

The Diablo Gazette

Arts, Entertainment and All That's *Good* in Our Communities
 Concord, Clayton, Walnut Creek, Martinez, Pleasant Hill
www.diablogazette.com | www.fb.com/diablogazette | (925) 298-9990

JANUARY 2024



Wishes for the NEW YEAR

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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- Is a Mysterious Pet Illness Headed to the Bay Area
- Art Meets Winter: Fantastic Ice Sculptures
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- Annual Contra Costa County Christmas Bird Count

Book Review, Movie and Streaming Review, Calendar of Events by City p.6 & 7 and much more...

FIRST TEE CRAB FEED

Friday, January 26, 2024

5-9PM @ Concord Centre,
 Concord, CA



Tickets

Individual - \$ 90
 Table of 10 - \$850
 Sponsorships
 Scan to purchase.



At First Tee, youth learn valuable life skills through the game of golf. In 2023 we reached over 3,000 youths through our on-course and school programs. Now you can help us reach even more!
<https://firstteecontracosta.org/>

YOU ARE INVITED! ROARING TWENTIES DANCE

Jump back in time to the glamorous era of the 1920's! Join us for a night of glitz and Gatsby-esque extravagance, including a live jazz band, dancing, raffles, costumes, and more!

Tickets on sale now!

www.concordreg.org

FEBRUARY 10, 2024

4:00 P.M. - 8:00 P.M.

The Concord Senior Center
 2727 PARKSIDE CIRCLE



First Tee, Crab Feeds, and Other Goodies

First Tee Contra Costa will be holding its annual crab feed at Centre Concord on Friday, January 26 and can use your support.

First Tee is an international youth development organization, a 501c3 nonprofit, dedicated to reaching youth ages 5 to 18 with the life skills common to the game of golf from simple shaking of hands, to crucial skills like planning for the future. They teach nine core values at ages 7 to 9: Respect, Courtesy, Honesty, Responsibility, Sportsmanship, Confidence, Judgment, Perseverance, and Integrity. From there they delve into self-management, goal setting, conflict resolution, and more, all delivered in a seamless and fun context of learning golf.

Young people who stick with the program into their teens will find opportunities for national academies focusing on leadership, career exploration, and of course, golf. Education is encouraged and rewarded. Scholarships, both athletic (golf) and academic are available.

In 2023 they reached over 3,000 youth through their on-course programming and school programs. By purchasing tickets or becoming a sponsor, your support will help create opportunities for youth to enjoy the game of golf, and become leaders, mentors, and wholesome citizens. Learn more at firstteecontracosta.org.

That is just one of several upcoming crab feeds. Crab festivals and crab feeds are extremely popular in late January through early March. The season's weather

patterns can make any outdoor event a risky endeavor.

Indoors, crab feeds are more than a culinary celebration, they have evolved from just eating crab into fostering community involvement with more goodies that include silent, live, and online auctions, raffles, music, and more. And most importantly, they are instrumental in providing much needed funds for local organizations. Here are a few of the local crab feeds with seats still available as of this writing.

Northgate Athletic Boosters January 20, Centre Concord

Pleasant Hill Lions, January 20, Pleasant Hill Community Center

Concord High School Athletics Booster, February 3, Centre Concord

Knights of Columbus, February 3, St. Bonaventure Church, Concord

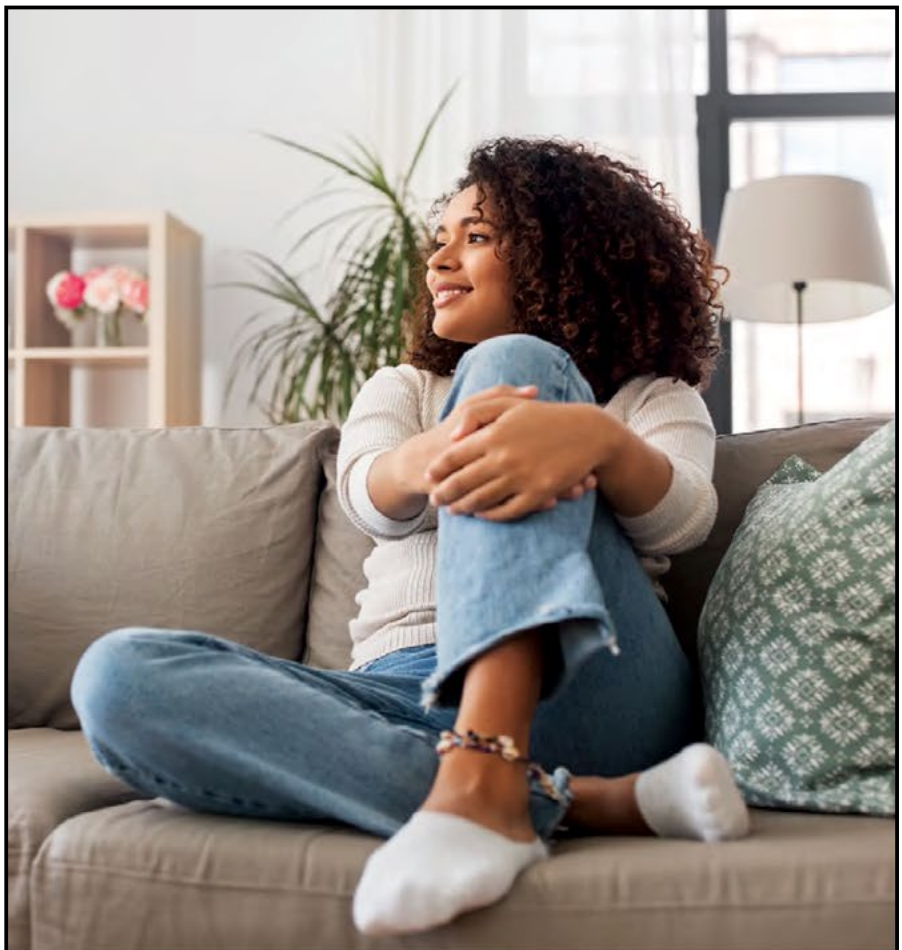
St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church, February 9, 1955 Kirker Pass, Concord

BD Performing Arts, February 23, Pleasant Hill Community Center

Chamber of Commerce, February 23, Centre Concord

More information on crab feeds is listed in our Calendar of Events page by city.

If your organization has an upcoming crab feed in February's or March not listed, please contact DiabloGazette@gmail.com for announcements to place in February issue.



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APY (Annual Percentage Yield) as of 10/1/23 and is subject to change without notice. New money only. Requires minimum \$1,000 opening. 8 month rolls into a 6 month certificate upon maturity. 14 month rolls into a 12 month certificate upon maturity. Any money deposited at SafeAmerica within the last 30 days qualifies as "new money". Early withdrawal penalties apply. See website for full details.

SILENT AUCTION. DELICIOUS FOOD. LIVE MUSIC. DANCING. AND MORE!

BD Performing Arts
CRAB FEED

FEBRUARY 23, 2024
PLEASANT HILL COMMUNITY CENTER
320 CIVIC DRIVE, PLEASANT HILL, CA 94523

5:00 PM - DOORS OPEN
6:00 PM - ALL YOU CAN EAT DINNER
(SALAD, GARLIC BREAD, PASTA, MARINATED CRAB, DESSERT)
8:00 PM - LIVE BAND & DANCE

ALL FUNDS RAISED WILL BENEFIT THE COMMUNITY ARTS PROGRAMS OF BD PERFORMING ARTS!

SINGLE TICKET: \$75.00
TABLE OF 10: \$675.00
(INCLUDES 2 BOTTLES OF WINE)

SCAN THIS CODE TO BUY TICKETS AND LEARN MORE!

BD PERFORMING ARTS IS A NON-PROFIT 501(C)(3) ORGANIZATION BASED IN CONCORD, CA.

Start Your New Year with **Luna & Fiore Restaurants** Concord's Best Italian Restaurants



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**Senior
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"I would like to thank our FIORE and LUNA RESTAURANT guests for a wonderful 2023 year and I look forward to serving you in this new year, with special events and wine dinners." ~ Chef Habib El Jacifi

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Poor Things

If you are familiar with director Yorgos Lanthimos's previous works, his latest film "Poor Things" will come as no surprise. If this is your first foray into his films, prepare yourself for a whirlwind of a ride.

Max McCandles (Ramy Youssef) is a young scientist hired by Dr. Godwin Baxter (Willem DaFoe) to observe and document his most recent experiment. McCandles is shocked to find the experiment is actually a young woman named Bella Baxter (Emma Stone). Bella's walking is unbalanced and her speech is indecipherable. Her beauty, however, is undeniable and McCandles is instantly smitten with the odd woman.

As McCandles spends all of his time observing Bella, he also learns about the mysterious doctor and his long-term plans for Bella. It seems everyone has their own ideas of how Bella should live her life, including Dr. Baxter's lawyer, Duncan Wedderburn (Mark Ruffalo), who is summoned to help the doctor with paperwork pertaining to Bella's future.

Bella begins her journey with a childlike brain, but learns and matures at a rapid pace, and begins to have machinations of how she wishes to live her life.

Since Bella was not subjected to earlier societal judgements, she has no filter as to what is acceptable young lady behavior. She says and does what pleases her with no apologies. This creates difficulties for the men in her life, simultaneously causing anguish and unquenchable desire.

This movie is peppered with nudity,



sex scenes and autopsies, which may not be for everyone. The setting is dazzling and quite perplexing. While the look resembles the Victorian era, fantastical machines move through the air and façade-like landscape, placing the film in a seemingly alternate universe.

Much like how this summer's "Barbie" movie took an iconic toy to show us the tribulations of being a woman, "Poor Things" allows us to see humanity through the eyes of what most of society would consider a monster. This, of course, translates to the labels put on women for the choices they make in life.

Lanthimos's films are always weird, beautifully grotesque conversation starters, and his latest is no exception.

Rated R In Theaters

Now
STREAMING

American Symphony



You may be familiar with musician Jon Batiste from his time as bandleader for "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert." Likewise, you may have read Suleika Jaouad's 2021 bestselling memoir, "Between Two Kingdoms," which chronicled her cancer diagnosis at twenty-two. Currently, these two creative powerhouses are married and "American Symphony" follows their journey as Batiste works on an originally composed symphony, which he is set to perform at Carnegie Hall.

Even though this is a film about music mostly comprised of Batiste's joyous melodies, the strongest scenes are the quiet moments, frequently shot close-up where we are privy to the couple's struggles and pain. The viewer is allowed access to intimate moments in the hospital, bedroom, hotel rooms and even over-the-phone therapy sessions.

As Batiste works on his personal masterpiece, he thrives at the top of his game but also struggles with his rising fame. His celebrity and prominence coalesce with the shocking reoccurrence of Jaouad's cancer.

When we go through difficult times in our lives, it can be understandable to direct all of our efforts toward the resolution,

while allowing everything else in our life to fall away. Here, we see an artist who finds a means to show up for his art and it is truly inspiring. Jaouad, who also studied music, finds creative outlets for her challenges through writing and painting. This film is not just compelling but can be used as motivation to help artists create during personal difficulties.

