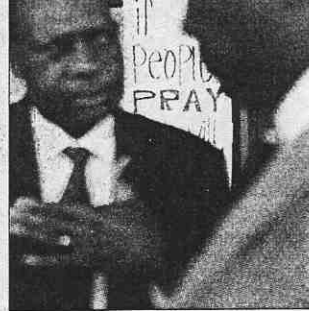


UNUSUAL VIGIL IN EAST P.A.



San José Mercury News

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JIM GENSHEIMER — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

East Palo Alto community leaders, top, at a prayer vigil Sunday for a supermarket in the city. Melissa Macklin-Billingsley, above left; and her mother, Helen Macklin, respond as Helen Macklin's son leads a prayer.

Residents pray for a supermarket

By **Elise Ackerman**
Mercury News

For about 30 years, residents of East Palo Alto have been waiting for a supermarket of their own.

Tired of promises and weary of setbacks, about 100 people gathered at City Hall on Sunday to beseech the aid of a higher power.

"Heavenly Father, we come before you because we need a full-service supermarket," prayed the Rev. Desmond Henry of the Community Church, one of more than a dozen congregations that participated in

the unusual prayer vigil.

Safeway closed its East Palo Alto store in the 1970s, adding the city of 2½ square miles to a long list of minority neighborhoods shunned by major supermarket chains. Brightly lit, fully stocked emporiums have since spread from San Diego's inner city to Harlem.

But none has yet returned to this enclave of mostly working-class blacks and Hispanics tucked between Highway 101 and San Francisco Bay.

Thanks to a spurt of redevelop-

ment targeted at drive-by consumers, residents of East Palo Alto can now buy a \$5,500, hand-crafted steel range hood at Expo Design Center or an entire set of living room furniture for \$742 at Ikea. But for everyday items like bulk packages of toilet paper or cheap, store-branded groceries, shoppers must venture outside city limits.

Earlier this year, a non-profit group that was founded more than a decade ago to develop a supermar-

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