

**Oakland eyes pay-to-play visa program for ballpark, new Coliseum**

By Angela Woodall, Oakland Tribune

Plans for a new A's ballpark in Oakland seemed to burst like a balloon when the California Supreme Court cleared the way for state lawmakers to seize redevelopment money.

But city leaders are eyeing a pay-to-play immigrant visa program to help finance the project now that the redevelopment funds they needed for the Victory Court ballpark may be out of reach.

Oakland is looking at finding the needed capital through a program that partners foreign investors willing to pay for a green card with credit-starved developers and cash-strapped municipalities.

Called EB-5, the program marks the first time that foreign investors can buy their way to a U.S. green card.

The program earned the nickname "million dollar visa" because a potential immigrant can get a green card for himself, his spouse and their children under the age of 21 by investing at least \$1 million in a project that produces at least 10 full-time jobs. In areas where unemployment is high, the investor can buy in for a minimum of \$500,000.

The \$8 million Tribune Tower deal completed in December was financed with EB-5 money.

And Mayor Jean Quan has been wooing Chinese investors to put their money behind the Victory Court ballpark and Coliseum City project, which includes hotels, a convention center, shops and new facilities for the Raiders and Warriors, as well as a ballpark alternative. Those projects are too vast to be paid for with only foreign capital, Quan said, but the city is looking at EB-5 visa money as a significant funding source.

Chinese investors, she said, "are very interested in EB-5 and always want to know what things are possible."

The strategy has actually been around since 1990 but wasn't an attractive proposal until the government revamped the program about a decade ago. EB-5 financing has paid for numerous developments across the country and attracted Bay Area names like former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown and the developer of Jack London Square, Jim Falaschi.

"It's quite the rage within the development community," said immigration attorney H. Ronald Klasko, who has specialized in EB-5 deals since 1991.

The U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services approved a record number of EB-5 applications last year -- 1,403. The agency received 3,858 applications, also an all-time high.

"There seems to be an unending supply of investors," Klasko said.

"If you want to live, work or retire anywhere in the U.S.A. and can afford to invest \$500,000 for a minimum of five years, the EB-5 visa is an option worth considering," according to the Bay Area Regional Center, one of 211 centers in the country where business people work to help foreign investors navigate the federal bureaucracy to do business in the United States. Investors mainly have been from China and Venezuela, though the program is attracting interest in Indian and Russia.

Brown is a member of the San Francisco Bay Area Regional Center. Other centers are located throughout the Bay Area, from Alamo to Union City. Although certified by the federal government, the centers usually are private ventures that operate separate from city governments.

Fremont and Union City officials said no EB-5 deals are pending in their cities even though their territory is covered by multiple regional centers. San Jose came close to an EB-5 deal, officials there said, but it didn't work out.

Nearly all EB-5 deals are done through regional centers, Klasko said.

The arrangement offers a layer of opacity for the foreign investors behind complex networks of partnerships.

For example, the Tribune Tower appears to have involved the San Francisco Regional Center, according to real estate records that list Thomas Henderson, a Bay Area businessman who founded Avalon Bay Foods Inc., as the managing member. He is also part of CallSocket Holding Co. LLC, the tower's new owner, and China-U.S. Venture LLC.

But no foreign investors are listed in any of the real estate documents, and CallSocket's headquarters (shared with China-U.S. Venture LLC) is an office in Oakland's produce district. No one answered the phone numbers listed.

In Union City, the New World Regional Center shares an address with a company that makes disposable gloves, Shen Wei USA, as well as other companies with ties to China.

Regional centers also let EB-5 projects bend the job creation rule by counting indirect employment in the total of 10 full-time positions. The jobs are open to anyone with permission to work in the United States.

The program turns the traditional path to citizenship on its head. But supporters see it as a win-win.

It's not as simple as buying a green card, said Michael Hastings, who launched the Bay Area Regional Center, which covers cities from Santa Clara County to Sacramento and includes the East Bay. Hastings is a private tech sector investor and a former executive with KPMG, a network of firms providing audit, tax and advisory services. Falaschi, of Jack London Square Investors, and Brendan Heafey are also partners.

