A couple of weeks ago a friend, Peter Gray, called me and left a message stating that he had something for me. We connected at his residence and Peter bestowed upon me some fresh salmon that he caught in the waters of Monterey Bay. The fish had already been cut into beautiful filets. I would categorize Peter among the world’s greatest fishermen. He operates a business that takes individuals on sport fishing tours and on more than one occasion I have let it be known that I would like to be the beneficiary of some of his great catches.

Peter told me that he grilled his salmon on cedar planks, and that it was delicious, so I decided to follow suit. This in turn resulted in a quick trip to Pastime Ace Hardware to purchase cedar planks. I was very impressed with the wide assortment of barbecue and grilling related accessories available at the store including several types of flavor enhancing wood chips. I purchased the cedar planks for the salmon along with some mesquite wood chips for a future grilling event and then proceeded to Trader Joe’s to pick up a few items including a lovely rib eye steak and a bottle of chardonnay. The family and I enjoyed a wonderful meal. Thank you Cap’n Pete!

Peter had exactly what I was looking for as did Trader Joe’s. For a city of approximately 25,000

‘We Love El Cerrito’ Gift Card Launch

BY GEORGINA EDWARDS

COVID-19 has impacted all aspects of our lives, placing small and local businesses in precarious waters, with entrepreneurs persevering to hang on each and every single day. The impact on small businesses will endure for years to come. With shop local movements, individuals can play a key role in preserving local businesses and reinvigorating our communities.

In partnership with local businesses and community leaders, the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce is proud to announce “We Love El Cerrito,” our new shop local campaign starting this month. We’ll be communicating with neighbors and business to encourage keeping dollars local in support of El Cerrito merchants and services by purchasing (or gifting) shop local “We Love El Cerrito” eGift cards, easily redeemable at participating businesses.

The United States eGift Card market is expected to reach $101,979 million by 2024 with a compound annual growth rate of 18.1% from 2020-2024. (Source—Saving Main Street: How Public-Private Partnerships Stimulate Small Business COVID-19 Recovery Efforts by Yiftee, August 2020.) The Chamber will be sharing about the benefits to encourage a wide range of merchants to join the program. Over time, we intend to build a shop local program that can be customized and refreshed with seasonal rewards and promotions.

For our inaugural phase, individuals will be encouraged to purchase eGift cards as gifts for Spring special occasions, like Mother’s Day, graduations and Father’s Day. Shoppers that participate and use eGift cards will qualify for branded “I Love El Cerrito” premiums like lapel buttons and shopping bags.

To operate this program, the Chamber is working with Yiftee, Inc., a Menlo Park based leader in the space, which has implemented over 200 community eGift card programs, working with over 55,000 merchants in communities throughout the United States since 2012.

“The Locally Atchison Card through Yiftee has helped our local businesses stay together during these times. This card is so helpful to my store and has given customers the incentive to give their support!”

— The Hardware Store, Atchison, Kansas

Stay tuned for more information coming from the Chamber. We’re excited to be part of rebuilding the El Cerrito we love.
What El Cerrito needs is a good seafood restaurant. I know exactly which one should locate in this city. The Fish Market Seafood Restaurant has been a favorite of mine since I discovered it when working in the Silicon Valley.

I’d frequently take my meal break at the Santa Clara location and appreciated the fresh fish, casual atmosphere, reasonable prices, and excellent service. The chain also has restaurants in Palo Alto, San Mateo, plus two in southern California. Each location also has a fish market.

Can we get one in El Cerrito? I’d like to believe we El Cerritans would totally support a seafood restaurant here. As it is now, I trek across the bay to Tadich Grill (San Francisco) or Sam’s (Tiburon) for seafood lunches or dinners. It would be great to have a quality seafood restaurant right here in town. We certainly have plenty of space available along the avenue.

So, a memo to our Chamber person(s) on the Economic Development Committee: get busy on a quest for a good seafood dining option in El Cerrito. Send “corporate” a copy of this Byline.

Their website: thefishmarket.com.

PennDel’s Bakehouse has settled in with a regular schedule. Open Thursday through Sunday from 9 a.m. until 2-ish p.m. (You see, they often sell out of all products.) Location: 6491 Portola Drive, across from CVS.

Moving. Presently on San Pablo at Carlson, Quad Republic Skate Company will soon be moving to larger quarters nearby. They are a full service roller skate shop. New location information to come.

Not yet. In March I mentioned Norge Cleaners’ plan to relocate from Albany to Stockton & San Pablo in El Cerrito. That didn’t quite work out but there is still a strong desire to open up shop in El Cerrito.

Finishing touches. The 32 new townhomes by Branagh Development at Eureka & San Pablo known as Credence are almost complete. Tour the new residences, each with a private balcony and other amenities, online at liveatcredence.com. The old Guitar Center never looked that good!

