Many years ago, my mother gifted me with a book by the title of “Succeeding Against the Odds.” It was the story about John H. Johnson who founded the Ebony publishing empire, the home of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazine. The odds were certainly stacked against him. Facing tremendous challenges, he was able to leverage a $500.00 loan secured by his mother’s furniture into a multi-million dollar publishing company.

I draw upon true life stories such as John H. Johnson’s as an additional source for strength and encouragement to bolster my drive, determination and motivation. Just as he did, I want to be able to succeed against the odds. At the 48th annual NAACP Image Awards in 2017, award recipient Denzel Washington uttered these words as part of his acceptance speech “ease is a greater threat to progress than hardship.”

For many of us this is a season of great challenge and hardship. Even trying to take advantage of the different relief programs can be fraught with bureaucracy, delays and the unavailability of information.

Support Local Placemaking, Our Restaurants

**By Paul Fadelli**

*Mayor Pro Tem, City El Cerrito*

During these difficult times, restaurants everywhere are in dire straits…and that includes El Cerrito. The National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation (NRAEF) estimates that as many as 5-7 million restaurant workers may lose their jobs due to the COVID-19 crisis.

In El Cerrito, most restaurants are providing only take out or delivery service to keep a stream of revenue coming in and workers employed. The El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce website ([www.elcerritochamber.org](http://www.elcerritochamber.org)) has a list of restaurants still providing meals to guide those who want to support our local establishments. (Also see the last page of this *Byline*.)

Placemaking is an important part of making cities enjoyable and accessible. It means creating attractive and enjoyable parts of a community where residents and visitors want to be—to spend time, and hopefully, money. To me there’s nothing more important than restaurants to attract people to neighborhoods where friends can meet, dine, and send important tax revenue to the city.

After college I was employed in an Oakland restaurant (Victoria Station) and worked my way up from a dishwasher, salad bar assistant, bus boy, and finally a bartender. Nights and brunches were always festive for the community of customers who congregated. While paychecks were lean, they provided important jobs to many of us employees who were still finding out where our lives might lead us. I’ve remained friends with many of my former restaurant workmates from “the Station.”

But help is needed now to shore up these small businesses.

Better yet, to support local placemaking in El Cerrito, order take out from our own restaurants so we can keep our brick and mortar as viable places that keep local workers employed during this difficult time.

The place we will be making better is El Cerrito.
Is it over yet? Hardly. SIP regulations are in effect until the end of this month. But I believe we are flattening the curve. There’s the positive note.

My own business, Premier Graphics, has been mostly shut down since this mess began; no sales. So I’ve applied for a PPP loan and if funding appears, I’ll smile again.

In fact, I applied for two PPP loans! My long running non-paying gig is the Treasurer job at this Chamber, and that entity is also a small business employing one person. Therefore, an application was submitted for the Chamber too.

Whether or not any federal assistance shows up, I must commend Rauly Butler and his colleague Rita Bonas at Mechanics Bank. Along with other “mechanics” they worked day and night, plus weekends, to assist me and others to move the paperwork. Call me a happy customer.

Masks have now become de rigueur along with social distancing. Stores stripe the floor or sidewalk every six feet. Essential industries print signs warning “no mask, no entry.” Queue up and wait to get inside a grocery store. One recent visit showed how efficient the process can be: check out at counter (sneeze glass separating you and the clerk), swipe the card and get a spritz of sanitizer, all in a minute or two.

Free bags. The annoying ten cent charge for shopping bags has been suspended by the Governor. Except, technically, not in cities such as El Cerrito. But I see most merchants providing bags at no added cost just to keep your personal dirty bags out of their stores.

Dedication. El Cerrito City Council members earn $441 per month. All are working harder than ever with a need to balance a budget with a serious drop in revenue due to the virus. At a recent council meeting they cut their own pay by ten percent. That is just plain wrong.

Moeser & San Pablo. Just so you know, the construction project is part of the San Pablo Avenue Green Stormwater Spine Project. Thanks to El Cerrito Senior Engineer Ana Bernardes for clarifying that.

Rialto news. With our beloved Cerrito Theater closed until CV restrictions are eased, Rialto presents Virtual Cinema. New films will be released every Friday for home streaming. This is a way to support the theater during shutdown. Prices will vary. No, pizza will not be delivered to your living room. Visit rialtocinemas.com for what’s available.

