report in print and online at nytimes.com. We invite your comments at bayarea @nytimes.com.

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Eric Asimov

Wine Lists That Elevate The Cellar

For wine lovers, a restaurant's wine list is a hallowed key to its soul. The menu may reveal the inclinations and ambitions of a chef, but the crucial questions about the food will only be answered through execution and follow-through.

But the wine list?

Carefully examined, it displays the inner nature of a restaurant. Is it a place of vision and creativity and passion? Or has a restaurant's identity been determined by focus groups? Is the craving for profits placed above all else? Or, worst case scenario, has the restaurant completely abdicated the task, or rather the opportunity, and instead handed over the list to a soulless distributor? For that, I have but one word: corkage.

Personally, I always prefer a list of iconoclastic vision over one aimed simply at peoplepleasing, and for that the Bay Area is a treasure-trove, with no shortage of wine lists that express the idealistic intent of their creators.

It's easy to start ticking off names, like the Slanted Door in the Ferry Building along the Embarcadero, where the wine director Mark Ellenbogen put together a list that courageously paired cool-climate, largely European whites with the restaurant's Vietnamese food, even as Americans were gravitating toward big, domestic reds.

Just as bravely, Shelley Lindgren at A16 in the Marina district created a list that celebrated the largely unknown wines of southern Italy. At RN74 in the Millennium Tower in SoMa — where the list incorporates the vast trophy holdings of the wine collector Wilf Jaeger — Raj Parr, the wine director for all of Michael Mina's restaurants, has sprinkled inexpensive treasures throughout, so that if the 1966 Musigny from Roumier is out of range at \$6,400, there's a 2005 Bourgogne rouge from Denis



RED, WHITE OR SHERRY Nopa in San Francisco offers numerous balanced, restrained wines.

A sampling of San Francisco restaurants that Eric Asimov found to have creative wine lists:

NOPA 560 Divisadero Street (415) 864-8643, nopasf.com.

SLANTED DOOR, 1 Ferry Building, No. 3, (415) 861-8032, slanteddoor.com.

A16 2355 Chestnut Street, (415) 771-2216 al6sf.com.

RN74 301 Mission Street, (415) 543-7474, michaelmina .net/rn74.

Bachelet for \$75, or better yet, a superb 2007 Corbières Campagnes from Maxime Magnon for \$54.

But of all the fine wine lists in the Bay Area, my favorite is the one at Nopa, the casual, eclectic gathering spot north of the Panhandle. I'm not saying Nopa has the best wine list in the area. With roughly 200 bottles, and another few dozen half-bottles and magnums, it's by no means the biggest or the most complete. But in the selection of wines, the fair prices and the spirit it connotes, it's closest to my heart.

It takes only a brief glance at the list to see that the wine director, Chris Deegan, has selected bottles that will exalt the simple, clear flavors of the MediterraThe Pour

For more about the pleasures (and the business) of wine, beer and spirits, go to Eric Asimov's blog.

nytimes.com/thepour

nean food. These are wines that for the most part are balanced and restrained, complementary rather than dominant. Often that means wines from Europe rather than California, but, while Nopa's list is heavily European, it is not dogmatically so.

I love to start a meal with a glass of dry sherry, but how often do you see sherry on a list outside of Spanish restaurants? Nopa offers not only the ubiquitous La Gitana Manzanilla, but a fine Amontillado from González Byass and both a palo cortado and a dry oloroso from Emilio Lustau.

Often, if you are the persnickety sort like me who grabs the wine list immediately upon being seated and lingers over it lustfully, you peruse a wine list looking for that safe harbor — that one bottle you know you will like among the dozens you cannot abide. Nopa's whole list is a safe harbor full of bottles that I would be thrilled to open, from classic appellations like the 2008 Fleurie from Domaine du Vissoux, to wonderful oddballs like the Vinja Barde vitovska from the Carso region of Italy.

The domestic selections fit right in. I love Truchard's roussanne from the Carneros, and Copain's Monument Tree pinot noir from the Anderson Valley, while Mount Eden's estate chardonnay from the Santa Cruz Mountains will please both white Burgundy fanatics and lovers of big California chardonnays.

If Nopa's list has a deficiency, it's in the lack of aged wines, not surprising in a small restaurant, which may not have the room to store wines for extended periods. The exception is the Riojas from Lopéz de Heredia, which are not released until they are well aged.

Nopa also offers some littleknown gems, like the 2007 Do Ferreiro Cepas Vellas, a profound old-vines albariño, and the pure, complex 2004 Les Poyeux Saumur Champigny from Clos Rougeard, very good now, even better in 10 years.

Some people might fault Nopa for its lack of pantheon wines, the classic greats that are primarily affordable to wealthy collectors. To me, those special-occasion wines are not necessary. Nopa may have achieved destination status, but it is still essentially a neighborhood hangout. If you must have those wines, I have two suggestions: Corkage, or RN74.

New Oakland Police Chief Inherits a Force in Turmoil

From Preceding Page force's labor union.

The union made wage concessions this year to avoid more than 100 budget-related layoffs, but it remains unclear how the association will react to Mr. Batts's other ideas, like using civilian employees for paperwork duties for officers.

Mr. Batts said he would not coddle a force that has shown a remarkable propensity for selfinflicted wounds, likening them to a team (say, the Raiders) that shows flashes of excellence but constantly incurs penalties.

"They do good police work at times," Mr. Batts said. "But then they do some very stupid things."

And sometimes they take the rap for other departments' actions. In January, the Oakland department found itself dealing with rioters downtown after a young unarmed black man, Oscar Grant III, was shot to death by a BART officer at the Fruitvale stop. Mr. Jordan said even his own mother did not realize that Oakland police had not killed Mr. Grant. But other violent incidents have consistently involved Oakland officers.

Mr. Dellums especially wants the number of shootings by officers to decrease. When Mr. Batts was in Long Beach, the mayor said, "His answer was tell officers to slow down, and think."

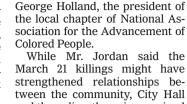
Perhaps the trickiest challenge facing Mr. Batts will be rebuilding trust among the city's African-Americans. They make up 30 percent of the population but suffered almost 80 percent of the murders in 2008.

A Glimmer of Hope

Oakland, one of the nation's most violent cities, has seen a drop in all major crimes except rape so far in 2009, compared with the same period last year.

	2008	2009	PERCENT CHANGE	
Homicide	110	89	-19%	
Aggravated assault	3,130	2,891	-8%	
Rape	185	211	+14%	
Robbery	3,003	2,472	-18%	
Burglary	5,941	5,607	-6%	
Arson	234	170	-27%	
Larceny	5,018	4,244	-15%	
Auto theft	5,685	4,360	-23%	

Source: Oakland Police Department Note: Data as of Wednesday. The New YORK TIMES



"There's a stigma attached in

our community that being a po-

lice officer is a negative," said

and the police, the pain remained palpable within the department. Those moves may be reopened next month when a report on the

month when a report on the shootings is released. "This is sort of a personal

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matter for every officer," he said. It was personal enough

for Mr. Batts that he decided to leave the site of his success and take on as tough a policing assignment as any in the country. His approach remains methodical. He plans to evaluate people for weeks before announcing a three-year strategic plan. And while the mayor is looking for more financing for the police, Mr. Batts is looking for a different kind of support, the

Anthony W.

Batts

"There is no way I can be seen as the guy on the white horse if the body politic and the community is not able to step up and assist." Mr. Batts said. "They can't

nity is not able to step up and assist," Mr. Batts said. "They can't get caught up in, 'This is not my neighborhood.' They have to think of it as 'This is my city.'"