Pot shop. The new north end dispensary at Bishop Center (Conlon & San Pablo) is still under construction but will likely open for business next month according to spokesperson Mark Friedman. The name will be NUG.

E-commerce. Metrical is a business based here in El Cerrito that provides predictive shopper engagement solutions that reduce online cart abandonment. The firm can be reached at 510-898-6880 or on the web at metric.al.

Inside again. With restaurants allowed to have 50% capacity inside, some businesses are at least breaking even and patrons are eating it up. A quick drive around town revealed inside dining in effect at Los Moles, The Junket, Nations, Elevation 66, and El Mono, just to name a few.

Instagram. Those active on this social media site must check out What’s Good in El Cerrito by following @thelittlehill. Stories, contests, pictures, all about our favorite town. Produced by an anonymous local civic booster. Even the Byline has gotten some “ink” there. Hey, nothing wrong with being a cheerleader. We can always use more positivity. El Cerrito is a great place to be. But I preach to the choir.

The Little Hill has shirts too! Front as pictured at left with the Instagram handle; back has the full color artwork shown in the above paragraph. Get ’em at thelittlehillshop.com.

See Past Prez Palaver, page 3
$500,000 Federal Grant Awarded for Mayfair Affordable

By Aissia Ashoori

In January 2021, the Community Development Department applied for funding through HUD’s HOPE VI Main Street Program to assist with financing the Mayfair Affordable project at 11690 San Pablo Avenue. The Main Street Program aims to revitalize traditional commercial areas by enhancing economic development efforts and creating affordable housing units for local governments with populations of 50,000 or less.

Due to its proximity to the Del Norte BART station, this project provides an opportunity for transit-oriented development and much-needed housing in the City’s San Pablo Avenue Priority Development Area while also creating new pedestrian traffic to support local businesses.

The site was previously the Mayfair Market (acquired by the former El Cerrito Redevelopment Agency) and remained vacant for three decades. On April 16, 2021, the project was awarded $500,000 as one of three grants nationally.

Mayfair Affordable will contribute to revitalizing the Uptown commercial district while fulfilling many of the City Council’s goals defined in the Affordable Housing Strategy, San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan, Housing Element and Economic Development Action Plan.

It will also create a mix of new multi-family housing, including 67 affordable units to very-low-income households, that will serve a diversity of residents while providing housing stability and economic development opportunities all adjacent transportation.

PAST PREZ PALAVER

Continued from page 2

Hillside Festival v.2021. A little different this year, but the event by El Cerrito Trail Trekkers runs all this month with a mix of live and pre-recorded online “hikes” plus self-guided events for families, friends and individuals to do without the crowds that have attended past, pre-pandemic festivals.

The all live virtual events will be interactive, offering attendees the opportunity to show their faces and to speak. The events will be archived for watching throughout the rest of the festival — and beyond. All events are free. Visit ectrailtrekkers.org for all the details.

City happenings. The City Council will receive a presentation on the El Cerrito Plaza BART project at their meeting on Tuesday, May 4th, at 7 p.m. As always, these meetings are by Zoom and login instructions are on the City’s website. A comprehensive article in the March Byline covered the Plaza BART proposal.

On Saturday, May 8th, is a public workshop on the City’s financial recovery plan, also by Zoom video. Times and login information can be found at el-cerrito.org.

SBA assistance. The Restaurant Revitalization Fund provides funding to help restaurants and other eligible businesses keep their doors open. It provides restaurants with funding equal to their pandemic-related revenue loss up to $10 million per business and no more than $5 million per physical location. Recipients are not required to repay the funding as long as funds are used for eligible uses no later than March 11, 2023. Call 1-844-279-8898 or check with the Chamber office for details.
By Georgina Edwards

When one lives right next to the ocean, breathtaking, dazzling views are daily companions. On some days, the fog keeps the particulars soft like an impressionist painting. On other days, when the sky is crystal clear, the brilliance of the sun makes the water sparkle and illuminates the details of neighborhoods, topography and architecture of our place in the world.

If you’re in El Cerrito on any given day, you likely spend more time in the flat areas around San Pablo Avenue and occasionally drive up the hills on Moeser Lane or Cutting Boulevard. Has it been a while? Well, it’s high time to revisit the hills! There are treasures to be re-discovered, lots of beautiful hiking and views to take in.