For non-artists, the message is equally as important. Our lives are happening now and we cannot wait to live them. The gorgeous cinematography illustrates the beauty found in the world around us. Batiste's music is uplifting and Jaouad's simple paintings are heartfelt. This is a film to keep in your back pocket, ready to pull out whenever life is getting you down.

Rated PG-13

Currently Streaming on Netflix



The Measure by Nikki Erlick

January is a time of renewal and reflection, and I found the perfect novel to feature this month. "The Measure" (William Morrow, 2022, paperback, 368 pages, \$13.70) by Nikki Erlick tackles a thought-provoking premise: If you could look inside a box and learn how long you were going to live, would you open it?

The book begins on one ordinary morning when everyone over the age of twenty-two receives a box at their doorstep. Inside is a piece of string that measures the length of their life. People soon classify themselves as either long-stringers or short-stringers. Unfortunately, short-stringers soon become victims of discrimination. Not only are they treated differently by the healthcare system but also in child custody battles. When a short-stringer goes on a killing spree, the string's impact on society becomes political. Legislation impinging on the rights of short-stringers is proposed. The strings have also appeared during an election year, and a conniving presidential hopeful, Senator Anthony Rollins, uses the strings as a campaign platform.

Societal norms are soon upended, and privacy issues arise. Erlick creates sweeping moral dilemmas. In one scenario, a girlfriend looks at her boyfriend's string length and breaks up with him. What makes her actions more egregious is his desire not to know, and she tells him anyway.

The novel's eight major characters represent a myriad of choices that a person could face, many of them life-changing decisions. Should they disclose their string length to a loved one? Should a short-stringer plan to get pregnant knowing they will leave their child prematurely motherless or fatherless? Erlick also explores the emotional impacts of lying about string length.

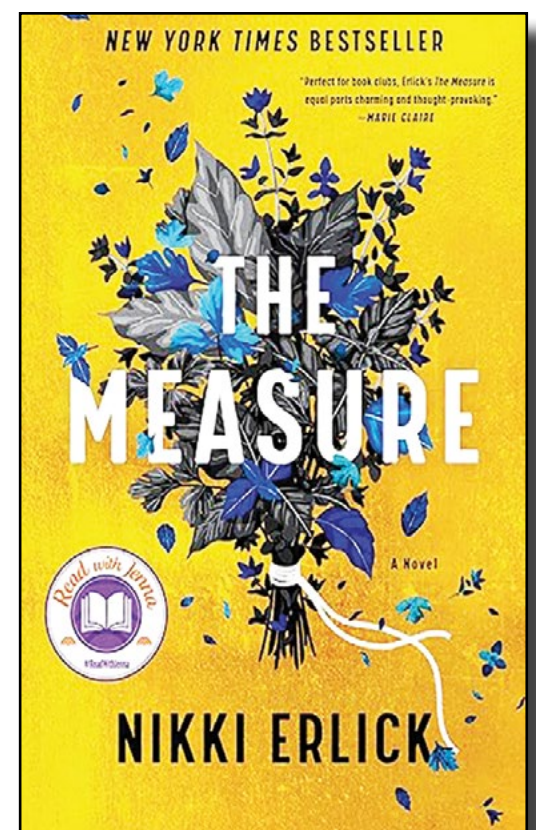
"The Measure" reveals the inevitable escalation of injustice born of human prejudice. Erlick captures issues in a realistic manner, ranging from predicaments at the personal level to sweeping national policies. Those who love Matt Haig's "The Midnight Library" and Fredrick Backman's "Anxious People" will probably enjoy Erlick's unique read.

A book about death could easily be

depressing, but somehow there is a powerful message of hope embedded in the pages. I loved this book. Would I look in my box? I am not sure. Would you?

"The Measure" was an Instant New York Times bestseller, a Read With Jenna Today Show Book Club Pick, an Amazon Best Book of July 2022, and a Discover Barnes & Noble Pick. It is slated for translation in 22 languages.

Nikki Erlick's work has appeared in "New York Magazine," "Newsweek," "Cosmopolitan," "Harper's Bazaar," "The Huffington Post," and "Vox Media." As a travel writer, she explored nearly a dozen countries, including rural villages in France and the arctic fjords of Norway. Erlick graduated Harvard University summa cum laude and was an editor of The Harvard Crimson. She earned her master's degree in Global Thought from Columbia University.



calendar of events

CLAYTON

CLUBS

Concord NorCal Helping Hands Lion's Club.

<https://www.lionsclubs.org>

Rotary Club of Concord.

<http://www.concordcarotary.org>

Cars 2nd Chance, vehicle / car donation programs turns donations into cash for charities Clayton Valley Concord Sunrise Rotary Charitable Fund. <https://cars2ndchance.com>

EVENTS

January 7, Discover Diablo: Twin Ponds Loop in Winter. 9 AM - 12 PM. This event is limited to 20 participants. Meet: At the gate at the END of Rockspring Place in Walnut Creek, Shell Ridge (not the gate at mid-point). savemountdiablo.org

LIBRARY

January 18 Teen Thursday – Watercolor Ocean

Scap. 4 – 5 PM. Teen Program (6th-12th grade). All supplies will be provided. Register online or by calling the Library.

Clayton Library, 6125 Clayton Rd. For more information please call 925-673-0659. <https://ccclib.org>



CONCORD

ARTS

art Cottage. 2238 Mt. Diablo Street Concord. (925) 956-3342 www.artcottage.info

CLUBS

Concord NorCal Helping Hands Lion's Club. www.lionsclub.org

Rotary Club of Concord.

<http://www.concordcarotary.org>

EVENTS

Thru January 31, Creative Concord Pop-Up Art Gallery! Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays, 10 AM-2 PM. Art in the Park! Free Admission. Creative Concord Pop-Up Art Gallery, 2151 Salvio St. Concord, next to the Concord Visitor Center, <https://www.visiteconcordca.com/>

Thru February 14, 2024, Ice at the Veranda 2001-2003 Diamond Blvd, Concord. <https://shoptheveranda.com/ice/>

January 18, Teens and Tweens! Join us at the Concord Library at 3:30pm The Zentangle Method is an easy-to-learn, relaxing, and fun way to create beautiful images by drawing structured patterns. Supplies will be provided. <https://www.facebook.com/concordartassociation/>

January 19, Rhino Conservation, Acting Locally and Globally, 12-1:30 pm, Diablo Gazette Contributor Jill Hedgecock will provide information on rhino conservation, her firsthand encounters with rhinos, and discuss recent promising developments that offer hope for the species. Concord Historical Society Museum and Event Center. 1928 Clayton Rd, Concord. Parking in rear.

YOUR PARTNER IN BUSINESS

GREATER



CONCORD

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

concordchamber.com | (925) 685-1181
kcabral@concordchamber.com

January 20, Northgate Athletic Boosters 2024 Crab & Pasta Feed, 5- 11 PM, Bronco families, get your tickets NOW at Centre Concord. Adults only! Center Concord 5298 Clayton Rd, Concord Tickets <https://www.northgatebroncos.org/crabfeed>

January 26, First Tee Contra Costa Crab Feed, 5 - 9 PM, At First Tee, youth learn valuable life skills through the game of golf – Centre Concord, 5298 Clayton Rd, Concord <https://firstteecontracosta.org/crabfeed>

January 27, Winter Regional Weekend - Winter Song Fest 2024 - High Desert Harmony Chorus, 9AM, You'll be assigned to one of two big choruses: Performance at the end of the afternoon by the two choruses, and coached quartets. Concord Hilton Hotel, 1970 Diamond Blvd, Concord. <https://www.highdesertharmony.net>

February 3, The Knights of Columbus Super Bowl Crab Feed. \$75 per person with a discounted price of \$70 for groups of 10 or more Funds support local Charity groups. The Church Hall of St Bonaventure Parish 5562 Clayton Rd, Concord More info and tickets: Greyeototo@gmail.com (925) 698-5254

February 3, Concord High School Athletic Boosters Crab Feed, 6 - 11 PM. Centre Concord, 5298 Clayton Rd., Concord. www.concordhighschool.net/crab-feed

February 4, East Bay Comic Con, 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Admission \$12, Concord Plaza Inn, 45 John Glenn Dr, Concord

February 4, Super Valentine's Boutique, 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM Free Admission. Hilton Concord, 1970 Diamond Blvd, Concord. www.kidfestconcord.com

February 9, St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church Annual Crab Feed & Silent Auction, 6 PM. Centre Concord, 5298 Clayton Rd., Concord. <https://www.stdemetrios.info/>

February 10, Roaring Twenties Dance, 4 - 8 PM, Concord Senior Center, 2727 Parkside Dr. Concord. www.Concordreg.org

February 23, Concord Chamber Crab Feed, 5:30-9:30 PM. Centre Concord, 5298 Clayton Rd. Concord. <https://www.concordchamber.com/>

FARMERS MARKETS

Pacific Coast Farmers Market <https://www.pcfma.org>
Todos Santos Plaza.

Tuesdays, 10AM- 2PM Year Round

LIBRARY

January 16, Pen & Ink Society Writing Group, 4 - 6 PM, the third Tuesday of each month from 4-6 p.m. Collaborate and learn more about writing with Creative Writing instructor and author Rayshell Clapper.

Concord Library, 2900 Salvio Street, Concord. For full list <https://ccclib.org>

MARTINEZ

CLUBS

Martinez Rotary Club meets weekly, 5-6 PM on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month. Campbell Theatre, 636 Ward Street., Martinez <http://www.martinezrotary.org> Pleasant Hill. <https://pleasanthillrotary.org/>

SERVICE

Saturdays St Vincent de Paul Food Pantry, 9 - 10 AM. Any one in need of food welcome! Located between Castro and Estudillo Streets, behind St. Catherine of Siena Church. Call 925-788-7409 for further information

EVENTS

January 7, Partners in Crime, 2.30 PM, Partners in Crime following the exploits of two "partners" who at times must rely on audience suggestions. Martinez Campbell Theater, 636 Ward Street, Martinez. www.campbelltheater.com

February 11, Downtown Martinez Wine & Chocolate Stroll 2024. 1:00pm to 4:00pm. Main Street Plaza 600 Block next to Starbucks. <https://downtownmartinez.org>

FARMERS MARKETS

Pacific Coast Farmers Market <https://www.pcfma.org>
Sundays, 9AM-1PM, Year Round. 700 Main St. Martinez.

PLEASANT HILL

EVENTS

January 13, General Meeting California Writer's Club, Mt. Diablo. 11 - 2 PM, Achy Obejas on The Art of Storytelling. Fraedo's Restaurant, 611 Gregory Lane, Pleasant Hill. To register for the meeting online, visit <https://cwcmtdiablo.org/meetings-and-workshops>.

January 20, Pleasant Hill Lions Annual Crab Feed, 6 - 11 PM. Pleasant Hill Senior Center. 233 Gregory Lane Pleasant Hill

February 23, Blue Devils

Crab Feed, 5 PM, Pleasant Hill Community Center, 320 Civic Dr. Pleasant Hill. <https://www.bluedevils.org>

LIBRARY

January 10, Kids Movie Matinee, 4:00pm-5:30pm. Join us for a family-friendly movie afternoon! We will be watching Lilo & Stitch (2002), rated PG.