Covid assistance. I am very impressed with the Contra Costa Small Business Development Center. They actually answer the phone! Representatives can walk you through the PPP and EIDL process. Contact at 925-222-5228; Web: contracostasbdc.org. The SBDC is a great resource for non-Covid business resources as well. Check them out.

Big hair. For those who have hair, they’ll have lots of it by the time the SIP regulations are lifted. Tip your barber or beautician well when they finally return.

See Past Prez Palaver, page 3
We Must Keep Local Business Alive with Consistent Positive Steps

April has come and gone and with it the first round of federal government economic stimulus assistance. By the time you read this, the President will have signed his approval for the second package worth about $500 billion and the portals at the SBA and other lenders will have opened once more. Maybe this time the money can actually go to some small and micro businesses instead of being grabbed by large corporations.

On a recent webinar, I was surprised to learn that the SBA criteria for small business varies widely according to industry and up to 500 employees is considered small for the retail sector. It is absurd and outdated that there isn’t a micro or very small business category, for example, say a maximum of 25 or 50 employees. This would be the case for most El Cerrito merchants and if a stimulus package existed for them, our neighborhood businesses would have an actual chance to get a financial shot in the arm.

I was also disappointed to learn that many big banks administering the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) may not have operated on first-come, first-served basis but instead looked for the larger companies to help first because the bank would make a higher fee on processing the loan. Do they have no scruples?

This crisis is really highlighting the best and worst of human nature, and that is surely an example of the lowest form. Also, I heard today on the webinar hosted by Congressman DeSaulnier’s office, there are scammers approaching businesses offering help to do the application process for a fee which is a blatantly fraudulent action. It’s depressing that such despicable people exist and feed on others’ problems. Neither the SBA nor any approved lender is permitted to collect any fees to apply.

However, I know of at least one business in El Cerrito that succeeded in getting the PPP money, so all hope is not lost. The owner credited his savvy controller for achieving this positive result. Please contact me if you know of any business that has had similar outcome or if they need help to apply for the current round.

If you or anyone you know needs assistance, I highly recommend reaching out right away to the new Small Business Call Center established by our county supervisor, John Gioia and his colleagues of Contra Costa County. He encouraged several agencies to establish this line to help Small Businesses access federal, state and local resources as well as learn how to scale back or survive a temporary closure, and how to ramp back up as COVID-19 restrictions ease off. This process is expected to be incremental over many months, and we face many unknowns.

The Small Business Call Center is open Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. The phone number is: 833-320-1919.

Remember the constant refrain here at the Chamber and City Hall: buy, eat, support local, and spread good words about local merchants! We want El Cerrito to stay alive in the community and economic sense, don’t you?

PAST PREZ PALAVER

Continued from page 2

Grab and go. Let’s meet the City Manager’s challenge to order food from El Cerrito restaurants as often as possible. Keep them in business! Please see the back page for the current restaurant list of shops offering take out food.

Another idea: pass on those food delivery services. You know, Uber, DoorDash, and the like. They extract a significant fee from the restaurant operator, reported to be 25-30%. The City and County of San Francisco recently passed an emergency law limiting them to 15%.

Fabric masks. You can have one made at Great American Dry Cleaners located at El Cerrito Plaza. Six bucks is the price I saw. Call 510-526-6844 or visit greatamericandrycleaners.com for information or to order.

El Cerrito’s budget. Every city in the state will have a big revenue problem this year thanks to COVID-19. But the matter is particularly acute in this city due to the fact that we lack financial reserves. A special City Council meeting on April 25th began the process by cutting their own budget to subsidize additional hours at the El Cerrito Library. (The county pays for 35 hours a week.) In an interesting twist, Contra Costa County decided to shut their libraries down on Sundays and that includes our branch. Win some, lose some.

The real work of the City Council will begin at the May 5th meeting when discussion and action other parts of the budget (the bulk of it) will begin. Expect some painful cuts. This has an impact on business, hence, I mention it here.

There is a lot of work going on at City Hall now amending spreadsheets by the hour. Or so it appears. I don’t envy the folks dealing with this. Should there be a Coronavirus bailout from the feds for cities, that would be a godsend to our small city. Congress is trying to get something like that going.

If interested, as I am, go to the City’s website where you can follow this budget mess in great detail and also participate via video council meetings.