Take Cutting Boulevard, a long street that connects Richmond and El Cerrito and changes in character all along the way, near the water, across railroad tracks, along residential neighborhoods, churches, retail stores, offices, BART. Nearly as soon as Cutting reaches the Del Norte BART station, the elevation begins to steadily and sharply increase. Keep going uphill, pass Arlington Boulevard, and keep going a bit farther. You’ll start noticing manicured green lawns and soon enough an impressive gate at 7901 Cutting Boulevard. Don’t be shy, cross that gate during business hours and see if you can learn about the Berkeley Country Club. Don’t worry, it’s called Berkeley because 100 years ago it was founded by next door neighbor folks, but yes, it’s in El Cerrito. The vistas will astonish and delight you!

Enjoyed by more than 360 members of all ages and backgrounds and booked for public events year round, this is an El Cerrito treasure. In 2020, the Club marked 100 years. Instead of celebrating, management took a deep look into the fundamentals and has been working hard behind the scenes. With and investment of over $2 million, the greens and surrounds have been refurbished in restoring the demanding golf course. Carefully and deliberately, every aspect of the Club has undergone renewal this past year, from member services, to events operations and dining.

As the Club anticipates re-opening indoor dining to 50% capacity this month every detail is in place, from state of the art temperature scans, to renovated dining areas and a thrillingly delightful new menu focused on drawing inspiration from a world flavors, trends and modern culinary techniques. The menus feature seasonal, fresh, organic, and sustainably harvested fare that is locally sourced whenever possible from the greater bay area as well as central and northern California.

The newest feature is the “Sky Deck,” a stunningly situated expansive platform to dine while enjoying an unparalleled view of the bay and the 18th hole. Planning for the inevitable mistier days, the deck also features and enclosed section that can also be heated.

Michelle Sand, Director of Event Sales and Membership, explains that a big part of the revitalization of the Club is building up member services and deepening the connection to the community. Soon, members will enjoy Friday night dinner events. Programs like PGA Juniors are under way to provide youth an opportunity to learn about the sport and stay active while experiencing camaraderie.

In 2021, the Club is already gaining new interest, with members actively golfing and membership expanding. Thoughtfully priced social memberships give community members easier access to the amenities and services. In August 2021, the Club will be opening its doors to the community, inviting visitors to participate in a golf tournament, a gala and other 100th (ish) year celebrations. Stay tuned, and venture up Cutting Boulevard more often!

For more information, contact:
Michelle Sand, Director of Event Sales & Membership
Phone: 510-806-1037
Email: msand@berkelycountryclub.com
What a year, right? I don’t have to tell you the past 15 months have been hard for everyone in our community. No one imagined we’d have to stay separated for so long. When Contra Costa Civic Theatre suspended main stage productions last March, we left the set in place for our next show, naively assuming we’d only have to wait a few weeks before re-opening. The set stayed there, empty, until the end of May before we finally took it down.

Despite the obvious setbacks, there have been significant bright spots to sustain us as we wait for the go-ahead to reopen. Our teaching artists and students have been gathering in person for summer camp and after-school classes. Our volunteers have turned the grounds outside the theatre into a stunning oasis filled with an array of drought-resistant plants, some donated by the volunteers themselves.

Our Board has worked diligently to steer the organization through this crisis. And we’ve been able to keep the theatrical spark alive through our Reading Stage series on Zoom, where we share the work of 21st-century women and BIPOC playwrights. Check out our schedule at cect.org/reading-stage.

One of the most exciting new programs to come out of the pandemic is our Kitchen Table Conversations, an informal monthly Zoom chat between myself and members of our CCCT community to talk about their work, their connection to the arts, and their hopes for the future. So far we’ve welcomed author/non-profit leader Debbie Chinn, rock icon Peter Albin, director Alex Perez, and immunologists Sheri Krams and Olivia Martinez. If you haven’t seen these yet, you’ll find them on CCCT’s website at cect.org/ktc.

As more Californians receive the vaccine and hospital cases remain the lowest in the country (as of this writing), there’s a lot of conversation around reopening our businesses. Governor Newsom has set a target of June 15th to fully reopen the economy. Like everyone, we’re trying to figure out what that actually means. We will be holding our reduced enrollment in-person drama camps again this summer, but our main stage productions will take longer to plan and present. Regardless of when that happens, we are committed to following science as the best way to provide a safe and welcoming environment for our community.

As you can imagine, a year without ticket sales, one of our primary revenue streams, has put a large financial strain on the organization. You can be a part of opening CCCT’s doors with a gift to our “Open the Doors” campaign. Visit cect.org/openthedoors for more information.

Thank you for your continued support of live theatre in El Cerrito. We can’t wait to welcome you back!
THE UTILITY Box Public Art Pilot Program is a beautification initiative designed to add to the vibrancy of the San Pablo Avenue corridor. Community artists are invited to participate in this program to help transform drab and unsightly utility boxes into attractive and captivating works of art that will enhance the beauty of the City’s streets and sidewalks. This program is paid for by the Arts in Public Places Program, which requires certain development projects to contribute one percent of construction costs to public art. The Arts and Culture Commission is responsible for acquisition, funding, and placement of public art in the City on public property with these restricted funds.

