

Alameda PRESERVATION Press

NEWSLETTER OF THE ALAMEDA
ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Masonry Chimneys – Could They Come Down Like a Ton of Bricks?

by Karen Lithgow

One of the more elegant features of a vintage home is its stately brick chimney and accompanying fireplace. The chimney bricks may extend down the side of a building in an attractive shape or just perch majestically on top of the roof. The chimneys hint at the warmth to be found inside around the fireplace, which generations may have enjoyed throughout the years. Some vintage fireplace surrounds include the most magnificent decorations made from tile, metal and other materials.

But, the dangers lurking amongst these picturesque brick chimneys are all too often hidden from view as many of them have not been reinforced to withstand a powerful earthquake. Unsecured bricks can fly off and become dangerous projectiles with a big enough jolt. When home buyers review the inspection reports provided for a home for sale, they often have both a home and a pest inspection to aid their review of the home's condition. If there is a brick chimney and fireplace, the home inspector may have recommended that a masonry expert be brought in for a more thorough look before the fireplace is used. Most people don't have a burning desire to use a wood-burning fireplace right away, so the issue is often relegated to a future time, post close. Burn day restrictions and concerns about air pollution

along with the mess of fireplace ashes deter some people from pursuing a working fireplace altogether. However, even if the fireplace isn't used, the potential issue of falling bricks in an earthquake is important to consider.

Local home inspector Paul Breitkopf concurs that there is a very high risk of damage in a major earthquake from unreinforced chimneys. Paul has 20+ years of inspection experience and is the third generation in his family with masonry and fireplace construction experience. He says that many of these chimneys remain on rooftops that were damaged from previous quakes and/or significantly eroded from exposure to the elements. Also that the older Victorian structures have the most risk and these older chimneys have bricks with more of a matte appearance, likely with eroded mortar joints. These chimneys will generally require closer inspection by a specialist. Bracing with steel can be effective but the best repair involves an internal rebuild and reinforcing. Often chimneys can be removed and replaced with metal interior components enclosed within a lighter weight wood structure and faced with a thin veneer brick. During Paul's inspection career, he still finds significantly damaged chimneys that were not noticed or checked after seismic events or during routine home maintenance.



*Leaning chimney in East End Alameda.
Image: Karen Lithgow.*

Continued on page 2...

Masonry Chimneys...continued from page 1

So, how can a homeowner tell what shape their chimney is in? Some of the problems are obvious when you see cracks along the brick work, the chimney is curving to one side or bricks have already fallen off. For example, the chimney on the house behind my Victorian has pieces that have fallen off and are wedged between the roof and the chimney. A recently retired contractor friend showed me a picture of his neighbor's Alameda home with a noticeably damaged chimney. He says he frequently has good-humored "discussions" with the neighbor about whether he should be repairing, improving, altering, reinforcing, stabilizing, etc. his fireplace and chimney. Another way to check the condition beyond a visual inspection is to check the firmness of the mortar with a screwdriver, if it's very soft, it's clearly not holding the bricks together. Over long periods of time the consistency turns to sand and the chimney on your roof is just a pile of unreinforced bricks ready to fall when shaken.

Several contractors I've talked to suggest that one way to keep a chimney from crashing through the roof and ceiling is to get a sheet of plywood into the attic and install it close to the chimney. This may stop falling bricks from plunging through the roof and ceiling. Going beyond that DIY repair would involve getting in a masonry chimney expert that could give you the range of available options. According to the Alameda city building department, if you are rebuilding a chimney, it has to look similar to its original shape 'Like for Like' and you can retain your wood-burning fireplace once you've obtained all of the required permits and inspections. The chimney must have the proper stability features added as well. If you're building a chimney and fireplace from scratch, you can't have a wood-burning fireplace but you can have a gas insert.

Before deciding on any projects or repairs, you might want to have your chimney inspected. The Irish Sweep is an Alameda-based professional chimney company that offers a number of chimney and fireplace services from cleaning



*Chimney pulling away from house.
Image: Jason Wady.*



*A rebar holding the chimney.
Image: Jason Wady.*

to structural repairs, fireplace enhancements and chimney removal. Owner Sally McKnight has been in the business for 35 years. Her company uses specialized cameras attached to poles to examine the inside of a chimney, looking at the mortar joints and clay liners to see if repairs are needed. Irish Sweep also specializes in assessing the condition of your chimney with regard to earthquake safety. Their technicians can find signs of previous earthquake damage, and can help protect and reinforce your chimney for future earthquake events.