Webinars. We’ve had several of these recently to help business people deal with effects of the virus shutdown and explain how to apply to assistance. Typically, not much advance notice is given before they “air.” Keep tabs on the City and Chamber websites, subscribe to the City Manager’s Updates and Community Development News.

Another way to be informed: contact byline@elcerritochamber.org. I send any assistance information out immediately upon receiving same. Often while walking down the street with my device. Dangerous, huh?
“El Cerrito has been headed for this for a long time. It’s been badly managed both in terms of the elected officials and in terms of the staff…”

some of the good and bad actors as part of the job. Is it satisfying to point out when people are acting improperly? Yes, it’s satisfying. But writing about public policy isn’t just catching the bad guys, it’s talking about both what can be done and what should be done to make government work the way it should.

Lisa: Have you ever come across a city that you’re particularly drawn to writing about?

Dan: I’m pretty well known as somebody who likes to delve into public policy issues, especially financial, local government finances. But frankly, there’s rarely an issue that comes along that doesn’t sort of pique my interest. For example, we’ve been buried in Coronavirus for months now and it’s still a fascinating topic. Everybody’s reading or talking about it all the time. I feel like I’m probably consuming about two to three hours worth of reading a day. It’s just kind of the nature of the issue.

Lisa: You don’t see yourself mainly as a muckraker pointing out public government inefficiencies?

Dan: Before and since I’ve been on the editorial page I’ve written about the importance of responsible fiscal behavior by local officials and public agency staff. Basically, I’ve been writing about this since the Great Recession. You got to be prepared and you got to clean up your act. There are good actors and there are bad actors. We expose some of the good and bad actors as part of the job. Is it satisfying to point out when people are acting improperly? Yes, it’s satisfying. But writing about public policy isn’t just catching the bad guys, it’s talking about both what can be done and what should be done to make government work the way it should.

Lisa: Do you have a part of public policy that you’re particularly drawn to writing about?

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taxes in the state. They already have one of the most exorbitant property transfer taxes in the state and they keep coming back to voters with more and more taxes. They’re notorious, as far as I’m concerned, for total deceit in the way they present the measures to the voters. That’s not a successful recipe or way to run a city.

Lisa: They risk losing all trust from residents.

Dan: Yes, they should. But maybe they’ll get away with it again. Correct me if I’m wrong, but the last measure passed overwhelmingly. I’m not sure if anybody really realized how badly they were being deceived. They picked a special time and jammed it through so people wouldn’t notice and there wouldn’t be opposing arguments on the ballot. This sort of deceit isn’t acceptable… shouldn’t be acceptable in our national politics and shouldn’t be acceptable in our local politics.

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Lisa: Where’s the money going to come from?

Dan: Well, as I’ve said already, your city is definitely in a world of hurt and the bottom line is they’re going to have to make deep cuts. The City Manager is going to have to find a very sharp pencil. Wherever the cuts are, those are the policy decisions the council and the staff are going to have to hammer through. Borrowing is not the way to solve it.

Lisa: Any other comments you’d like to share with our Chamber audience?

Dan: No, thanks, I need to get back to work.

Garbage, Waste Haulers Seeking Support

By John C. Stashik

In a letter sent to Governor Gavin Newsom in early April, 40 waste and recycling industry stakeholders, including large waste haulers and the Teamsters union, warned that they will soon need support from the state to continue providing solid waste collection services.

That’s because garbage companies are losing significant revenue from the sudden drop in business activity — revenue they rely on to fund their operations, from fueling and fixing trucks to keeping employees paid.

Around the state, 10-20% of commercial accounts have been canceled or significantly reduced. While weekly garbage collection is mandated by law, garbage companies are expected to figure out how to stay profitable and in business.

“Trash Talk” in the April 2020 Byline interviewed Mark Figone of East Bay Sanitary Co., Inc. The topic was the state of the refuse and recycling industry.

To learn more, contact Mark. Email: markfigone@ebsan.com. East Bay Sanitary collects garbage and green waste in El Cerrito.

Empty Streets, Plenty of Parking, in El Cerrito During SIP

A recent walk around the city revealed some quiet streets.

There was plenty of parking available at El Cerrito Plaza on what normally is a lot full of cars with retail customers.

On upper Fairmount Avenue, both the street and sidewalks were totally empty.