Hastings said he and his Regional Center partners are still looking for a project 2½ years after they began operating in July 2009.

"It's not the easiest thing," Hastings said. It's also not without risk.

After two years, if the investors can deliver on their job-creation promises, they stand to make a profit and become permanent citizens, along with their families.

If the jobs don't materialize within two years, they don't get the green cards.

And they don't get their money back if the project fails.

### **Herhold: Fight over San Jose's arena has lessons for A's ballpark**

By Scott Herhold, Mercury News Columnist

Nearly a quarter-century ago, a young computer specialist who worked for the Mercury News disproved the theorem that you can't fight City Hall.

Depending on your viewpoint, her legacy either protects or hinders us still as San Jose edges toward a downtown ballpark deal for the A's.

For a look back at a history that resonates even now -- trust me, it matters to A's co-owner Lew Wolff -- I tracked down Susan Strain.

A tall, geekish woman with a bark of a laugh, Strain left the Mercury News in 1991 and is now a project manager at a New Orleans tech company.

She clearly recalls 1988, when she and her allies forced San Jose to accept a mandate to hold an election before investing in a sports facility.

I disagree with Strain about the value of ballparks and arenas. I think the HP Pavilion has been a huge success. She voted against it. But for better or worse, her story shows something singular about San Jose. It's still a place where one person with organizational skills can have outsized impact.

Late in 1987 and 1988, then-Mayor Tom McEnery led the push for an arena on Santa Clara Street, which prompted worries about traffic and noise from neighborhood groups.

As Strain tells the story, she was an almost accidental activist. As a resident of San Jose's Hyde Park neighborhood, Strain says, she had trouble getting the mayor's office to return her calls about too many homeless shelters in her neighborhood.

"So I agreed to lead the initiative on the arena," said Strain, now 51. "That was the only way I could get them to stop dumping homeless shelters into my neighborhood."

Hardware stores

The citizens' group decided not to go after the arena itself, but rather to seek a law that would demand an election for any city-funded sports facility seating 5,000 or more.

Targeting hardware stores, where Strain figured the customers were homeowners -- and thus voters -- the organizers collected an astonishing 18,600 signatures in 10 days.

"We were not campaigning for or against the arena," said Strain, though the demand erected a serious hurdle for McEnergy. "We were saying this will give you the right to vote."

After Strain's group gathered enough signatures to qualify for the ballot, the City Council accepted the measure as law and went to a vote on the arena. McEnergy won by 53 percent after revealing at the last minute that a poll showed the arena losing.

Not exactly uncomfortable in the role of power broker, Strain laughingly says she achieved her personal goal of getting the mayor to return her phone calls. "Before they adopted the measure, he called and asked if I would be running the campaign against the arena," she said. "I said no."

McEnergy's recollection

McEnergy has a different memory. He says it wasn't that Strain didn't get her calls returned, but that she objected to a needed homeless shelter on Commercial Street, two-thirds of a mile from her house.

"The thing that bothers me most about her was not her ability to cleverly demagogue an issue (the arena), but that she did not care about it and only used it to manipulate others," McEnergy said.

All these years later, I worry that Strain's legacy could lead to a rejection of the A's ballpark. But history has moved her way. The 49ers stadium in Santa Clara went to a vote.

The take-away? You can fight City Hall. It's just Susan Strain you don't want to defy.

### **At 90, Alvin Dark still a Giant at heart**

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

He was the Giants' shortstop and captain when Willie Mays made his miracle catch. He began the rally that culminated with the Shot Heard 'Round the World. He managed the Giants' first World Series team in San Francisco. He piloted the A's to the 1974 World Series title.

Alvin Dark remembers all that stuff as if it were yesterday, even though yesterday was the day after his 90th birthday.

"I honestly feel as good now as I did 50 years ago," Dark said, and let's be the first to mention that this is the 50-year anniversary of the Giants' first World Series as San Franciscans, a seven-game loss to the Yankees that wasn't redeemed until the Giants finally won it all two autumns ago.