According to Irish Sweep, once a camera inspection is done and damage is found, there are multiple ways to affect a good repair. One way is to install a stainless steel liner inside the chimney. It's a solid repair although complicated and expensive because of the many components. They can also use a heat shield product which is a ceramic coating that can be applied to the interior surfaces of the chimney and it will fill all voids and cover and secure all fractures in the clay liners rendering the chimney and fireplace safe for use again. Irish Sweep can also conduct masonry repairs including mortar, brick

alignment and brick replacement to ensure your chimney continues to function well for years to come. Once your fireplace and chimney have been thoroughly inspected and cleaned, you can consider the installation of a fireplace insert. The closed combustion system of a fireplace insert can be 60% to 80% heat efficient in the conversion of firewood fuel to usable heat in contrast to traditional fireplaces that convert 5% to 20% into usable heat. They can also install artificial gas logs for lower maintenance and effect on the environment.

If you're looking to rebuild your chimney by a masonry expert, Oakland-based International Masonry is a great option. Owner Jason Wady has been in the business for over 35 years and was trained at the prestigious Colchester Institute in England. International Masonry specializes in the high quality construction, restoration and repair of fireplaces and chimneys. Jason also believes that if there is a big quake, you will see chimneys fly off everywhere because of the many unreinforced masonry chimneys in the area. The age of the home is an indicator, most things built before the 50s will most likely be unreinforced.

Continued on page 3...

Masonry Chimneys...continued from page 2



*Damaged section removed and rebar added.
Image: Jason Wady.*



*Replacement of attic chimney.
Image: Jason Wady.*



*Concrete installed around rebar and straps.
Image: Jason Wady.*



Installation of the existing cleaned bricks with wire and rebar reinforcement. Image: Jason Wady.

Jason says that there are many ways to restore and repair fireplaces and chimneys to improve their structural integrity. The city of Alameda wants chimneys to be put back looking the same but with the required reinforcement including straps and bracing. Jason has a trained eye to determine the best alternatives to repairing a chimney, whether it's a partial or total rebuild. International Masonry is one of the few companies that can do everything when it comes to chimneys. They can also design and build brick or stone fireplaces and can also repair, match and fix loose or missing bricks, stone or blocks in your fireplace or chimney. International Masonry also installs stove inserts including gas inserts as well as gas log setups. They also specialize in chimney cleaning services.

Another local Alameda company that can repair and replace brick chimneys is Hans Thiering Masonry. Hans began working in masonry over 38 years ago after an apprenticeship in the Tri Valley area. Hans and Trudi Thiering have tackled numerous projects throughout the years. From simple, custom patios and walkways on residences, to working on all corners of the illustrious UC Berkeley campus, Prescott Hotel,

lavish San Francisco homes, restorations of historic buildings, and more. The partnership can take on any project that lays ahead. As a small, family owned business, Hans takes pride in his work and has outstanding customer satisfaction. With the amount of skill and honest craftsmanship poured into his work, this ensures a solid result each occasion. Although more of Hans' projects these days include restoration work in larger buildings in Berkeley and San Francisco, he continues to do fireplace rebuilds here in Alameda. Homeowners need to plan ahead to have chimney work done as there can be a long waiting list for this type of work.

Sometimes it makes sense to remove chimney bricks and rebuild using cement with an overlay of brick veneers. One silver lining from having to remove old bricks from a chimney is that the lovely antique bricks can be repurposed right at your property. Many of us who have taken out these vintage bricks have used them to good effect to create brick patios and walkways that look like they're original to your historical property. Brick foundations have supplied a lot of these attractive brick surfaces as well around town.



Whimsical patio design using vintage bricks from a removed chimney. Image: Karen Lithgow.



This chimney has a unique design with ceramic tile inlays. Image: Hans Thiering Masonry.