Fairmount is normally a bustling business district.
Coachland Education Center Helps Students Succeed in School and Life!

By Lisa Martinengo

Amazingly, the current Corona virus outbreak is not the first pandemic Eric Ma has lived through. In 2003, the future founder of Coachland Education Center used to live in Hong Kong, and recalled when the SARS virus hit, high school classes were not cancelled. Mask-wearing was obligatory and the constant hand washing went on for four months!

It’s now 2020, Eric has lived in the United States for 17 years and is now doing everything to help his business survive through this pandemic’s effects. Not surprisingly, Eric and the Coachland staff are using Zoom video and Google to keep in touch with their students and maintain regular sessions whenever possible.

Eric received a B.S. in Business Finances from San Francisco State University in 2010. He got a real estate license and sold houses for a few years. Sometime mid-decade, Eric grew disenchanted with industry and discovered an interest in helping teens and children to succeed at school. He remembered an intense focus on testing in Hong Kong schools, likely remnants of the British education system and how he prepared for these tests. He realized a niche existed to help families and kids eager to ace their courses and tests here.

In 2015, Eric and a partner began looking for suitable space to launch their business and found the roomy and light El Cerrito office space at 11858 San Pablo Ave. Most of the year was consumed with remodeling, paperwork and permits to bring the space up to standards and Coachland Education Center door opened January, 2016.

Marketing and advertising helped some, but word of mouth referrals starting to increase the business by the next year. Now Eric and staff have great relationships with many local parents as well as teachers at Korematsu Middle School and El Cerrito High. He and the other tutors know what the course books, curriculum and homework are, and can provide in-depth help to students needing a bit of extra time to learn. Along with English and math, other areas of coaching include Science, Spanish, Japanese, Software coding and SAT test preparation.

How does it start? All students begin with a free assessment to evaluate each student’s strength and weaknesses. The curriculum and instructions are customized for each student to improve their grades and performance. The tutoring program is available in semi-private (3:1) or private one-on-one.

Would you like to ensure your child has the tools to succeed in school and do their best in life? Coachland can help with this! Try a free consultation.

Coachland Education Center
info@coachland.com • Phone: 510-680-5218

OPEN FOR BUSINESS
Farmers Market
AT EL CERRITO PLAZA
Open Tuesday & Saturday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce
Linking Business and Community Since 1984

Saturday, May 2
Mexican Food returns

Saturday, May 9
Hudson Fresh Fish returns

Chamber Video Mixer
THURSDAY, MAY 14 • 5-6:30 P.M.
Where? Your living room on Zoom, of course! Grab your favorite drink and snack, cozy up to your screen to network, share and learn from each other.

RSVP: info@elcerritochamber.org
and we’ll send you the link to sign in
ability of much needed funds. All of this is rather disconcerting. Despite this, we must maintain a “stiff upper lip” and press on regardless of the complexities, uncertainty and bureaucracy. The true-life story of how one lawyer responded to government delays and nonsense put a smile on my face. Hopefully, it will do the same for you. Even though it is not related to the current Coronavirus situation it still serves as a great example of how not to let them “get you down.”

Part of rebuilding New Orleans caused residents often to be challenged with the task of tracing home titles back potentially hundreds of years. With a community rich with history stretching back over two centuries, houses have been passed along through generations of family, sometimes making it quite difficult to establish ownership.

A New Orleans lawyer sought an FHA loan for a client. He was told the loan would be granted if he could prove satisfactory title to a parcel of property being offered as collateral. The title to the property dated back to 1803, which took the lawyer three months to track down. After sending the information to the FHA, he received the following reply (Actual reply from FHA): “Upon review of your letter adjoining your client’s loan application we note that the request is supported by an Abstract of Title. While we compliment the able manner in which you have prepared and presented the application, we must point out that you have only cleared title to the proposed collateral property back to 1803. Before final approval can be accorded, it will be necessary to clear the title back to its origin.”

Annoyed, the lawyer responded as follows with this actual response: “Your letter regarding title in Case No. 189156 has been received. I note that you wish to have title extended further than the 206 years covered by the present application.

“I was unaware that any educated person in this country, particularly those working in the property area, would not know that Louisiana was purchased by the United States from France, in 1803, the year of origin identified in our application. For the edification of uninformed FHA bureaucrats, the title to the land prior to U.S. ownership was obtained from France, which had acquired it by Right of Conquest from Spain. The land came into the possession of Spain by Right of Discovery made in the year 1492 by a sea captain named Christopher Columbus, who had been granted the privilege of seeking a new route to India by the Spanish monarch, Queen Isabella.