Pleasant Hill Library, 12 Monticello Avenue. For more information please call 925-673-0659. <https://ccclib.org>

WALNUT CREEK

EVENTS

6-12. Under 6 FREE. 2751 Buena Vista Avenue, Walnut Creek (in Larkey Park). www.wcmrs.org

FARMERS MARKETS

Contra Costa Certified Farmers Market <http://www.cccfm.org>

Sundays 9AM-1PM, Year Round. Locust Street between Cole and Lacassie St <http://www.cccfm.org/walnut-creek-market/>

Diablo Valley Farmers Market North Wiget Ln. and Mitchell Dr. Shadelands, Walnut Creek, Saturdays 9AM-1PM Year Round 1799 Locust St. www.cafarmersmkt.com

Rossmoor Farmers Market Rossmoor residents and their families only. Fridays 9AM-1PM, Golden Rain Rd. <http://www.cafarmersmkt.com/rossmoor-farmers-market>

LIBRARY

January 20, Dungeons & Dragons, 2 - 4 PM, Join us for a D&D adventure intended for all experience levels. Ages 13-18.

Walnut Creek Library, 1644 N Broadway. For more information please call 925-673-0659. <https://ccclib.org>

LESHER CENTER

January 27, 28, Gershwin in New York. Presented by California Symphony. Rhapsody in Blue turns 100 in a program that explores the American Dream.

Leshar Center for the Arts 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, <https://www.lesherartscenter.org> Tickets: (925)943-7469 Wed-Sun Noon to 6:00 p.m.

Other Cities

EVENTS

January 4, SIR Branch 19 will hold its Monthly Luncheon, 11 AM, Pittsburg Elks' Lodge, 200 Marina Blvd., Pittsburg. This will be the Annual Holiday Luncheon. Members are invited to bring guests. www.sirinc2.org/branch19 925 338-1996 for more information.

SUBMIT YOUR CALENDAR ENTRIES by the 20th of the month before Issue month. diablogazette@gmail.com



A Winter Fresh Healthy Start to a New Year

After the indulgence of the holidays, it is nice to have a meal that is both appetizing and good for you. Take advantage of the abundance of tempting produce available in Northern California to create a meal that will shake off those mid-winter blues.

Start with a salad of fennel, arugula, and aged jack cheese. This lightly dressed salad is unique and pairs nicely with sparkling water jazzed up with fresh cut cucumber slices. While citrus, berries, and mint are all also delicious, I find the “herbal” flavor of cucumber particularly refreshing. Water is essential to good health and changes dramatically with these additions.

Whether you prefer sparkling or still, lightly flavored water is the perfect partner for your salad.

For the main course, open up a winter white wine like Chenin Blanc. It is a welcome reprieve from the red wines often served in cooler winter months. Chenin Blanc’s herbal notes will pick up on the ranch spices found in the Original Ranch Roasted Potatoes listed here.

Add some grilled boneless breasts of chicken marinated in your favorite citrus juices, olive oil, rosemary, and salt. Cook it on an indoor grill pan to stay inside where it is nice and warm. Complete the meal with asparagus coated in olive oil and salt. Throw it into the oven with the potatoes. Let them roast together for the last 7-10 minutes.

Chocolate Walnut Meringues are a heavenly way to end this meal. Make them well in advance because, while they start in a pre-heated oven, they need to cook with the oven off for at least two hours to obtain their crisp crunch. Since these cookies are too sweet for wine, pair them with some chai tea. The baking spices complement the chocolate and the nutty flavor of the meringues.

So, go on. Pair Up!

Maria Terry is a Certified Sommelier and Wine Educator in Northern California.
www.LaSommellerie.com

FENNEL SALAD

INGREDIENTS

1½ tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 teaspoon sugar
½ teaspoon olive oil
Salt and pepper
2 cups thinly sliced fennel, about 1 bulb
½ cup thinly sliced sweet onion
4 cups trimmed arugula
1 ounce shaved aged jack or Parmesan cheese



DIRECTIONS

Whisk together dressing. Toss fennel and onion with dressing. Place arugula on plate and a mound of fennel onion on top. Finish with cheese shavings.

Yield: 4 servings

ORIGINAL RANCH ROASTED POTATOES

INGREDIENTS

1 pound small Yukon Gold potatoes, quartered
2 tablespoons olive oil
¼ -½ packet (1 ounce) Hidden Valley® Original Ranch® Salad Dressing & Seasoning Mix

DIRECTIONS

Place potatoes in a gallon-size Ziplock bag and add oil; seal bag. Toss to coat. Add salad dressing mix and toss again until coated. Bake in parchment lined baking pan at 450°F for 30 to 35 minutes or until potatoes are brown and crisp.

Yield: 4 servings

CHOCOLATE WALNUT MERINGUES

INGREDIENTS

2 large egg whites, at room temperature
½ teaspoon cream of tartar
2/3 cup superfine granulated sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup semisweet chocolate chips or finely chopped semisweet chocolate
1 cup finely chopped walnuts

DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F and line two baking sheets with parchment paper. Set aside.

In the bowl of an electric mixer, beat egg whites until foamy. Add the cream of tartar and beat until fluffy but not at all dry. (Be careful not to overbeat.) Add the sugar gradually, about 3 tablespoons at a time. When 1/2 of the sugar has been added, add the vanilla extract. Continue beating and adding remaining sugar in batches, until all of the sugar is



Tech in
English

New Year Brings New Solutions

Welcome the New Year and ponder some new year’s resolutions like eating healthy, quitting cigarettes, and what should we be doing with our old computer hardware. The speculation is there will be a computer resurgence in sales and technology that offers new solutions to obsolescence, security and space. Read on...

Living through the pandemic created a major shift in the workforce. We moved from working in an office where one’s company provided all the computing power needed to do their jobs, to the “work from home” model that forced workers to have PCs to get work done.

Three years ago, employees that did not have company equipment scrambled to upgrade their old “rigs” while a few needed to outright purchase PCs to meet this challenge. Most users just made the best of the situation by upgrading and modifying existing computer hardware.

2024 should see about a 4-6% resurgence in PC sales after a sharp 13.7% decline in 2023. This means the bulk of over 220 million computers need to be replaced. In addition to old equipment, Microsoft has announced the end of life for the Windows 10 operating system in October 2025. While this is nearly two years away, we don’t advise waiting until then due to technical advances and recent security challenges. Like it or not, this is the year to upgrade to Windows 11.

Source Bing Copilot*

“The personal computer industry has seen significant advancements in the past few years. According to a recent article by Robotics & Automation News, some of the major trends in PC technology include a focus on portability, versatility, and connectivity. Here are some of the latest developments in personal computers:

Thin and Light Designs: The popularity of thin and light computers is rising.

Portability: Laptops are being made as portable as possible without losing performance.

2-in-1 Devices: Detachable

tablets with attachable keyboards and convertible laptops are two examples of 2-in-1 products that are growing in popularity.

Virtual and Augmented Reality: Virtual and augmented reality technologies are becoming more accessible to consumers. They are being used in gaming, education and other fields.

Artificial Intelligence: AI is being integrated into personal computers to improve their performance and capabilities. AI-powered personal assistants, such as Microsoft’s Cortana, are becoming more common [Ed- Meaning: AI powered assistance].

Cloud Computing: Cloud computing is becoming more prevalent in the personal computer industry. It allows users to store and access data remotely, making it easier to work from anywhere.”

For game players, graphic artists, and engineers, it is time to upgrade to the latest Nvidia graphic adaptors such as the GeForce RTX 40 Series like the RTX 4090 or something more affordable such as the GeForce RTX 3080Ti.

For portability, there is a new player known as a NUC (Next Unit of Computing). This tiny box does everything a full-size computer does in a 6-inch wide 2-inch-tall computer. The NUC has on board everything from graphics, WiFi to HDMI dual outputs. This is a great choice for professional offices, accountants, and for general purpose users that want power without consuming desk space.

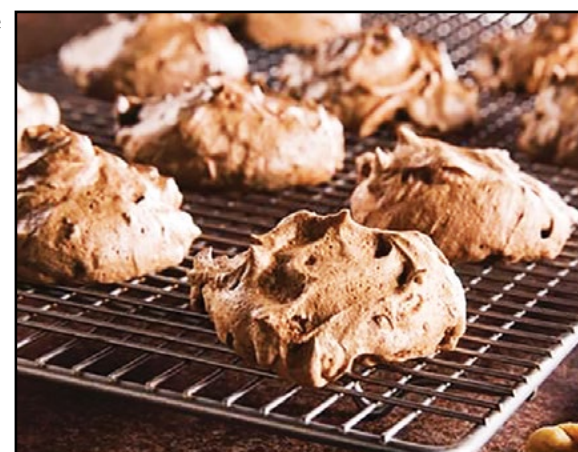
AI powered anti-virus is really an intelligent monitoring of your computer against every known and unknown malware. From traditional Trojans, keyloggers, ransomware, bloatware, hacking, phishing scams to yet to be invented attacks, you are safe. If you do not have this, your wallet will wish you did.

Come and investigate your new options, after all it is a new year. Happy New Year – Now go do the right thing.

**Buy the way Claudine Gay, this is how quotes are done.*

dissolved and the meringue is very shiny and tight. Gently fold in the chocolate chips and chopped nuts.

Working one teaspoon at a time, push a teaspoonful of meringue from the tip of one teaspoon with the back of another teaspoon onto the lined baking sheets, leaving one inch of space between cookies. Place baking sheets in the preheated oven and turn the oven off. Leave the cookies (undisturbed) in the oven for at least two hours and up to overnight, or until cookies are crisp and dry.



Yield: 48 cookies



Proposition 19

Preserves Tax Base for Up to Three Moves

For those over 55 years of age, Proposition 19 offers good news. You can move your property tax base to your new property. (See the graphic.) In fact, you can transfer your original tax



base to a new home up to three times anywhere in California as long as you purchase a home for equal or lesser value than the original home. There is an adjusted calculation if the new home is more than the sold home. There are forms on the Contra Costa County website detailing the process.

These changes, courtesy Proposition 19, are a relief to clients who previously thought they would be unable to take this tax base transfer because they have already taken it in the past.

Age 55 or not, if there is a thought about a move in 2024, here are some things you can do to prepare so you don't "miss the boat."

Miss the boat? For example, when interest rates are predicted to drop, realize that there will be more buyers at that time but it may be a sudden and short-term window. If selling and your home is market-ready, you can reap the bidding of higher prices that often come with interest rate reductions.

So here are three areas that can help you get a jump on preparation, establish cash reserves, and at minimum provide a more solid home to live in should you decide to stay.

Secure Your Move Money

If you want to buy before selling and have a lot of equity in your home, many clients have secured an equity line on their current home to have the down payment on a new home. Then they can

get a loan to complete the purchase and move at their leisure. (Then we stage and sell their vacated home.)

An equity line can take four to 12 weeks as they are non-urgent in nature and should be your

"reserve" sitting in the bank until you need it. You do not make any payments until you use it. If you do not need it, it is canceled when you sell. The time for doing this is before you need it, because your home cannot be on the MLS when you apply for an equity line.