Let Preservation Begin with You— The Housing Element of Alameda’s General Plan *by Brenden Sullivan*

Our January Newsletter pointed out the importance for AAPS members to participate in Planning Board and City Council meetings so our elected body hears our voice to preserve our beautiful homes by protecting our neighborhoods. Through continued perseverance and tireless efforts put forth by Christopher Buckley and the Preservation Action Committee, the Planning Board has retained some of its original preservation language in the Housing Element. However, preservation efforts are falling short. Our historic homes and beautiful neighborhoods will soon be a thing of the past, if more of us do not get involved—not only locally, but at the State level.

It’s estimated that Alameda’s construction needs are approximately 6,000 to 10,000 new units in order to house approximately 30,000 additional people by 2040. Though the Housing Element of Alameda’s General Plan continues to direct a large portion of the new growth to the Naval Air Station and the industrial sites in the northern waterfront of Alameda—the updated Housing Element has expanded this growth all across the City—including our single-family neighborhoods.

Our preservation policies are even more threatened now than ever before, as Sacramento politicians continue to work with large multi-million-dollar real estate developers under the guise of building affordable housing. They are literally tearing down historic neighborhoods. At the center of this deal are laws like SB-9 and SB-10 – which give blanket permission to property owners and developers to turn a single-family home into as many as four homes on one existing lot with no requirement to increase parking. Instead of allowing cities and counties to develop

neighborhoods in a sensible way that allows for growth and the development of affordable housing, the state imposed a one-size-fits-all approach upon homeowners.

As AAPS members, we need to start with encouraging our own elected officials to advocate for local control over zoning and land use decisions. Namely, that local governments should remain the ultimate decision makers for how their communities are built. For more information on how participate in this effort, contact California Cities for Local Control at: <https://localcontrolca.com>.

As preservationists, I encourage members to go beyond our community and get involved at the regional and State levels by spreading awareness and harvesting support for local municipalities to continue to manage their own land use and zoning issues without being trumped by State mandates driven by political agendas and corporate profits. We should not allow the State Legislature to mandate changes to our cities that will remove local control and be detrimental to our communities, including density, height restrictions, building setbacks and other building characteristics. I urge AAPS members to visit www.ourneighborhoodvoices.com to get involved and join the effort to promote a California initiative that establishes the rights of local cities and counties to control their own zoning regulations.

If the initiative is passed, community control will override state-imposed development mandates and residents will have a voice in the future of their communities by amending the California Constitution to protect the rights of communities to determine their own zoning and development projects.

Let preservation begin with each and every one of us. After all, it does not matter how you feel about preservation. It does not matter what you think about preservation. It only matters what you do for preservation to guarantee we protect our historic homes and beautiful neighborhoods for generations to come.



DO YOU KNOW THE WEDGE?

This small neighborhood (Tilden Way-Blanding Avenue-Park Street) is home to some of Alameda’s most significant antiquities—buildings from the 1870s. Our endeavor will result in a booklet devoted to this 12-block area, and we need help with research, photography, writing, and outreach. Please join us, you are warmly welcome!

Contact Judithlynch7@gmail.com

Home Tour App Opens Doors to the Past *by Conchita Perales*

Highlighting the richness of architectural history in and around the Leonardville Heritage Area of Alameda, over 400 tour-goers had access to detailed information covering over 80 historic properties through AAPS' Alameda Preservation Travel app. For a second year in a row and due to the continued concerns around the spread of the Covid19 virus, the Legacy Home Tour was again organized as an outdoor self-guided walking tour.

The tour features narration by local realtor and Alameda architecture expert Denise Brady. "What makes this tour a particular pleasure for walking is the amazing variety of architectural styles concentrated within six blocks. It also gives you an opportunity to experience and learn about the style differences between Victorian, Colonial Revival, Craftsman, Art Deco, and pre and post World War II era homes, all built between 1878 and 1951", she explains. It's an architectural history lesson of the area gleaned through the narration and images.

A huge advantage of offering the tour on an app is that it can be used multiple times without limit, and anyone anywhere in the world can also experience it without actually being physically present. Aside from the

app, a full-color collectible companion booklet was designed and made available to download and print for those who purchased the app, and also as an option for those folks who preferred to have it on hand as opposed to the mobile app.