Dark, who celebrated Saturday's birthday with friends and family - including his wife of 42 years, Jackie - at home in Easley, S.C., said the Giants are dearest to his heart among his many teams, largely because he got to play for manager Leo Durocher during a golden era of baseball in New York.

Also because he appeared in three World Series with the Giants, twice as a player, topping .400 both times.

"Baseball was my business and my life. I gave it all I had," Dark said. "I never drank, never smoked, never chewed, never anything like that. It was all against my sports upbringing. I feel very fortunate. And very happy. God blessed me."

Dark's athletic career was full of highlights - from being a football player at LSU to the National League's top rookie with the pennant-winning Boston Braves to a champion as a player and manager - and also controversy. For all his accomplishments, he could not shake his race-related issues on the early '60s Giants, though he has taken steps to rectify relationships in recent years.

### **Culture clash**

"We had some problems, and we spoke about it," Hall of Famer Orlando Cepeda said. "Not too many Latinos were playing on other teams. He misunderstood Latino players, coming from the South, Louisiana, and us coming from Puerto Rico and the Dominican. In those days, the white Americans didn't know us. We come from a different culture.

"But those days are gone. He sent me a card to apologize. He told me he feels bad. When we see each other, we hug. Right now, we're good friends. His wife is a great lady. Like I told him, everything is behind us. Life's too beautiful."

Dark was a .289 hitter and topped 2,000 hits and 1,000 runs in 1,828 games over 14 seasons, including 6 1/2 with the Giants. While New Yorkers pondered the center-field debate between Willie, Mickey or the Duke, a subplot unfolded at shortstop - Pee Wee, Scooter or Al, who for a spell was every bit as significant as Hall of Famers Pee Wee Reese of the Dodgers and Phil Rizzuto of the Yankees.

Dark's ties with Mays as teammate and manager began in Willie's rookie season, 1951, and Dark called him "the best all-around ballplayer I've ever known."

That '51 team completed a comeback for the ages when Bobby Thomson hit his majestic three-run homer off Ralph Branca, and Dark's single opened the four-run rally. The Wall Street Journal reported in 2001 that the '51 Giants, while coming back from a 13 1/2-game deficit to overtake the Dodgers, stole signs with the help of a telescope-and-buzzer system at the Polo Grounds.

### **News to him**

"After the season's over and after things happen, there are a lot of guys trying to gain some popularity by saying certain things," Dark said. "The things they talked about, I knew nothing about. If anybody on the ballclub would know something about it, it would be the captain, and I knew nothing about things they were talking about."

The Giants lost to the Yankees in six games in the '51 Series but swept the favored Indians in '54, a Series featuring Mays' out-of-this-universe Game 1 catch of Vic Wertz's long fly, which swung the momentum the Giants' way.

"No one thought he could catch it. It was over his head," Dark said. "Lo and behold, with his back turned to me, he stuck up his hand and caught the ball, turned and threw it. I think it turned the whole Series around."

Two years later, Dark was dealt to the Cardinals, and he finished his career in 1960 with the Milwaukee Braves. After that season, Giants owner Horace Stoneham traded for his old shortstop to be manager though Dark was 39 without managing experience and wasn't going to be a drinking partner for Stoneham, a role other Giants managers filled over the years.

### **Multicultural team**

The complexion of the Giants was changing, literally. Dark entered the majors in 1946, a year before Jackie Robinson broke the color line, and now he was inheriting baseball's most diverse club, a mix of Latinos, African Americans and whites, many of whom hadn't mingled with other ethnic groups until reaching pro ball but rallied together to win the '62 pennant.

Among the knocks on Dark were his attempts to prohibit Latinos from speaking Spanish to each other - Felipe Alou found it particularly offensive, considering he was born in the Dominican Republic and had two brothers on the team - and from playing Latin music in the clubhouse, a rule clearly directed at Cepeda, the man known as "Cha Cha."

"We had more (minorities) than any other ballclub," Dark said. "Knowing that, I tried to get the point across to all those guys, not necessarily in a crowd but individually: 'Hey, listen, I don't care what nationality you are. You have a job to do on this ballclub, and that's the most important thing to me. As long as you do a good job here, I don't care where you came from.' "

However, Dark's supposed efforts to unify the team eventually divided it. Cepeda detailed in his 1998 autobiography, "Baby Bull: From Hardball to Hard Time and Back," his broken relationship with Dark and suggested the divided team cost the Giants pennants.