Prepare your home for a buyer. Cut down that tree you have been wanting to get rid of, trim up branches and take out dead plants and shrubs. Walk across the street and see what a buyer sees. At the minimum, make sure your mailbox, door locks, front door and paint and trims are looking fresh and new. Do not put this off. If you wait to paint the exterior once the market is hot, the painters will be booked and you may miss the prime selling time.

Inspections – Complete the pest and home inspection including sewer, roof, and chimney if needed. This process takes a couple of weeks, but if done early, you will be ready for buyer disclosures.

In addition, you will have completed the necessary fixups that might be small in expense but big in impact. Buyers who are presented with inspections upfront make better offers when they know there are no surprises. This is huge for a buyer.

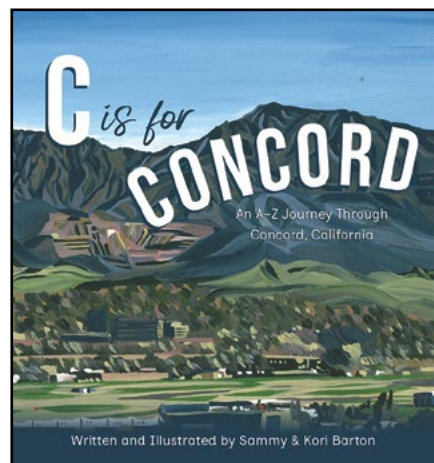
Your Realtor, me, has resources for all of the above and other steps necessary to prepare you for a profitable and quick sale.

“C” is for Concord

C is for Concord is a delightful children's book written and illustrated by Concord residents, Kori and Sammy Barton. Every home with children should seriously consider picking up a copy. The book is an alphabetical portrayal of some of Concord's best amenities, (26 to be exact, one for each letter) and their historical significance. Its purpose is to introduce Concord in a clever and fun way so kids will enjoy learning about their hometown. Kori is an artist and did all the colorful illustrations herself.

Each page begins with short poetic introduction to each feature, such as "T is for Tom Hanks, born here in our city..." then offers description of Concord's relationship with Hanks. By the way, Hanks had agreed to be included in the book. "We're super thankful. It's really kind of him. He didn't have to," Kori humbly mentions.

This is an idea long past due. "It just occurred to me as I was doing yard work and playing with my kids in the backyard. I thought, you know, I don't think anyone's done this yet for Concord. We have such a deep history." Kori has



always wanted to write a children's book because she loves reading to her kids. "I wanted to write something close to home, something that they are a part of."

Kori says they are already working on a Walnut Creek book and a plan to do all the local cities.

The book is available at Amazon Books, Berkshire Books.

PROP 19 BENEFITS

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If you're a senior, retiree or older homeowner who feels trapped in a home that no longer fits your needs, here's some good news – Prop 19 makes it easier for you to move to a new home without incurring a property tax hike.*

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- Transfer your original tax base to a new home up to three times

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... Without Hiking Your Property Taxes*

* Purchasing a more expensive replacement property will result in an adjusted tax increase based on your Prop 13 tax basis.

"Prop 19 allows seniors to transfer their home's low tax base and move near family or medical care, or downsize anywhere in California without a tax increase." – Deborah Howard, CALSAL President, California Senior Advocates League



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YOUR NEIGHBOR'S SHOES

by Michael Barrington, mbwriter.net

When Art and Winter Converge, Chisel It

They are ice sculptors, and in addition to being unusually dexterous, Robert Chislett and his artistic team at Chisel-It Ice in Concord are among the best in the country.

On December 16, Chisel-It Ice was called upon to build a 30-foot-long sushi bar for the Roblox Company Christmas party held for 3500 guests at the California Academy of Science. The impressive set up featured two tons of crystal-clear ice with two original 5-foot-tall ice sculptured snowflakes uniquely designed by Robert.

For a large private party in Atherton, Robert and his team masterfully crafted an 8-foot ice sculpture, replicating Michelangelo's David, to commemorate a 50th birthday celebration. This impressive piece was sculpted from eight 300-pound blocks of ice, all meticulously prepared in 10 degrees temperature inside their ice studio freezer.

Their sculptures can be of any size; no project is too small or too large. From small tabletop creations to life-size replicas or larger, if you have an idea, he will bring it to life.

Chisel-It Ice makes its own ice blocks. His tools are chainsaws, chipping irons, scrapers and of course chisels. They transform squarish blocks into extraordinary creations of leaping fish, swooping birds or graceful columns and more. For 30 years, Robert and team have produced amazing sculptures including a life-size stagecoach, a Lexus and a grand piano and thousands of other unique objects and designs.

His sculptures have been commissioned by many Bay Area sports teams and beyond, including the SF Giants, the SF 49ers, the Golden State Warriors, and the AT & T Pebble Beach golf tournament. Musician Todd Rundgren ended his San Francisco concert by smashing a Chislett custom ice guitar on stage.

Creativity flourishes at Chisel-It. During the Covid-19 lockdown which prohibited large gatherings, the business was severely struggling. To survive, Robert developed a new product that he believed would appeal to families and deliver the fun they were missing — snowballs. Yes, the real thing, and it worked. He now sells about 20,000 snowballs a year and growing.

"Everyone loves them, they buy holiday parties, snowballs for kid's events, after church snowball fights, pool parties..."

For one party alone he sold 5,000. Last year, Golden State Warriors' Steph Curry bought 8,000 snowballs for the Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation's hosted "Christmas with the Currys" kids party at The Bridge Yard in Oakland.

Robert leads a highly skilled and dedicated team at Chisel-it Ice at his Concord facility.

Most of his team members have been with the company for over a decade, sharing a deep love for their work and a passion for crafting new ice

designs. Interestingly, Robert insists that his daughter Claire, whose name means 'clear' in French, has always been his COI, Core of Inspiration.

Originally from the east coast, Robert graduated from the CIA, the Culinary Institute of America in New York, in 1991. There he learned the art of ice sculpting. He and a few friends drove eight hours to and from New Jersey every Sunday for fifteen weeks so they could be trained by the world-renowned ice carver and 2002 Winter Olympic Gold medalist, (Cultural Olympiad Event, Salt Lake) Vivat Hongpong.

After graduating from culinary school, Robert traveled with Hongpong and helped with his ice sculpting, not so much for the money but the experience. Hongpong was his master and mentor.

In 1995, Robert and his wife, Jennifer, moved out of New York, making Clayton their home. "I just thought this area was so beautiful," he said.

In 1998, Robert started Chisel-It Ice. With the last name Chislett, it was a perfect company name.

For his first large creation, he produced ten large Bacardi bottles for an actor's party in Hollywood.

Unfortunately, Robert's and Chisel-It's art cannot be seen in a museum nor stored and passed down over generations to be sold for millions of dollars years later. The

lifespan of this art is approximately four to 10 hours.

The best way to appreciate this work is Online. Check out their gallery at www.chisel-it.com to view the spectacular masterpieces they have created over the years. You will be amazed.

Robert's business card reads, "Dream It. We'll Chisel it." There, his team is ready to carve in ice, your most imaginative ideas. And remember, he lives and works just down the road; he is your neighbor.



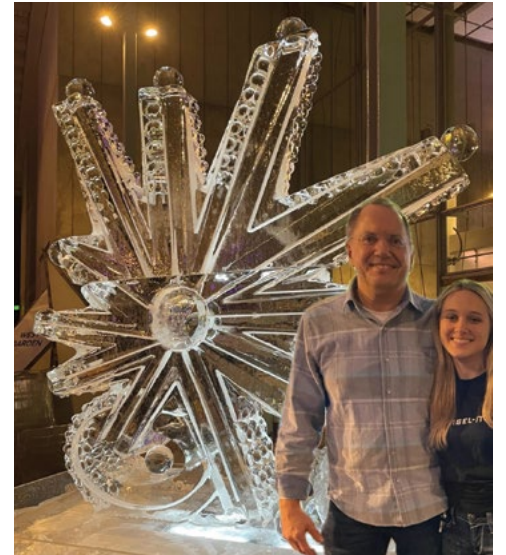
Steph Curry juggles three of the 8,000 snowballs he purchased for the "Christmas with the Currys" kids party at The Bridge Yard in Oakland in 2022. Photo courtesy of Bay Area News Group.



Chisel-It ice team of sculptors: Devin King, David Ochoa, and Jacen Chislett



L-R: Mady Keil, Liza Lukeshina, Kendra Fitsimmons, and Claire Chislett pony up to the ice bar .



Chisel-It sculpted a stunning 30-foot-long ice sushi bar w for a Roblox Christmas party at the California Academy of Science in San Francisco. Bottom: An 8-foot Michael Angelo's David. Robert Chislett with daughter Claire in front of 5-foot ice snowflakes.

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5 Secrets to Fruit Tree Success

Did you know that Moraga's Bartlett pear industry was a dominant market force in the 1930s and 40s?

Contra Costa gardeners love their fruit trees, both citrus and stone fruits, apples, pears, peaches, cherries and plums. Our mild to hot central and east county climates favor heavy fruit set and sweet ripening. But skill, effort and patience are required.

Do your research. For the best fruit/citrus trees for our area, my trusted sources are the Sunset Western Garden Book and the UC IPM website.

I'll share with you my five secrets to successful fruit production:

Right Climate, Location and Watering — Apricots and lemons do well in cool season areas such as West County, but most stone fruits do best in inland climates where winter temperatures are colder and summer temperatures higher.

All fruit trees enjoy full sun. Stone fruits need watering a couple of times per week in dry months whereas citrus only need water every two weeks but must be watered deeply. If in doubt, ask a garden center specialist about the best fruit tree selections for your location.

Trim to Reachable Height — Trim your fruit trees down over time to where you need no ladder to reach the topmost fruit. Ladders are fall hazards on uneven or muddy ground.

Fruit trees respond well to pruning and shaping, yielding as much fruit in a compact form as they would as tall sprawlers.

Netting the tree against hungry birds is much easier with a compact form. If your tree has grown too tall, you can remove a third of its volume each year for several years to obtain compactness without affecting its long-term health.

Winter Season Care — Fruit trees need more love in wintertime than in summer harvest season. January and February are the dormant season for stone fruits. This is an ideal time to prune and spray for pest control. (Read seasonal note at end of this article.)



Compact trees yield large fruit - Courtesy Saxon Holt

Except for thinning excess fruit to prevent limb loss in early summer, leave your tree alone until you have harvested your bounty.

For citrus, winter months are typically harvest months for varieties such as Mandarin oranges (tangerines) and navel oranges. These popular varieties require nighttime temperatures in the low 40s to turn their skin colors orange, and mild early winter days to sweeten.

Pest Exclusion — Do you have fruit bandits in your garden? Rats, squirrels, and birds are well-known fruit lovers, and they do not wait for ripening. Bird netting is somewhat effective against our avian competitors, but rats and squirrels crawl over the netting with their weight crushing fruit-bearing branches. Dogs are great against rodents if they protect your

yard 24/7. But the best strategy is to build a total exclusion fence with rodent baffles at the top to keep these voracious pests out.

Blossom Timing — Be tolerant of low yield years. Some varieties have alternate heavy and light bearing years. And if spring weather is cold, windy, or rainy while your fruit trees are blooming, blossoms are knocked off, pollen is destroyed, and pollinators such as honeybees snuggle in their hives dreaming of warmer days. Pollination and fruit set can be ruined despite your best efforts. Just like people, mother nature has her up times and down times.