“The good Queen Isabella, being a pious woman and almost as careful about titles as the FHA, took the precaution of securing the blessing of the Pope before she sold her jewels to finance Columbus’ expedition…”

“Now the Pope, as I’m sure you may know, is the emissary of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and God, is commonly accepted, as having created this world. Therefore, I believe it is safe to presume that God also made that part of the world called Louisiana. God, therefore, would be the owner of origin and his origins date back to before the beginning of time, the world as we know it, and the FHA. I hope you find God’s original claim to be satisfactory. Now may we have our loan?”

Let us continue to stay the course with faith, tenacity and humor as well. “This too shall pass.”
All Chamber lunches, mixers, and other events canceled until further notice due to the COVID-19 emergency.

Dine Out El Cerrito

These restaurants offer take out food during the COVID-19 lockdown. List subject to change. El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce members shown in red. Check restaurant websites as many provide online ordering and delivery to maintain social distancing.

Bánh Mi Sandwich Deli
10174 San Pablo Ave.
Bananaleafelcerrito.com

Baskin Robbins
10398 San Pablo Ave.
baskinrobbins.com

Brasil Bistro
11866 San Pablo Ave.

Burgerim
El Cerrito Plaza
burgerim.com

Burger King
6021 Central Ave.
bk.com

Chef's Chinese
El Cerrito Plaza

Chipotle
Carlson & San Pablo
chipotle.com

Church's Chicken
11575 San Pablo Ave.
churches.com

Donut Time
10740 San Pablo Ave.

El Cerrito Natural Grocery
Annex — wine & beer only
Stockton & San Pablo
naturalgrocery.com

Elevation 66 Brewing Co.
10082 San Pablo Ave.
elevation66.com

El Mono Fresh
Flavors of Peru
10264 San Pablo Ave.
elmonofresh.com

Frannie Express
Hawaiian Barbecue
11775 San Pablo Ave.
frannieexpress.com

Gangnam Tofu
Korean Cuisine
11740 San Pablo Ave.

Himalayan Grocery
10340 San Pablo Ave.

HK Home Kitchen
10140 San Pablo Ave.

Jack in the Box
5920 Cutting Blvd.
jackinthebox.com

Jamba Juice
El Cerrito Plaza
jamba.com

Little Caesar's Pizza
11299 San Pablo Ave.
littlecaesars.com

Little Hong Kong
10443 San Pablo Ave.

Lucky Store
El Cerrito Plaza
luckysupermarkets.com

McBears Social Club
food truck
10458 San Pablo Ave.

McDonald's
11821 San Pablo Ave.
mcdonalds.com

Mountain Mike’s Pizza
10750 San Pablo Ave.
mountainmikespizza.com

Mr. Pickle’s Sandwich Shop
10810 San Pablo Ave.
mrpickles.com

New India Supermarket
10289 San Pablo Ave.

Nation's Giant Hamburgers
Central & San Pablo
nationsrestaurants.com

New Dumpling
10064 San Pablo Ave.

Noodles Fresh
10042 San Pablo Ave.
noodlesfresh.com

Nori Roll
10178 San Pablo Ave.
norrol.com

Papi's Pizza Roma
10616 San Pablo Ave.
papispizzaroma.com

Panda Express
El Cerrito Plaza
pandexpress.com

Peet's Coffee
Carlson & San Pablo
peets.com

Popeye’s Louisiana Kitchen
10125 San Pablo Ave.
popeyes.com

Quickly
El Cerrito Plaza

Red Onion
11900 San Pablo Ave.

Romano’s Macaroni Grill
El Cerrito Plaza
macaronigrill.com

Safeway
11450 San Pablo Ave.

Sasa Kitchen
10350 San Pablo Ave.
sasakitchenca.co

Subway
10398 San Pablo Ave.

Taqueria El Salva
11252 San Pablo Ave.

tashi-delek-cuisine.com

Uncle Wong’s
11760 San Pablo Ave.

Uncle Wong’s
11760 San Pablo Ave.

The Junket
El Cerrito Plaza
thejunket.com

Uncle Wong’s
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