"We're human beings. We all make mistakes," Cepeda says now. "I don't hold a grudge with anybody. I learned so much from him about the game of baseball. I wish things could've been much different. He was a great baseball man, and he was man enough to come to me and say I'm sorry."

### **Controversial quote**

Dark managed the Giants for four seasons through 1964. In July of his final season, he was quoted by Newsday's Stan Isaacs as saying the Giants' minorities were "just not able to perform up to the white ballplayers when it comes to mental alertness."

Dark insisted that he was misquoted and that the story was taken out of context, arguing that he often used seven minority players in his lineup and had made general comments about the team's mental mistakes. Robinson came to his defense, calling Dark unbiased, and Mays squelched a player revolt that could have gotten Dark fired. He was gone after a season in which the Giants finished fourth.

"Let me say this: Some reporters always tried to find a reason that a manager like myself wouldn't like people from different countries," Dark said. "We have 25 on the ballclub, and every one is important to me. I don't care where they came from."

In 1966, Dark began a two-year stint managing the Kansas City A's, followed by four years managing the Indians. A's owner Charlie Finley rehired him in 1974 to manage his team, now in Oakland. Dark managed the A's to their third World Series title in a row that year but was fired after the '75 season, probably his best managing job - the Catfish Hunter-less A's won 98 games and a division title but lost to Boston in the ALCS.

"I didn't always do everything Charlie Finley wanted me to do, because at the time I felt I knew more about baseball than Charlie Finley," Dark said.

Dark's last managing gig was with the '77 Padres, and he published his autobiography in 1980: "When in Doubt, Fire the Manager," covering his playing and managing years on and off the field.

## **Major Lee-ague: Geaney named international scouting coordinator**

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 1/4/2012, 5:19pm

The A's have promoted Sam Geaney to the position of coordinator of international scouting, a role previously held by Dan Kantrovitz, who leaves after three years to become St. Louis' new amateur scouting director.

Geaney, just 26, previously served as a coordinator in the scouting department and, before that, as a scouting assistant and video coordinator.

In an email on Wednesday, A's assistant general manager David Forst said, "I have no doubt he will pick up right where Dan left off."

Kantrovitz played a significant role when it came to acquiring international players, and the A's are expected to continue their efforts in that area, especially in the midst of a rebuild.

## **Oakland A's Top-50 Prospects: 15-11**

Melissa Lockard, OaklandClubhouse.com

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It's that time of the year when we take stock of the Oakland A's organization and analyze the top prospects. For the next few weeks, we will profile our top-50 prospect list in groups of five. Today, we continue the series with a review of prospects, 15-11.

*Note: These rankings are from [our original top-50 prospect ranking](#) posted on November 17, 2011. We will re-rank the A's top-50 prospects to incorporate any newly acquired players in late January.*

### **15. Bobby Crocker**

It is not uncommon for the A's to keep track of players they drafted but failed to sign out of high school. One such player was Crocker, who was originally selected by the A's in the 38th round in 2008 out of Aptos High School. After three strong years at Cal-Poly, SLO, Crocker remained on the A's radar and Oakland took the outfielder in the fourth round. This time around, he signed quickly. After spending a few weeks working on mechanics with A's coaches in Arizona, Crocker was sent to short-season Vermont, where he starred for the Lake Monsters.

In 32 games for the Lake Monsters, Crocker hit .322/.367/.441 with six stolen bases in seven attempts. A's Assistant General Manager David Forst said Crocker stood out from the crowd in Vermont.

"Bobby Crocker jumps out at you. He's kind of the highest round pick there and you know who he is the moment he walks onto the field," Forst said.

"He's big, he's well put together. He hit a couple of balls to the opposite field that showed some really impressive power."