Seasonal Note: Neem oil is a natural substance derived from the neem tree in South Asia. When applied to your fruit trees during dormant season, the oil smothers and kills overwintering insect nymphs, eggs, bacteria, and viruses. Follow the application instructions carefully as Neem is tricky to use in colder weather. You may need to apply Neem two to three times during dormancy. Clean old leaf litter away from your trees before spraying and wear goggles.

Email comments and questions to: NakedGardener@diablogazette.com.



Happy New Year Best Wishes in 2024!



Exquisite "Belvedere" Model in Peacock Creek on a Premium Lot Backing to Open Space with Incredible Views! 5 bedrooms plus bonus room/loft/optional 6th bed & den, 3.5 baths, approx. 4076sf on an approx. .26 acre lot with inside laundry and 3-car garage. Outdoor kitchen island, pool/spa & possible RV/boat parking. Must see!



Gorgeous Falcon Ridge Two-Story with Views! Downstairs den/bonus room with full bathroom. 4 bedrooms, 3 baths, approx. 2843sf on an approx. .17 acre lot with inside laundry & an attached 3 car garage. Updated throughout. Sensational backyard oasis is perfect for entertaining with views from Valley to Delta.



Mitchell Canyon Estates! 4 bedrooms, 3 baths, approx. 2846sf with an attached 3 car garage plus huge workspace & loft above. Downstairs En-suite plus 2 additional bedrooms & full bath. 2nd floor loft & primary suite offer views of Mt. Diablo. .3 acre lot features long side yard for RV/boat storage.



Beautifully Maintained Silver Creek Home on a Court Location with Views! 4 bedrooms plus den & attached bonus/Florida room, 3 baths, approx. 2443sf on an approx. .21 acre lot with inside laundry plus 2-car garage & carport. Large side yard for additional parking plus in-ground pool.

Clayton Market Update

Address	Sales Price	SF	Bed/Bath	Sales Date
206 Condon Way	\$934,000	1911	4/2.5	11/29/2023
2 Long Creek Cir	\$700,000	1378	3/2.5	12/1/2023
608 Golden Eagle Pl	\$1,150,000	2315	4/2.5	12/6/2023
4601 Keller Ridge Dr	\$760,000	1595	3/2.5	12/7/2023
8034 Kelok Way	\$1,260,000	2843	4/3	12/18/2023
2801 Morgan Territory Rd	\$1,740,000	3350	4/2.5	12/18/2023
5944 Cardinet Dr	\$1,056,000	2272	4/2	12/18/2023



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Concord Market Update

Address	Sales Price	SF	Bed/Bath	Sales Date
4791 Laura Dr	\$975,000	2412	4/2	12/1/2023
4348 Rose Ln	\$1,100,000	1290	3/2	12/4/2023
5508 Connecticut Dr	\$810,000	1158	3/2	12/6/2023
5455 Kirkwood Dr #C2	\$315,000	696	1/1	12/8/2023
1710 Shellwood Dr	\$869,000	1532	3/2	12/13/2023
1883 Renee Way	\$1,470,000	3006	4/3	12/15/2023
4650 Greenbush Dr	\$847,500	1690	3/2	12/22/2023

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February 3, 2024

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- Take a chance on winning game prizes
- Join the live auction for a Coach's Dessert to top off the meal!

Tickets: \$80/person, or \$800 for a table of 10.

2 drinks included with ticket price

Select your preferred table. Seating arrangements subject to change.

-Corkage fee \$20 at the door

Buy your tickets online TODAY at

www.concordhighschool.net/crab-feed

To pay by check, fill out the online form, select your table, and pick 'manual pay' as payment option. Then send your check payable to **Concord High School Athletic Boosters Club** by January 15th to CHS ABC Crab Feed Tickets c/o Concord High School, 4200 Concord Blvd, Concord, CA 94521

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Annual Contra Costa County Christmas Bird Count: Population Remains Above Average, Rare Birds Spotted

by Jill Hedgecock

The Mount Diablo Bird Alliance (MDBA; formerly the Mount Diablo Audubon Society) held its annual Contra Costa County (CCC) Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on December 16, 2023, a cool, but gloriously sunny day. Despite declining bird populations in North America, our county's bird population has remained steady, giving the volunteers the delightful opportunity to spot rarely seen birds.

The count for the National Audubon Society began on Christmas Day 1900 and is the world's longest-running citizen-driven wildlife census. The results from all the count circles are logged into eBird and compiled into a central database by the National Audubon Society, and the data are used by scientists around the world to conduct research.

The most recent compilation (2021-2022) has documented an overall decrease in bird populations across North America over the last 30 years. Far more total birds were tallied three decades ago, averaging 60 to 100 million, as compared to 43 million during the 2022 bird count. These lower numbers are even more troubling given the growth in the number of people counting them and the larger area monitored.

The CCC count circle, which is centered halfway between Pleasant Hill and Clayton, has been underway for the last 68 years. The count circle is divided into 24 sections and volunteers count every bird of every species sighted on the assigned day.

The tally of species observed in 2023

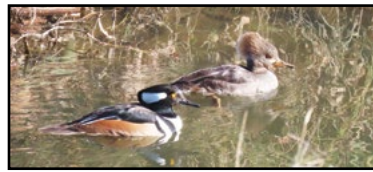
from all CCC segments was 155 species. This is five fewer than last year and below the all-time high of 161 species in 2020, yet above the 25-year average of 149 species. Many factors can affect the species count including the number of volunteers and their birding skills, the weather, and public access to prime habitat areas. This year, about 72 MDBA volunteers documented the type and numbers of every bird they saw that day either on established routes led by a trip leader or in their backyards.

Rare birds and other bird highlights

Sue Adler led the Grayson Creek and Hidden Lakes segment. Bird highlights in this segment were two pairs of Hooded Mergansers along Grayson Creek and a Green Heron at Hidden Lakes Park.

Although not rare birds, a Hairy Woodpecker in the trees near Hidden Lakes and a Great Blue Heron at Grayson Creek were also fun finds. Adler, who moved to California from Michigan, became interested in birds because she wanted to know which birds were singing in her neighborhood.

Jerry Britten, the MDBA President and CBC compiler, announced that he had found a Common Poorwill, a species that was last seen during the count in 1993. Finding poorwills pose challenges



Hooded Merganser pair



Green Heron

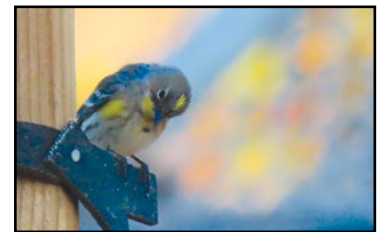
for birders because they are nocturnal insect-eaters and are masters of camouflage. Because insects are less active in the cold, the birds tend to hunker down and enter a state of torpor.

According to Cornell Laboratory's All About Birds website, poorwills can lower their body temperature to 41°

Fahrenheit and decrease their oxygen intake by more than 90%. Their ability to blend with the environment and their lack of movement make them exceedingly difficult to find. Another rarity spotted this year was a long-billed curlew which was last found during the CCC CBC in 1997. Other 2023 highlights included a hybrid red- and yellow-shafted flicker, a mountain bluebird, a yellow-bellied sapsucker, and a bald eagle.

One of the best parts of participating on the bird count is meeting other birders. Bird enthusiasts or anyone wishing to learn more about the club's activities are invited to learn more about MDBA's programs at www.mtdiabloaudubon.org.

Jill Hedgecock has a master's degree in Environmental Management. Her love of nature inspired her to author the award-winning novel, "Rhino in the Room" and the sequel, "Queen of the Rhino."



Yellow-rumped Warbler



Common Poorwill (photo by Jerry Britten)



Great Blue Heron



Red-tailed Hawk

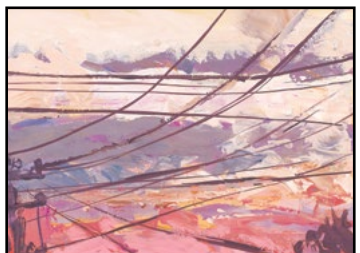
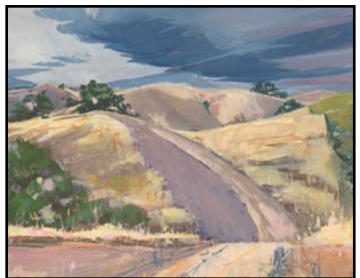
"Smaller Paintings" Watercolor Exhibit at Main Street Arts Gallery

by Samantha McNally

Main Street Arts Gallery will be bringing in the New Year with beautiful watercolor paintings. The California Watercolor Association will display their pieces from January 5 - February 25. A reception will be held on January 13 from 4 to 7 p.m. Please join us as we celebrate 26 local artists. There were 84 entries from the California Watercolor Association artists and jurors from Main Street Arts, Samantha McNally and Bonnie Fry chose 33 watercolor paintings to hang on our guest wall.

Main Street Arts is a co-op, with eleven members. Each member is responsible for hanging new artwork every two months. Our new January/February show will be open for you to enjoy beginning January 5. Sadly,

we have to say goodbye to Lynne McManus, one of our founding members. A talented watercolorist, Lynne, is retiring from the gallery. She will be missed. In February we expect to have a new Main Street Arts gallery member. Who will it be? We don't know yet.



We will resume our First Friday celebrations on February 2. Main Street Arts and many other shops on Main Street stay open and offer refreshments between 6:00 and 9:00 p.m. every first Friday of the month. Our free raffle continues into 2024. In January you can have a chance to win art by Eric Carlstrom.

In February, Bonnie Fry's artwork will be the free raffle prize. All you have to do is come in and fill out a raffle ticket, for free.

All of us at Main Street Arts wish everyone a Happy New Year and we look forward to making lots of new art for the gallery.

The complete list of artists and works of this exhibit is Online at www.mainstreetarts.net.



Reminiscing: aRt Cottage Enters Its 13th Year with Watercolor Exhibit

January 2024 is the start of our 13th year in business as aRt Cottage. It is hard to believe that this was once a bunk house for fruit pickers, where kids slept and spent days picking almonds from the orchard. That was around 1925. Then, in the 30s, it became a private home for the West family. Three generations later of the ownership and growth of the West's family and the bungalow, it was purchased and converted into aRt Cottage. Original plans were to use it for a private studio where art could be made and different mediums could be explored.



Jim Jordan, a fellow artist and curator recalls, "Friends and colleagues from Diablo Valley College art classes were invited to join in the fun by painting directly on the walls." There were 14 areas marked off for the 14 artists who were all a part of the CC14 Group. This group met monthly, rotating in homes to help each other out by constructive criticism and critiquing each other's work. These 14 artists could come in at any time, bring their paint supplies and work on their wall project. The deadline they had was to get their work done by February 1, 2012. There was no subject and no theme, it was up to the artist to do something they were interested in and put it on the wall.

The aRt Cottage had their first opening exhibit that February of 2012. It was called "On the Wall". It was only enough to fill the front gallery room, but we were all pretty

happy and proud of it. That was the beginning of a good thing.