On opening day, September 26th, the turnout was amazing! Costumed docents were stationed along the route to direct tour goers, answer questions and create a fun environment for everyone. We also had a fully-staffed ticket table, with additional volunteers ready to welcome and help people download and use the app. And for the first time in the history of the Home Tour, we opened a store with AAPS' preservation items such as etched beer glasses, mugs, t-shirts and tote bags, now available for purchase on our website.

And to top the day off, we were all treated to a fun outdoor garden party at Denise and Scott Brady's backyard where stories and anecdotes from the big day were shared by all. The Legacy Home Tour would not be possible without the help, care and attention of its fantastic Committee members, docents and volunteers. Thank you!



Above: Cassiane Mobley and Cynthia Vlahos with Denise Brady.



Above: Karin Jensen's dreamy selfie.



Above: Patsy Baer tends the store.



Above: James and Cathleen Myers of PEERS, with Karen Tierney and Lisa Baker.



Above: Grant Ute, Conchita Perales, Brenden and Sozdar Sullivan. Left: Joyce Boyd.



Left: Scott Brady, Toni Lewis and Betty Cosmo.

TRAVELOGUE



An illustrated architectural travel story inspired by places visited and experiences encountered.

Christopher Buckley's Transylvania Road Trip *by Conchita Perales*



Transylvania, known for its remote landscape and obscure history, its very name evokes a place of medieval towns, mountainous scenery and forgotten castles, but mostly and unequivocally, it's associated with werewolves, Dracula (loosely based on 15th century Vlad III Dracula "The Impaler"), Prince of Wallachia, and blood thirsty vampires. Superstitions in this region of Central Romania have hardly changed since the Middle Ages and they continue to draw attention and visitors from around the world.

Intrigued by its history and architecture, Christopher Buckley, longtime member and Preservation Action Committee Chair for AAPS, accompanied by his friend Marina Carlson and his half- Hungarian college friend Dennis Mitchell, went on an architectural discovery road trip through the famous Romanian countryside in 2018. Chris and Marina met up in Budapest with Dennis who owns an apartment in the famous city, "and is a well-located crash pad when visiting Europe", adds Chris. Their plan was to go as far as Sinaia to visit the famed German neo-Renaissance Peleş Castle,



and make strategic stops in UNESCO World Heritage sites along the way to admire the well preserved Transylvanian Gothic style in 14th and 15th century cathedrals and castles, and visit famous villages with fortified churches. They also wanted to experience cities built in the modern Secessionist style, the New Art movement that overtook Europe at the turn of the 20th century (aka Art Nouveau in France and Belgium, Modernisme in Catalonia and Jurgensstil in Germany). So they plotted their 1,000 mile roundtrip on a map, rented a car, and reserved rooms in small independently owned accommodations.

First stop, Timisoara. The city is well known for its Secessionist architecture, and part of the Art Nouveau European route. The remaining 14th century fortifications and military structures were demolished by the mid 19th century and replaced with new boulevards and buildings. It's called the "Little Vienna" for its many

- 1 Metropolitan Orthodox Cathedral, Piata Victoriei, Timisoara
- 2 Secessionist buildings, Timisoara

Continued on page 7...

TRAVELOGUE...*continued from page 6*

historical monuments. They spent some time at the central square, Piata Victoriei, surrounded by colorful Secessionist buildings, and the early 20th century Neo-Moldavian style Metropolitan Orthodox Cathedral which strives to resemble 14th century Romanian monasteries, with its impressive towers with mosaic-patterned roof tiles.

Next stop was Hunedoara where they visited the impressive multi-towered Corvin Castle designed in a rich Gothic style. Originally built by John Hunyadi, one of Hungary's greatest statesman and military leaders, in the mid-15th century over the site of an older fortification, it has been altered, rebuilt and expanded at various times, which produced its current whimsical look, including its 19th century steeply pitched conical roofs. "False historicism was running rampant back then and Corvin Castle is a prime example of that. I call stuff like this *false historicism at its finest*," adds Chris.

Sibiu is a quaint walled medieval city on a hill known for the Germanic architecture in its old downtown, the legacy of 12th century Saxon settlers. Around the city are the remains of medieval walls and towers, including the 13th century Council Tower. Legend has it that the son of Vlad the Impaler is buried in the Evangelical Cathedral at Huet square.