The A's might famously not be trying to sell jeans, but Crocker has the classic athlete build that scouts dream on. He is listed at 6'3", 220 pounds and he has above-average strength and speed. Some scouts fear that Crocker will continue to add muscle, causing him to lose the speed that currently allows him to play centerfield. However, for the moment, Crocker has the range to stay in center. At the plate, Crocker has shown flashes of the power one would expect from a player of his body type, but he has yet to translate that ability into consistent in-game power.

The last outfielder the A's drafted out of Cal-Poly was another player with power and speed, [Grant Desme](#). A's Director of Scouting Eric Kubota sees some similarities between Desme and Crocker.

"They are similar in that they are both big and physical and athletic," Kubota said.

"I think that Grant had shown more power in his game at this point than Bobby has. Bobby is probably a better runner. But really, longterm they both had similar profiles. They are big and physical and athletic. Bobby will need to develop his power to get there, but they share a lot of the same characteristics."

Crocker's swing can get long at times, leaving him vulnerable to strike-outs, although he has been working to shorten his swing. He has an aggressive approach at the plate, and he will need to improve his control of the strike-zone as he

advances. With his collegiate experience and his success in the New York-Penn League, Crocker has a chance to skip the Low-A level and start next year at High-A Stockton. He will turn 22 in May.

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#### **14. Stephen Parker**

After a breakthrough campaign with High-A Stockton in 2010, Parker had a somewhat disappointing 2011 season with Double-A Midland. The third baseman hit for a decent average (.286) and got on-base at a solid clip (.373), but his power numbers dropped significantly from his levels at High-A (.413 in 2011 after a .508 mark in 2010).

Part of the drop in numbers may have been as a result of adjusting to a higher level of competition. He got off to a hot start in April before the league adjusted to him in May and June. Parker eventually adjusted back and posted a .313/.416/.424 line after the All-Star break, although only two of his 10 homeruns would come after the break.

Scout.com's National Baseball Expert Frankie Piliere still sees power potential in Parker's bat.

"I did expect to see bigger power numbers out of Parker in 2011, but I still buy into his power for the long haul," Piliere said.

"I'm interested to see how he fares in 2012 but I do think he has the power to profile there."

Parker will need his power to return in 2012 to remain among the A's top prospects. He has an above-average grasp of the strike-zone and he does a good job of using all fields. A left-handed hitter, Parker has hit well against both lefties and righties during his career. He has average speed for a corner infielder, but isn't a threat to steal.

Defensively, Parker is still a work in progress at third base. The A's believe he will eventually be at least an average defender at the position, but he still remains inconsistent with the glove. His 20 errors tied him for the most among Texas League third basemen.

Parker finished the season and played in the post-season with Triple-A Sacramento and he is expected to start the 2012 campaign at that level. Parker is the A's best third base prospect above the A-ball level and he could get a shot in the big leagues as soon as 2013 if he can show improvements defensively and return his power to his 2010 levels in 2012. He will be 24 throughout the 2012 season.

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#### **13. Renato Nunez**

Nunez was the A's most ballyhooed international amateur free agent signing in 2010. He received a seven-figure signing bonus to join the A's organization out of his native Venezuela. The teenager made his professional debut in the Dominican Summer League in 2011 and he is expected to make the jump to the US in 2012.

When the A's signed Nunez as a 16-year-old, they raved about his power potential and his arm strength. He flashed both of those tools in 2011, although he also showed that he is a work-in-progress. The third baseman got off to a strong start to the DSL season, but he struggled down-the-stretch as the league grew more familiar with him. On the year, he finished with a .268/.301/.407 line with five homers and 12 doubles in 53 games. Defensively, Nunez was wildly inconsistent, committing a league-high 30 errors at the hot corner.

During the fall, the A's sent Nunez to the United States to participate in the A's fall Instructional League. A's Director of Player Development Keith Lieppman saw marked improvements from Nunez, especially defensively. A's Director of Player Personnel Billy Owens was also pleased with what he saw from Nunez at Instructs.

"He is making improvements at third base and he's got some real power and he's a smart kid," Owens said.

Nunez will turn 18 in April and should be one of the younger players on the A's Arizona Rookie League squad in 2012. He is still growing into his 6'1", 185-pound frame and he is also still learning pitch recognition and the strike-zone. Nunez has a long development path ahead of him, but he has the raw tools to be a power-hitting third baseman with a plus arm.