The artwork of Ricardo Cerezo, Jesse White, and Martial Yapo, was approved on January 25, 2021, as finalists of 2021 Utility Box Public Art Pilot Program.

The artist’s description for the San Pablo & Ohlone Greenway box is by Jesse White, who created that both celebrates the identities of the children in the El Cerrito community. Designed for children, each of the four box sides shows a different child’s face. Each face, which together represent the diverse demographics of El Cerrito, is surrounded by a different tree or plant: redwood, coastal fern, yarrow, and California poppy. Beautifully hand lettered words add a powerful message to each design: “We are diverse like the California poppy.” By pairing local plants and trees with affirmations of identity, a public work of art was created that both celebrates the identities of the children in El Cerrito and also prompts their curiosity and discovery of the natural world.

Jesse White is an illustrator and muralist creating work that explores the power of children and nature, a focus that stems from her background in education and life-long fascination with the natural world. A proud Tar Heel, she graduated summa cum laude from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a B.F.A. in Studio Art. She earned her master’s degree in Art Education from the Virginia Commonwealth University. When she’s not drawing, Jesse loves to cook and eat delicious vegan food, get lost in produce at the farmers market, and go on city walks with her dog, River.

The artist’s description for the San Pablo & Knott box is by Ricardo Cerezo, an artist with a 360 degree vision of the world. The colorful shapes, the mixed media, acrylic, spray paint, and oil make his style unique by the complex addition of layers. His design process starts with sketching a concept, applying a style, and dressing it up with colors, letting passersby find the meaning or at least brighten up their day. He has a B.S. degree in Computer Science, a certificate in Graphic Design and Computer Graphics from the University of California, Los Angeles and studied fine art at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. Additionally, he has received graphic design awards and has worked as web designer in institutions like the Panama Canal Authority.

Martial Yapo is a French Artist/Designer with a Masters in Architecture of Paris. Focused on painting since a young age, he tells stories through his artwork, about his vision of the world, and digs into his personal spirituality, his African roots and traditions. His technique is a mix of street art, tribal ethnic expression, graffiti and African contemporary art. Martial’s creations are a fine line between who Martial is and what he represents: a French-born African descent urban artist with a 360 degree vision of the world. The colorful shapes, the mixed media, acrylic, spray paint, and oil make his style unique by the complex addition of layers.

The City of El Cerrito’s Arts and Culture Commission consists of seven members who demonstrate a commitment to various arts disciplines, including but not limited to fine arts, visual arts, performing arts, literary arts, art history, and arts education.
people, we have great resources and amenities. In terms of major grocery stores, El Cerrito has a large Safeway, Lucky and a Trader Joe’s. For additional fresh food and produce selections we even have a great Farmers Market! We have the best of both worlds. Small mom and pop businesses as well as national chains, be that grocery shopping, restaurants, auto repair, clothing and general household shopping.

I was recently looking at a list of the top selling cars in America and Honda Motors had multiple entries in the top ten. Well, we even have our Honda of El Cerrito dealership. As a longtime resident of El Cerrito, it is easy to take for granted all that our city has to offer because these amenities become part of the “natural landscape.”

When I read about communities that are food deserts and lacking in basic services and then give some real thought about all that El Cerrito has to offer, it is pretty mind boggling. A plethora of restaurants, professional services, stores of various types, a multitude of parks, youth activities, senior activities, live performances at the Contra Costa Civic Theatre, our own movie theater of classic design, Rialto Cinemas Cerrito, a wonderful golf course with a stunning clubhouse, housing of all types and architectural styles from the modest bungalow to grand and stately homes.

New higher density transit-oriented developments that take into account the need for more housing of various types that can help to lessen the carbon footprint. Not one, but two BART stations, with trains that are electrically powered. Speaking of the environment, El Cerrito also has a first class recycling center. We are a conscientious and civically involved community, be that Rotary, the Library Foundation, the MLK celebration committee, and of course, the El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce!

While the grains of sand in the hourglass of our lives are running, there is so much for us to take advantage of and enjoy in El Cerrito, California. Guess what? The beauty of it all is that it does not stop there.

When that last grain of sand has run to the bottom of our hourglass of life and our time on “this side” is up, El Cerrito even has a fabulous memorial park in Sunset View Cemetery. Pleasant, peaceful, and meticulously maintained with great views.

Next time you are at one El Cerrito’s restaurants or coffee houses reflecting on our great city, remember, El Cerrito is just like the old slogan from Maxwell House Coffee, “good to the last drop.”

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