Chris explains that Brasov, Sibiu and other Transylvanian towns had a significant German - Saxon population. The Hungarian nobility brought them in to help fight the Tatars and other invaders. They built frontier towns around a fortification, almost like a village around a Coliseum, so if an invasion came they would go inside this fortification that had a Church in the middle of it. And inside the walls you can see all the rooms, windows and stair railings – they would camp out, they'd have lots of storage for supplies, food and necessities, so they'd be ready for the invaders. There are



many of these fortified churches in the area of Brasov, the buildings were very functional and very unusual but mostly community oriented.

They visited Bran Castle near Brasov, promoted as "Dracula's Castle", with little or no evidence that Vlad the Impaler had anything to do with it. "It is very picturesque", says Chris, "with a maze of small rooms and passageways and interesting exhibits. Although the earliest building dates from the 14th century, the castle experienced numerous changes over time through the 20th century."

Sinaia, a town in the spectacular Bucegi Mountains, is the home of the magnificent neo-Renaissance Peleş Castle, built for Carol I, King of Romania, as his summer residence in the late 19th century. Chris says that "the interiors are spectacular, with rooms in a wide range of architectural styles, (Baroque, Gothic, Florentine, Turkish, etc.) extensive dark woodwork and stained glass, and shows you how over-the-top late 19th century architecture can go. It's the perfect place for a fairytale."

Prejmer, near Brasov, has one of the best preserved fortified churches in the country. It was built in the late gothic style in the 15th century and was surrounded by a wall with towers. It was meant as a defensive structure and had up to four levels that accommodated the villagers and the granaries, with cellars on the bottom floor. The churches often include many additions ranging from when they were first built in the Late Middle Ages through to the 16th century.

- 3 Corvin Castle, Hunedoara
- 4 Sibiu, walled medieval city
- 5 Bran Castle near Brasov
- 6 Peleş Castle, Sinaia

Continued on page 8...

TRAVELOGUE...continued from page 7

Sighisoara is quintessentially Transylvanian, with its colorful cobbled streets, ancient churches and well-preserved walled town center. Chris adds that “it’s also marketed as the birthplace of Dracula, and a total tourist trap!”

Targu Mures is home to the Secessionist style City Hall and Palace of Culture, both inaugurated in 1913. Their architecture displays elements of the local folk art, such as the tiled roofs and the colored mosaic details. The Palace’s impressive stained glass windows display illustrated sequences from Hungarian legends, and the City Hall is also quite spectacular.

Their last stop was the town of Oradea, known for its baroque and Art Nouveau architecture, as well as the Secessionist buildings that line the Republicii walkway.

Chris added that “another highlight of the trip was the food, which, like other eastern European countries is very rich. Examples include duck various ways, chicken stuffed with foie gras, pork neck, and Dacian Stew (pork, veal, other meats, and sausage in a tomato broth). Dishes are sometimes topped with a fried or poached egg. We had some great meals here, and the prices are very reasonable. Dennis speaks Hungarian, and in a lot of these hospitality places they speak English, German and or French. I can get by in German pretty well, and I also speak some French, which surprisingly, is very similar to the Romanian language.”

Images: Christopher Buckley, except Dracula’s birthhouse from Wikipedia.

- 7 Fortified church in Prejmer
- 8 Sighisoara, the birthhouse of Dracula
- 9 The Palace of Culture, Targu Mures
- 10 Oradea architecture



The Dracula Legend

Count Dracula, the name of a fictional vampire conjured up by Bram Stoker in 1897, is believed to be inspired in part by the real Vlad III Dracula, also known as Vlad the Impaler. A 15th-century Romanian warrior prince, known for his barbaric killing method, where he’d impale his adversaries on stakes and leave them to bleed out, creating a reputation of a blood thirsty tyrant. “The historical Dracula was a very nasty guy”, says Chris. His name had its origin in his father’s nickname, Vlad Dracul, (“Vlad the Dragon” in medieval Romanian), who received it after he became a member of the Order of the Dragon. Dracula means “the son” of Dracul. In modern Romanian, dracul means “the devil”, which has contributed enormously to Vlad’s reputation. During his research Bram Stoker came across the brutal accounts of the atrocities committed by Vlad III and decided to use the name for his main character.