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#### **12. A.J. Griffin**

It was a whirlwind season for Griffin, who began the year with Low-A Burlington and wound-up pitching for all four of the A's full-season affiliates. In 160.2 regular season innings, Griffin posted a 3.47 ERA and a remarkable 156:32 K:BB ratio. He didn't slow down during the post-season either. In 21 post-season innings for High-A Stockton, Griffin posted a 1.29 ERA, while striking out 28 and walking only two.

Griffin's standout 2011 season followed an impressive 2010 professional debut during which he served as the closer for the short-season Vancouver Canadians. In 21.1 innings for the C's, Griffin posted a 27:7 K:BB ratio and he allowed only 15 hits while saving 15 games. The A's never intended for Griffin to be a reliever long-term, however, as he already had a starter's pitch arsenal when he graduated from the University of San Diego. They used him as a reliever in 2010 to keep down his innings count after a long collegiate season.

Griffin's command is his most impressive attribute. He has walked only 41 batters in 209 professional innings (including the playoffs). Early in his collegiate career at USD, Griffin was a hard thrower, reaching 94-95 MPH at times. However, he now works more frequently in the 88-91 MPH range. He is 6'5" and is an intimidating presence on the mound despite not being a hard thrower.

"Griffin can locate so well, and he gets a good downhill angle. He has a great change-up and can spin a breaking ball a little bit," A's minor league pitching coordinator Gil Patterson said.

Griffin was a four-year collegiate player, so he was already 22 when he was drafted. He will be 24 throughout the 2012 campaign. His arsenal is well developed and what he is now as a pitcher is most likely what he will always be. One pitch that could improve is his curveball. It is a 12-6 slow breaking pitch and can be a plus pitch for him at times, but he can also hang it on occasion, as evidenced by the 17 homeruns he allowed in 2011. If he can add more sharpness to the pitch, he should be able to bring down that homerun total, although he is a flyball pitcher.

Griffin got a taste of both Double-A and Triple-A last season and held his own, for the most part. He will begin the 2012 season back at Double-A, but he should get some time in Triple-A by the end of the year and could be in the conversation for a spot in the major leagues by 2013.

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## 11. Adrian Cardenas

The 2009 and 2010 seasons for Cardenas were all about him getting over the Triple-A hurdle. In 2011, he finally proved he could hit for average and get on-base regularly at that advanced level. There are still some remaining questions that the infielder will have to answer before he gets a long look in the big leagues, however.

The Florida native has been a top prospect since he was drafted in the first round out of high school by the Philadelphia Phillies in 2006. Since that time, Cardenas has shown the ability to hit for average. In nearly 2,500 career minor league at-bats, Cardenas has a .303 average. He has hit for .290 or better at every minor league level. Cardenas is a contact hitter who doesn't walk or strike-out much. He has only 260 career walks and 354 career strike-outs.

One area that hasn't developed yet for Cardenas offensively is his power game. The left-handed hitter is well built at 6'0", 205 pounds, but he utilizes a swing that is more conducive to going the other way or lining the ball into the gap than going over the fence. In 491 at-bats for Sacramento in 2011, Cardenas hit .314 with a .374 OBP, but he slugged only .418. Cardenas has average speed and hasn't been a major base-stealer throughout his career.

Where Cardenas lines-up defensively is the biggest question about his overall game, however. A natural second baseman, Cardenas is blocked at that position in Oakland by [Jemile Weeks](#), so the A's have tried moving him around the field to find a better fit. Over the past few years, he has spent time at shortstop, third base and in left field. He struggled at third and scouts don't believe he has the range to handle shortstop. Cardenas was fine in left field, but he doesn't have the power that most teams desire for that position.

Cardenas has an excellent feel for hitting and profiles as the kind of hitter who would hit for average in the big leagues. Whether hitting for average is enough to make him a major league regular remains to be seen. Settling into a permanent defensive position would help clarify his major league future. With Weeks firmly ensconced at second in Oakland, Cardenas' best opportunity at the major league level may come with another organization.