More than 112 exhibits later, we are starting January 2024 off with our Watercolors exhibit, my favorite medium. This is one of two shows this year that is not a group membership show. It was open for all artists, from beginners to very experienced.

aRt Cottage believes in giving everyone an equal chance at showing their work and experiencing an opening. We do not have juried exhibits.

As proprietor, I feel honored that so many artists are participating in this venue. It is not easy to get a piece ready, deliver it, leave it for two months, and expose yourself to the public's eye. It has always been aRt Cottage's role to welcome newcomers to join in the joy of exhibiting.

Our schedule for 2024 is as follows:

January - February...Watercolors (non group). March - April...Concord Art Association, May- June...Contra Costa Plein Air Painters, July- August...Lamorinda Arts Association, Sep- Oct...Creatures Great&Small (non group), Nov-Dec...Holiday Boutique (non group)

If you are interested in showing at aRt Cottage, call 925 956-3342. aRt Cottage is located at 2238 Mt. Diablo St. Concord. You can preview our upcoming Watercolors exhibit, at artcottage.info.



The Concord Creative Pop-Up Art Gallery Unveils a Tapestry of Local Talent

by Beth Javens, President & CEO

Art aficionados and enthusiasts can immerse themselves in a visual feast at the newly opened Creative Concord Pop-Up Art Lounge adjacent to the Visit Concord Center located inside of Salvio Pacheco Square. This downtown art haven is a celebration of creativity and community spirit put on display through the end of January.

The gallery showcases a curated selection of pieces from the recent Creative Concord “Art and Music Jam in the Park,” produced by Local Edition, 333 Arts, Visit Concord and the City of Concord.

Local Edition, led by Sage and Tari Loring, is an art-centric agency who focus on art curation, design and experiences. From vibrant paintings that capture the essence of local landscapes to sculptures that breathe life into abstract concepts, the Pop-Up Art Lounge offers a diverse range of creations from some incredibly talented artists.

There is much to explore including “Rock N’ Roll Dart Frog” created by Demetris Washington, “From Colors with Love” painted by Calee Dunlap and “Find Your Sunshine” from the mind of Andrea Belton of Concord.

“Growing up in Concord near Monument Boulevard and other parts of the city, I’ve come to meet many people of different cultures and personalities that are extraordinary and diverse and that we don’t often see in many places. To honor my hometown, the iconic Mount Diablo that greets us locals every day felt the most fitting to represent Concord and welcome new friends with encouraging words who will visit this city,” Andrea says of her selection. “I’ve always wanted to push myself to try new things and push the limits this year, so this experience of live painting was truly a learning experience and I feel even more

empowered to do what makes me shine most, which is art.”

Whether you are drawn to

contemporary paintings, intricate sculptures, or avant-garde installations, all displayed pieces are available for purchase, making it the perfect destination for those in search of a unique piece that transcends the ordinary.

The gallery space, provided by LeFever Matson, is open on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays from 10 AM to 2 PM through January 31, 2024. A welcoming concierge is ready to guide visitors through the diverse collection and provide insights into the artists and their inspirations.

For those looking to host a memorable party or special event, the Pop-Up Art Lounge is available to rent for special gatherings. It has already been well-received as the featured space for official city and holiday events. The backdrop of local arts makes for a unique setting to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, or corporate events.

So, whether you are a seasoned art collector, a casual appreciator, or someone in search of the perfect venue for your next celebration, the Creative Concord Pop-Up Art Lounge offers a new addition to experience downtown.

For more information contact Visit Concord at info@visitconcordca.com.



Andre Belton paints at the October 23 Art Jam event at Todos Santos

For the Love of Pets by Jill Hedgecock, Jillhedgecock.com

Is a Mysterious Dog Illness Heading Toward the Bay Area?

A highly contagious, airborne virus called the canine infectious respiratory disease (aCIRD) has been spreading across the United States. The virus does not appear to transfer to people but frequent hand washing is recommended. The disease has been fatal in some canines with underlying health conditions. According to a November News post by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the County of Marin’s Public Health Advisory issued on December 1, 2023, the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) received reports of 200+ cases of aCIRD in August 2023. In November, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health received reports of multiple aCIRD cases. As of mid-December, aCIRD verified cases have not been reported in Contra Costa County. The typical first symptom is a cough, which may last for weeks or even months. Sneezing and goopy eyes have also been noted in dogs suffering from aCIRD. Standard antibiotic treatments have been unsuccessful.

The following symptoms have been summarized by the AVMA:

Long-term (six to eight weeks) of mild to moderate inflammation of the trachea that could turn into pneumonia. Neither of these conditions have been responsive to treatment.

Quick onset of pneumonia-like symptoms that can result in severe illness or death in as little as one to three days.

Other symptoms include lethargy, blue or purple gums, and/or watery or red eyes. To protect your dog keep it away from other dogs, especially nose-to-nose contact. Veterinarians recommend making sure your dog’s vaccinations are up-to-date, especially Bordetella, canine influenza, and parainfluenza. In most cases, dogs will recover without treatment but some will progress to pneumonia.

If your dog has a cough but is active and eating normally, there is no need to panic. However, limiting contact with other dogs such as doggy daycare, grooming facilities and dog parks, is advisable. But if your dog has underlying health issues, call your veterinarian.



Until an effective treatment is discovered, if your dog is showing signs of aCIRD, call your veterinarian and keep your sick dog away from other dogs for at least 14 days. If you fear your dog has been exposed, isolate it for seven days and notify any other dog owners or facilities where your dog has visited. Avoid taking your pet to dog-friendly restaurants, dog parks, or the groomer, or allow it to drink from communal water bowls. If you cannot care for your sick pet for any reason, consider hiring an in-house pet sitter rather than taking it to a kennel.

The symptoms of aCIRD are similar to dog flu, which is another emerging disease and highly contagious. A case of dog flu was recently reported in the South Bay. According to AVMA, dogs infected with dog flu may develop a persistent cough, eye discharge, lethargy, and/or may develop a thick nasal discharge and fever up to 104° to 105°F. However, some dogs may not show symptoms, yet remain contagious. Most dogs recover in two to three weeks.

Dog owners should call their veterinarian and quarantine their dogs to reduce the spread of these diseases.

Jill Hedgecock is a local author. Her new release “In Shadow’s Reflection” is the third novel in her young adult Doberman series. This novel along with “Between Shadow’s Eyes” (book 1) and “From Shadow’s Perspective (book 2) are available on amazon.com.

New Year, New Laws

Here is a list of some of the new laws effective January 1, 2024.

State Minimum Wage Increase: The state minimum wage will increase to \$16 per hour.

Paid Sick Leave: SB616 requires an employee to have no less than 40 hours or five days of accrued sick leave or paid time off by the 200th calendar day of employment, or in each 12-month period.

Work From Home: SB 731 requires an employer to provide a 30-day advance written notice before requiring remote employees to return to an in-person setting. The notice would also explain the employee’s right to remain remote as an accommodation, if applicable, to their disabilities.

Penalizing Cannabis: SB700 makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against a person in hiring, termination, or any term or condition of employment.

Credit History: SB 267 prohibits the use of a person’s credit history as part of the application process for a rental housing

accommodation. Tenants must offer the application the option to provide reasonable evidence to pay.


San Francisco, San Jose, Oakland, Glendale, Long Beach, and Los Angeles have the authority to launch speed camera pilot programs that will last five years or until Jan. 1, 2032 (whichever date is sooner). After a 60-day introductory period of issuing only warnings to violators, fines will start at \$50 for drivers who go at least 11 mph over the speed limit, though amounts can be reduced depending on income.

The California Department of Social Services will be directed to ensure LGBTQ youth are placed with supportive and gender-affirming foster parents. The law requires a family to demonstrate the ability and willingness to meet a child’s needs, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Concealed Carry Revision: SB 2 prevents concealed carry of firearm in some public spaces, including sidewalks and school zones.



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Grow Concord: A Heartwarming Tale About Concord's Samaritans of All Ages

by David King

Meet Kelly McKinley and Andrea Altman (Andie), co-founders of Grow Concord. Now a 501c3 non-profit whose roots began when McKinley, who is disabled, was inspired by Concord Samaritan extraordinaire, Jack Fleihmann. Fleihmann spent two plus years feeding the homeless two and three times daily going camp to camp with home cooked meals until medical issues forced him to stop.

Now McKinley and Altman have picked up where Fleihmann ended. (According to Fleihmann, "She not only picked up where I left off, she magnified it.")

"October 2021, I started working 10 hours a week at yard duty at my son's school during lunchtime," McKinley recalls. "This was my first job since becoming permanently disabled 10 years earlier. The first week I was there, I saw 20 lbs. of fruit being tossed. We were just coming out of covid so anything that was 'touched' was contaminated. With the staff's permission, I started bringing home the fruit, washing, and drying every piece. Then on Friday's I would drop off the goods to Jack."

Four months later, Fleihmann had posted that there were some very hungry people behind Dunkin Donuts on Clayton Rd. Many homeless were getting displaced when the City of Concord swept 'Bartland' and many other camps. "That next day, I started cooking \$10 meals for 12 people."

Fast forward 18 months, She now sets up in parks six days a week and serves basically potluck meals to homeless who show up, the food entirely cooked and donated by like-minded citizens. McKinley now volunteers all of her time to GROW Concord. Grow is a non-profit that was given to her through one citizen also inspired by their efforts.

A Tale Too Heartwarming Not To Share.

Altman received a call from a mom that a bunch of girls had a lemonade stand



Grow Concord founders Andie Altman and Kelly McKinley with lemonade stand entrepreneurs Ella and Lily.

and wanted to donate their earnings to Grow Concord.

Jordi, Abby, Lily, and Ella ran a remarkably successful lemonade stand in the state streets. They raised \$102.47. "I saw Ella and Lily at the park and it all came full circle," McKinley said. "I knew these two from when I was a Yard Duty."

While this generous family served up the dinner, McKinley was able to spend time with J and G, two brothers, ages 7 and 8, living in their car with their parents. Their family comes to Concord every Friday for a real home cooked meal and snacks for the weekend. Both were in dire need of shoes. "That's one of the first things I look at when meeting someone on the streets."

When Ella and Lily finished serving the others, McKinley told them what she would do with the money they raised. Shoes for the two boys. This put a big smile on their faces. McKinley later sent the girls this note:

Dear Abby, Jordi, Lily, and Ella. This is what I did with your earnings.

\$58.70 2 pairs shoes, \$18.60 10 pairs socks, \$13.60 2 car doodle pads, \$5.59 1 outdoor glitter chalk, \$4.28, 2 toothbrush kits. Total — \$100.77.

And I still have \$1.70 left over... Maybe for candy?

Local News Items from Claycord.com and Other Sources

In Case You Missed It...

Concord Sears Is One Of Only 13 Left In The World-The Concord

Sears store in the Sunvalley Mall is one of only 13 left in the World.



Save Mount Diablo Purchases

Krane Pond Property-Save Mount Diablo this week closed escrow on the 6.69-acre Krane Pond property on the slopes of Mount Diablo, permanently protecting it from development.

The conservation group said in a statement Wednesday that the property is part of the "missing mile," a square mile of partly unprotected land on Mount Diablo's north peak.