Dracula is big business in Transylvania, and he is everywhere – from keychains to sweatshirts, and many towns claim a connection with the famous character. He was born in Sighisoara, and although Bran Castle is sometimes called “Dracula’s Castle” it is unlikely that he ever stayed there. Transylvania has therefore become a popular setting for gothic horror fiction and especially vampire fiction. Just as the fictional Count Dracula traveled from his remote castle in Transylvania to England in an effort to spread the curse of vampirism, so will Transylvania be forever linked to spreading the curse of Dracula.

A Bit of Transylvanian History

The earliest known reference to Transylvania appears in 1075 as *ultra silvam*, meaning “beyond the forest” or “on the other side of the woods”. Bound on the east and south by the Carpathian Mountain Range and to the west by the Apuseni Mountains, its natural borders have kept most of its territory in a slow pace of development with some villages still resembling the Middle Ages. Settled by Hungarians between the 10th and the 13th century, by the 14th it was run over by Eastern Romanians (Vlachs) migrating from the Balkans escaping the Ottoman (Turkish) invasion. By the late 17th century the Austrian Habsburgs acquired the territory, finally extinguishing the Ottoman threat.

Fast forward to 1848 the Hungarian rebellion against the Habsburgs lost to the Russian and Austrian forces and just 19 years later the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary was established. But, following defeat in World War I, the dual monarchy disintegrated and on December 1, 1918 the Transylvanian Romanians proclaimed union with Romania. This date has become a national holiday that continues to be celebrated to this day. Transylvania, along with the rest of Romania, was under a communist regime during WWII and until 1989, when the Romanian Revolution overthrew the communist leadership and executed its leader Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena. Since then Romania became far more integrated with the West, it became a member of the European Union in 2007.

PRESERVATION AWARDS 2021

The 2021 Preservation Awards Ceremony was held digitally via Zoom on July 25th. Hosted by AAPS President Karen Lithgow and managed by Plaque Committee Chair Kevis Brownson, the event was a big success! All the awarded projects were truly impressive, and each restoration story had a surprising twist, like the 1914 lottery ticket hidden in a wall discovered during demolition that determined the previously unknown date the house was built; or discovering the only remaining 1890 newel post on the entry porch that provided the clue to the staircase restoration; or finding the original attic window removed when the house was plastered, or even finding fully functioning sliding doors that once separated two rooms buried inside a wall. Presented in great detail by the homeowners and with pictures displaying the progress of the work during the process of restoration, the more than 60 attendees had an opportunity to learn and admire these incredible transformations. AAPS couldn't be prouder of this year's Preservation Awards. **Congratulations to the winners!**



»»»»»
 Judith Jones &
 Nick Winkworth
 603 Haight Avenue



»»»»»
 Greg & Jill Harrison
 1814 Ninth Street



»»»»»
 Sean Nolan
 & Kris Koblik
 2508 Eagle Avenue



»»»»»
 1428 Benton Street



«««««
 Jen Evans &
 Nate Martin
 1504 Verdi Street



»»»»»
 Patricia Devlin
 922 Lafayette Street



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CALL FOR NOMINATIONS 2022 AAPS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

In This Issue:

- *Masonry Chimneys*
- *Let Preservation Begin with You—
The Housing Element of Alameda’s
General Plan*
- *Home Tour App Opens Doors to the Past*
- *Travelogue: Christopher Buckley’s
Transylvania Road Trip*
- *Preservation Awards 2021*

AAPS is in the process of electing its 2022 Board.

We have an excellent Board; however, we welcome the opportunity to expand our ranks to include new members with ideas to further enhance and benefit AAPS preservation interests throughout the community we serve.

Please let us know if you or someone you know would like to serve AAPS in a board capacity. Our goal is to continue to increase awareness, understanding, available resources, and support of architectural preservation throughout Alameda.

Please contact Conchita Perales at peralesconchita@gmail.com or 510-205-6762 with your nominations.

AAPS BOARD MEMBERS 2021

| | |
|---|--|
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PAC

PRESERVATION ACTION COMMITTEE

GET INVOLVED & MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

The General Plan is in currently being updated.
Together we can make a difference in Alameda’s future.
Share your ideas and participate!

We maintain a Google Group list to advise
AAPS members on ongoing issues that could affect
historic properties.

Please contact
Christopher Buckley at
510-523-0411 or cbuckleyAICP@att.net