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Posted on Fri, Oct. 29, 2004

Who needs the Sharks? HP Pavilion thriving

 By Leigh Weimers
 Mercury News

The Shark Tank may have dark nights this fall with the hockey season on hold, but the preceding nine months' ticket sales were so bright they lifted the local arena into first place nationwide and third in the world.

Billboard magazine and Pollstar, which count tickets sold at arenas for non-sporting events, report that totals from January through September put our HP Pavilion behind only the Manchester Evening News Arena in Manchester, England, and Bell Centre in Montreal. Rounding out the Top 10 in descending order: Wachovia Center in Philadelphia, Madison Square Garden, Air Canada Centre in Toronto, Savvis Center in St. Louis, the Palace of Auburn Hills in Michigan, the St. Pete Times Forum in Tampa and Arrowhead Pond in Anaheim.

No wonder there's no rush to settle the hockey impasse. With ticket sales like that, who needs hockey (except our downtown businesses)?

SHOW AND TELL: Speaking of tickets, phones have been ringing off the hook at Ballet San Jose Silicon Valley. The most-asked question: ``Is there really a free party on opening night?" The answer: Yes. As the ballet advertised earlier this week, Fry's Electronics is sponsoring a party at the Fairmont Hotel before the Nov. 19 opener, free to ticket holders for that evening's performance. Food will be the highlight -- carving stations for beef, pork and turkey, smoked salmon ravioli, shrimp and stone crab claws on ice, Dungeness crab gazpacho shooters, and desserts -- plus live entertainment. Dinner for 2,000 -- credit **John Fry** with another grand gesture.

Ed Sengstack does more than promote ticket sales to local shows through the Artsopolis.com Web site he directs. He also opens onstage himself tonight in the musical ``Merrily We Roll Along" with Sunnyvale Community Players.

More music, different language. Peña Juchit Ireta, launched by **Letitia** and **Victor Hugo Santos** to promote Latin America music, drama, dance and literature at the grass-roots level, marks its 10th anniversary tonight and Saturday with performances at the San Jose Unitarian Church. **Grupo Germinal**, **Los Hermanos Acha**, **Nayo Ulloa** and others.

SPOOKED: How cool to have flashlight tours of genuine spooky mansions to creep us out (Ainsley House



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in Campbell tonight, the Winchester Mystery House on Saturday and Halloween). In Morgan Hill, the best alternative is a ``haunted" warehouse Saturday, but the benefit event will feature local celebrity tricycle races: **Greg Sellers** vs. Mayor **Dennis Kennedy**, **Chad Chastain** (**Brandi's** bro) vs. **Mune Fry**.

Willow Glen, meanwhile, goes literary. An estimated 3,000 new or gently used books will be distributed today to preschool and elementary school children at the annual Willow Glen merchants' Halloween event. They call it Books for Treats.

And for those who feel there's already enough Halloween emphasis, Palo Alto's Neighbors Abroad program will celebrate the 10th anniversary of its sister city relationship with Albi, France, tonight with a cabaret evening at Cubberley Center. Halloween may not be as big a deal in France, but with l'Association Belle Epoque and La Compagnie Evelyne Remazeilhès of Albi bringing gourmet food and cancan dancing to Palo Alto, who cares?

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