The group said the property has been one of its priorities since its founding in 1971, partially because of its large pond, one of the largest on Mount Diablo's north side, and its position directly adjacent to Mount Diablo State Park.

Here's Your Annual Wild Mushroom Warning From The East Bay Regional Park District

Mushrooms are an ecologically

important part of our parklands and can look beautiful — but some of them contain dangerous toxins.



Annual Wild Mushroom Warning
Learn More about Mushrooms at the Tilden Fungus Fair

The death cap (*Amanita phalloides*) and western destroying angel (*Amanita ocreata*) are two of the world's most toxic mushrooms, and both can be found in East Bay Regional Parks during the rainy season.

The death cap and western destroying angel mushrooms contain amatoxins, molecules that are deadly to many animals. Symptoms may not appear until up to 12 hours after consumption, beginning as severe gastrointestinal distress and progressing to liver and kidney failure if treatment is not sought immediately. Both mushrooms can be lethal to humans and pets if consumed. They are mainly associated with oak trees and can be found growing anywhere oak roots are present.

For more stories visit Claycord.com



Jennifer Stojanovich
Realtor, Better Homes Realty

Ten Tips For Aging in Place

Getting older does not mean we have to give up our cherished homes and independence. Aging in place, or staying in your own home as you age, is becoming an increasingly popular choice for seniors. With a little planning, you can create a comfortable and safe environment to enjoy your golden years. Here are ten valuable tips to help you make the most of aging in place.

Create an accessible home. The cornerstone of successful aging in place lies in the accessibility of your home. Strategically placed handrails, especially in high-traffic zones like hallways and bathrooms, offer essential support. Furthermore, using ramps or gently sloping entrances instead of stairs guarantees unobstructed mobility.

Add a touch of technology. Modern technology can be a game-changer. Embrace the world of smart home devices such as voice-activated assistants and motion-sensor lighting. These innovations contribute significantly to both safety and convenience. Most are easier to install and use than you think.

Concentrate on the main floor. Concentrating your daily activities on the main floor minimizes the need for stairs and reduces the risk of accidents. It also ensures seamless access to the spaces you use most.

Focus on bathroom safety. The strategic installation of sturdy grab bars and the adoption of a user-friendly walk-in shower diminishes the likelihood of slipping and falling. In addition, you can enhance the bathroom's safety with non-slip mats.

Think smart in the kitchen. Revamp your kitchen to align with

your evolving needs. Choose appliances equipped with intuitive controls and ergonomic design. Organizing your kitchen essentials within arm's reach reduces the need for stretching or bending over. Put your most-used items on the kitchen counter and the lower shelves of your cabinets for easy reaching.

Brighten things up. Brighter bulbs, coupled with adjustable fixtures, not only illuminate your space but also alleviate strain on aging eyes, enhancing overall safety.

Foster social spaces. Combat potential isolation by creating inviting spaces that invite social interactions. Craft cozy seating arrangements that make it easy to connect with friends and family.

Tackle flooring considerations. Carefully select flooring materials that prioritize safety. Select slip-resistant options such as hardwood, cork, or textured tiles. Moreover, eliminate potential tripping hazards by securing loose rugs with double-sided tape or removing them altogether.

Make your health needs a priority. Prioritize your health needs by ensuring that essential medical supplies are easily accessible. Establish a safety alert system to address emergencies promptly, providing you with peace of mind.

Build a robust support network. Cultivate a network of dependable allies, be it understanding neighbors, close friends, or dedicated professional caregivers. This ensures that assistance is readily available when you need it most.

Compliments of VirtualResults.net



Neuroplasticity
by Jessica Raam Foster,
NeurologyofPresence.com

Finding Balance In Your Life

What does that actually feel like? Notice the words that you choose to describe it.

I sometimes say:

I feel pulled in too many different directions.

I feel ungrounded.

I feel off-center.

I feel pushed around.

I keep getting knocked down.

Picture what that actually looks like if you were to physicalize it. It is movement in multiple planes — which is exactly how we train the vestibular system, aka your balance system.

The vestibular system is regulated by tiny little organs that live inside your ears. These tiny organs send signals to your brain to let your brain know where you are in relationship to gravity, and which direction you are moving.

In my experience, training my physical balance directly improves my ability to balance the external world. It makes sense, the more centered and grounded I feel in my body, the better able I am to discern when things get out of whack, and the faster I can course-correct before they really go off the rails.

I am fascinated by the boundary (or lack thereof) between where our psychological/emotional experience of life meets the physical. At the end of the day everything we experience in life is a result of brain activity. It makes sense to me that the health of my brain is going to dictate, or at least play a role in my experience of life.

So how do we improve balance? You can't unless you challenge it. You can't find center unless you get knocked off of it.

So, let's find the edges of your balance. Here are suggestions on how to increasingly challenge your balance: Close your eyes. Try standing on one foot. Nod or shake your head. Pick a narrower platform.

Pick something just challenging enough that you work to stay with it for a minute.

Try anything from this list the next time you feel unbalanced and know that you are waking up your vestibular system, the part of your brain responsible for helping you know where your true center really is. Hopefully, you will feel more capable and ready to tackle whatever challenges you are facing today.



Jim Diaz
Mayor, Clayton
jdiaz@claytonca.gov

Clayton Mayor

A Letter from the Mayor

December 28, 2023

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as your mayor. This town has been my home for over forty-four years, and I care deeply about its future.

As we embark on this journey together, upgrading our technology infrastructure will be crucial. We need efficient systems to provide top-notch services to our residents. Reviewing our budget and revenue streams will also be a top priority. My goal is to deliver the high-quality services we all expect, while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

At the same time, we must continue addressing persistent challenges like housing regulations, infrastructure maintenance, and public safety. I am committed to working closely with our police department to ensure they have adequate funding to keep our community safe.

I am extremely excited to participate in the planning for Clayton's 60th

Anniversary of its 1964 Inauguration. It will be a wonderful event for us to come together as neighbors and friends. I encourage everyone to get involved. Please contact City Hall if you would like to volunteer your time or expertise.

Clayton is a special place with a small-town charm. As your mayor, I will work hard to maintain that character while running an open and transparent local government. I want to keep you informed and involved in important decisions every step of the way.

I encourage you to attend City Council Meetings in person to make your voice heard. You can also reach out to me directly with any questions or concerns at 925-673-7316 or JimD@claytonca.gov.

Let's make 2024 a year to remember in Clayton. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Jim



SUPERVISOR
KEN CARLSON
District IV
Contra Costa County

Year-end Reflections

As the new year begins, I want to take this opportunity to reflect on my first year as your County Supervisor. While I have spent 30+ years as a public servant, this year has been a learning process, and I am grateful for the support I have received from County staff and the staff at each of the various boards I sit on.

One of the joys of this year was to co-author the Board of Supervisors' annual resolution recognizing July as Pride Month. As the first openly gay Supervisor, I was honored to raise the pride flag at the County Administration Building to mark the beginning of the month. I also authored a board order for the County to support ACA 5, a resolution that will create a ballot measure to repeal Prop. 8, and make marriage a fundamental right in the California Constitution. This year the Board took an important step in moving the Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) forward by appointing two co-directors. Dr. Kendra Carr and Mr. Peter Kim will work together, in this new County Department, to address racial equity work within County government and in the community. I believe that my work never stops to ensure that Contra Costa County is inclusive to all members of our communities.

As a retired police officer, I was proud of the additional staff we added to ensure our justice system is fair.



During this year's budget cycle, the Board allocated an additional \$850,000 to Stand Together Contra Costa (STCC), allowing them to expand their staff and capacity. STCC provides legal services, immigrant rights education, and training to support families impacted by anti-immigrant policies. I also directed \$50,000 to STCC to expand their services right here in District IV. The Board also approved \$2.2 million to hire ten attorneys, evenly split between the Public Defenders and the District Attorney's Offices to ensure current and past cases adhere to the California Racial Justice Act (AB 256).

It is a privilege and honor to serve you. I do my absolute best to listen, collaborate, and clearly communicate the direction our County is heading. One of the ways I do this is through my eBlasts. This year I've sent out over 70 emails filled with information about our community, ways to get involved and how I am engaging in the community. This fall, I started hosting a monthly Coffee with Ken. Our next one will be in the City of Clayton. To sign up for my eBlasts please visit www.contracosta.gov/carlson

I look forward to what 2024 will bring.



Edi Birsan
Concord Mayor
cityofconcord.org

Mayor Birsan Takes the Gavel to the Streets

As the new Mayor in Concord, I will be having some initial formal times to be available to meet with folks:

Mondays at City Hall from 4:00 - 5:00 p.m.; Tuesdays I will be roaming around the Farmers Market around noon; and Saturdays, from 11:00 a.m. to 12 noon at Peet's at Oak Grove and Treat. These times may be expanded should demand require it, and I welcome that. I am also willing to meet at other times or come to you if you would be so generous as to host a little neighborhood meeting. Please let me know.

On social media I have a council Facebook page as well as my personal page. Otherwise, I do not recommend you rely on social media to get my attention to something. I do not use X, Instagram, 'Spot-a-fly' and rarely look at Claycord's Facebook. Nextdoor is hit and miss. At times, their threads can spin wildly and make it quite easy to miss things.

I have been sending out a Birsan Bulletin by email about every six weeks to a mailing list focusing on Council District 4 and this will be continuing since I am still in that Council seat. The best way is always to contact me directly. Quite frankly, my preference is one on one, face-to-face over tea or coffee.

Other things about the position of Mayor. In Concord, Walnut Creek, Pleasant Hill and Clayton, the city council selects the position every December. It is a majority vote.

There is a reference at times to 'traditional rotation' which means typically the Vice Mayor who has not been the mayor the longest on the council is moved to Mayor as was my case this year.

Though, this does not always happen. In the last 10 years, each of the four cities named have selected someone other than who would be in rotation, typically on a 3-2 or a 4-1



The Mayor is in. Concord Mayor Birsan meets with resident at Peet's Coffee, Oak Grove and Treat, on Saturdays from 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon.

vote. Sometimes, selecting a mayor might be called a blood sport. It never occurs without negative impacts on the Councilmembers involved.

The only way around this is to have a directly elected mayor, which I have supported for years. Or enact a law (not a policy which can be ignored as one city did) that simply states that if there is only one candidate then that candidate is made mayor, and if there is more than one, then the one who has not been the mayor the longest sequentially in office is appointed. I can only hope such a simple solution will occur, but politics is never that simple.

The views here are personally of Edi Birsan, not to be construed with a screed disguised as a formal government declaration, not at any cost to the taxpayers. If you want to moan and groan you write direct to EdiBirsan@gmail.com

The Carbonator: Reducing Wildfire Risks



A new machine called a carbonator is being used by the East Bay Regional Park District to fight fire with fire, literally. The carbonator was recently started up for the winter season. The carbonator is currently being used at Anthony Chabot Regional Park to dispose of vegetation from a large 365-acre fuels reduction project. In 2020, the Park District found over 1,500 acres of dead and dying trees within its parks caused by drought stress and climate change. The carbonator burns organic matter at extremely high temperatures

(about 1,300 degrees Fahrenheit) using very little oxygen to dispose of vegetation, which results in very low greenhouse gas emissions. The carbonator is a climate-friendly disposal method, especially compared to the conventional open pile burning or transporting loads long distances off-site in diesel trucks. "The project at Anthony Chabot Regional Park is a first-of-its-kind project in the Bay Area," said Park District General Manager Sabrina Landreth. "As the largest regional park district in the nation and a local leader in wildfire prevention, we knew we needed to find an innovative solution for disposing of the vegetation from our fuels reduction projects." The resulting material, called biochar, is being used within the Park District as a soil enhancer. "The carbonator is an innovative fuels reduction tool to address wildfire risks," said Chief Aileen Theile.

Around Martinez



“Enough is Enough” Says Healthy Martinez and Council

Pressures County and Agencies to Hold Refinery Accountable

by Brianne Zorn, Mayor, City of Martinez

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” -Margaret Mead

I cannot think of a better example of this (otherwise very cliché) quote than the Martinez City Council meeting on December 20. The City of Martinez has been dealing with the fallout (pun intended) of the spent catalyst release since Thanksgiving 2022. The grassroots activist group Healthy Martinez (healthymartinez.org) was formed to hold the Martinez Refinery Company and their parent company PBF Energy accountable for this release. But as additional incidents occurred, their participation in the advocacy for the health of the Martinez community became even more important.

The Contra Costa Health (CC Health) Community Oversight Committee released the results of the soil sampling and risk assessment this summer, which concluded the fruits and vegetables growing in our soils are safe to eat, and our risk of exposure to spent catalyst was unlikely because all metals detected in the soil were below background levels. If this had been the only release this past year, we would have been able to pick up the pieces and move on.

But the releases into our community continued, including spent catalyst powder, coke dust, unplanned flaring, and unwelcome odors, indicating a systemic issue at the refinery. Throughout the year, the Martinez City Council pushed the County to

improve Community Warning System communications with our community, continued to coordinate with county, state, and federal leadership, and rolled out our own Martinez Alerts system.

In October, the City Council issued a proclamation urging the refinery to comply with regional air emissions standards and initiated bi-monthly presentations by the Refinery to keep them accountable to their statements of corrective actions.

All along, the activist group Healthy Martinez has kept the pressure on, with continual communication with the media and agency representatives, and attending our council meetings. I am so appreciative of the leaders of Healthy Martinez who have kept this conversation going, expanding their network and amplifying the many voices who are being affected by the refinery.

On December 20, the Healthy Martinez group showed up in force, filling the Council Chambers with informed citizens demanding action by the agencies tasked with protecting our health and safety. We kicked off the evening stating that moving forward, we will be referring to the refinery as PBF Energy, since they have not earned the right to use our City's name. This was followed by a presentation by PBF Energy refinery representatives with explanations of the most recent events (odors on December 15 and flaring with black smoke and a grass fire on December 17).

The Council asked serious questions

of the refinery, CC Health, and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (Air District) inquiring about violations, enforcement, and penalties, with the recurring theme: “Enough is enough.” This was followed by over an hour of public comment. The item was concluded by representatives of CC Health expressing their frustration with the recent events at the refinery and their commitment to explore all of their options.

The pressure worked. On December 27, Contra Costa County announced an unplanned inspection of the refinery. A Safety Assessment, which will be coordinated by the Community Oversight Committee, will be scheduled for 2024. The Martinez City Council will continue to push for a community air monitoring station to be installed by the Air District, and



Healthy Martinez group fills Council Chambers at December 20 Council meeting. Photo credit: Jonathan Bash

we will be supporting efforts by our state assembly to push for increased enforcement of refineries.

I encourage everyone to sign up for Martinez Alerts so you will receive updates on incidents that may affect our community. While the regular updates of what is going on in Martinez may increase your frustration, it also means you will have the knowledge you need to make informed decisions for you and your family. Knowledge is power. Sign up for Martinez Alerts at martinezalerts.com.

2024: Rates Easing but Insurance Problems Mounting

by Courtney Ayers, AMP Real Estate & Staging

In 2023 we saw mortgage rates rise to the highest levels since 2000. This 23-year high peaked in October with rates hitting 8.45% on conventional loans. Fortunately, just at the end of the year, in December we saw rates drop back from this high point to around 7% for conventional and 5.49% for FHA loans. While no one has a crystal ball to predict what will happen in 2024, it is widely anticipated that rates will continue to drop.

This is great news to both buyers and sellers. However, as we enter 2024 a new problem has been lurking on the horizon — insurance.

In 2023 insurance companies began to leave California. Thanks to the catastrophic wildfires the state has experienced over the last few years, many insurance providers have deemed California as uninsurable and left the state while other companies have continued to do business in California but only in certain areas and/or with steep rate hikes.

It is easy to focus on the impact of high interest rates on buyers' and

sellers' abilities and desires to buy and sell real estate. But the impact of insurance companies no longer doing business in certain areas, dropping policies, and raising rates on policies is an issue not to be overlooked or forgotten. We have already been hearing about some policies in the Martinez area that have doubled and tripled in the last year, adding hundreds of dollars a month to their payments.

As buyers enter the market in 2024, it will be important for them to factor in the potential extra costs of the higher insurance quotes to their monthly payments. The new higher rates will preclude some buyers from being able to purchase a home that otherwise would appear to be within their price range.

So, with one problem easing, we have another one in the works. This is how it always goes though. There is never a market without challenges or problems. Navigating the wild real estate market can be tricky but with the right people you should be able to sail smoothly through a transaction.

AMP Real Estate & Staging
Ayers Martinez Properties

706 Ferry st,
Martinez CA 94553

Have you been on the sidelines?

There's an estimated 5 Million people that have been waiting on interest rates to drop to purchase a home...

This could be your sign...

Interest Rates have already started to come down so If you've been sitting on the sidelines waiting to buy or sell, this may be your sign to dive in! If you're looking to sell! lets talk now and start taking the steps to get your home ready for the spring season and if you're looking to buy lets get looking before everyone else jumps in!

Where to start?

Knowing how to even get started can be overwhelming. From prepping your home for sale, getting connected with the mortgage people and products and even figuring how to start saving Courtney is here every step of the way.

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What Can I Do For You?

“We Are Building”: City Council Pledges to Make Affordable Housing a Reality

by Craig Lazzeretti, *Martinez News And Views*

After years of failing to bring in affordable housing to Martinez, City Council members vowed to make sure this time is different as they signed off on a revised 2023-2031 Housing Element at their December 20 meeting that will guide the city’s growth over the next eight years.

Council Member Satinder Malhi expressed hope that 2024 will feature more talk about housing in the council chamber and a lot less about refinery accidents.

“Next year, when we’re done dealing with environmental disasters hopefully, we can actually turn our attention to the existential crisis of our time, which is the lack of housing,” he said. “We are building.”

Previous Housing Elements in the city, which did little more than list targets for housing growth at various income levels with little to no action toward meeting them.

State legislation passed in recent years has steadily stripped away the power of cities to drag their feet on housing development and the city — like others up and down the State — was forced to make several revisions to the initial draft of its Housing Element to meet state demands, attract developers and stimulate growth.

Malhi put a particular focus on creating “workforce” housing so that members of the Z and millennial generations have the same opportunities

“to plant some roots in this community like many of us did.”

Malhi warned that the city risks losing even more local control over future growth if it doesn’t move aggressively to implement the 31 programs contained in the Housing Element and get shovels into the ground.

“If we continue to drag our feet, we’re going to lose that control and they’re going to come in here and build for us,” he said.

Planning Manager Michael Cass said the city has already begun implementing various programs in the plan, even before it’s certified by the state with the goal of seeing tangible changes in the city’s housing picture within the first three years of the eight-year cycle.

The Housing Element revision that received the most focus was the state’s requirement that it raise the development height limit for various zones of the city from two stories to three stories to achieve a density goal for affordable housing of 30 units per acre.

Council Member Jay Howard, a carpenter by trade, noted that the height of projects is a key incentive in convincing developers to build. “... only being willing to do development if they can get into the third and fourth floor, because that’s where they make money. If they’re not going to make money, they’re not going to come to town.”

Mayor Brienne Zorn raised the issue of the “builder’s remedy,” which has

been in effect since February when the city failed to adopt its Housing Element by the state-mandated deadline, giving developers the ability to circumvent the city’s regulatory and zoning standards for affordable housing projects if they so choose.

She said the fact that no developers have taken advantage of the “builder’s remedy” suggests that Martinez is not currently a place where they want to build. She asked Cass whether he believed the incentive programs in the Housing Element would change that dynamic.

Cass said that there are already signs of progress, with the city issuing more housing permits in 2023 than it has in any of the past eight years.

In the Housing Element cycle for 2015-2023, Martinez permitted only 105 of 469 housing units that it was assigned in its Regional Housing Needs Allocation. All but one of those units were at the above-moderate-income level; none were in the extremely low- or low-income categories.

“Our numbers were so bad before that anything is better than practically zero,” Zorn said of the positive recent trend in new housing unit permits, many of which have been in the form of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).

Martinez is expected to create a total of 1,345 housing units during the 2023-



31 cycle, 551 of which are supposed to be in the low- or very low-income categories.

The council adopted the Housing Element by a 4-0 vote. It will be sent to the State Department of Housing and Community Development for certification.

(This article has been abridged from its original)

A City Park Gets a Name

Original article by Tom Lochner, freelance journalist

A decision was made. The name of a city park to be built at the site of a former public golf course a half-mile south of Highway 4 has been decided — Pine Meadow Park.

But it was not an easy consideration. A series of speakers debated whether the name should celebrate the area’s original indigenous inhabitants, or to commemorate its more recent history as a popular community recreation and gathering place. In the end, they chose the latter.

The 8.2-acre park site lies amid the planned 65-home “Traditions (at the Meadow)” subdivision at the site of the former Pine Meadow Public Golf Course east of Morello Avenue and north of Center Avenue.

The Parks, Recreation, Marina & Cultural Commission (PRMCC) had recommended adopting the name “Karkin Park” to honor the Carquin Ohlone people (“Karkin” is the spelling widely used for the language of the Carquin people).

Meanwhile, the Martinez Historical Society, in a unanimous vote of its board, and the support of 384 residents who signed a petition preferred Pine Meadow Park.

Vice Mayor Mark Ross commented that Karkin Park was “kind of a well-

intentioned nomenclature that popped up. It wasn’t submitted by the tribes. They were notified kind of after the fact.”

One proponent of Pine Meadow Park said the proposal to name the park Karkin is “a sweet gesture towards the indigenous people” but that also deserving recognition and consideration are the multiple generations of current inhabitants of the area that know it as Pine Meadow.

There was general agreement that both Native American history and more recent non-indigenous Martinez history should be honored. Several speakers held the view that there are places better suited than the new park to honor the former.

Councilman Jay Howard, “I have no problem with recognizing the Carquin people, but this location is just not the best one,” Howard said.

Councilman Malhi agreed. Mayor Zorn said she completely agreed with all the arguments for the name Karkin Park but was not comfortable naming it without input from indigenous people — she likened it to “thinking on behalf of someone else.” As for the subdivision park, she said she supported the name Pine Meadow Park.



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