As I was giving thought to my subject matter for this column a flashback to my childhood occurred. Suddenly remembering the words “eat your vegetables, clean up your room and this is grown folks’ business!” Words that I certainly heard on more than one occasion, but I’ll discuss that a little later in the column.

In business as well as society as a whole there’s a plethora of rules, regulations, laws, ordinances and policies that we have to deal with. As a real estate broker I’m regulated by the California Department of Real Estate but there are also a number of federal as well as local laws that impact my business ranging from advertising, records retention, to very basic issues such as the placement of a sign promoting a Sunday open house. There are a lot of rules and regulations to abide by.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures an average of 109,000 bills are introduced in state legislatures each year. I was curious to know how many bills were introduced in California for 2019 and the answer is an eye-popping 2,576. With all the laws that we have on the books in California it seems unfathomable that an additional 2,576 pieces of legislation could

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Two longtime local realty firms, both started around the same time in the 1970s, are joining forces as the real estate industry enters a new era.

Red Oak Realty has acquired Marvin Gardens Real Estate and the combined operation is being touted as the “largest independent brokerage in the East Bay,” Red Oak says in a news release. Red Oak has about 100 agents and Marvin Gardens has about 60, and both firms specialize in the East Bay area from Oakland to Richmond.

The makeup of the revised organization is still to be finalized. Red Oak has offices on Solano Avenue in Berkeley and in the Montclair district of Oakland. Marvin Gardens has offices on Fairmount Avenue in El Cerrito; on Hopkins Street and on Solano Avenue in Berkeley; and on Arlington Avenue in Kensington.

One agent said that the Kensington office will likely be consolidated elsewhere. The acquisition was announced in early August and the changeover was expected to be complete by September.

“With this acquisition, Red Oak will grow by over 50 percent, and have six East Bay locations. In total, 160 agents will generate over $1.2 billion in annual sales volume and over 1,200 annual transactions.”

The emphasis on local ownership and agent specialization is significant as the real estate industry sees more consolidation and acquisitions by national firms, as well as newer online ventures.

“This was truly a decision from the heart,” said Marion Henon who owns Marvin Gardens with Todd Hodson. “Both companies have shared the same values for decades, and rather than work as separate factions or sell to a giant corporation, we’ll be stronger together.”

Henon and Hodson will be sales managers with Red Oak.

“Ultimately, Marvin Gardens is changing its name, not its philosophy,” said Red Oak Realty owner Vanessa Bergmark in a statement. “The company
For the record, this chamber of commerce has no affiliation with any other chamber. That includes the California Chamber of Commerce (Cal-Chamber), the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, or any others. Most of the positions taken by the above organizations don’t even cross our radar in El Cerrito. We’re local. Any opinions or blather written in this column are mine alone.

Dynamex. Speaking at our February meeting, attorney Jean Shrem mentioned this far-reaching court decision that reinterprets existing state law governing employees and independent contractors. In summary: the state’s highest court adopted a new legal standard for determining whether workers should be classified as employees or as independent contractors for purposes of California wage orders. The court decision makes it more difficult for businesses to classify workers as independent contractors as it presumptively considers all workers to be employees. To quote Shrem, “[the] case is a big deal.”

The Dynamex decision has ride share giants Uber and Lyft shaken. Their entire business model is based on hiring “independent contractors” to drive long hours at starvation wages. That’s a perfect example of the so-called “gig economy.” Dynamex could hit Uber-Lyft hard; neither has ever made a profit. It will be interesting to see how things develop. Will state politicians cave in to Uber-Lyft or not? Stay tuned.

Want more info? Look up Dynamex Operations West v. Superior Court of Los Angeles.

Harassment. AB 1825 requires that by January 1, 2020, all California employers with five or more employees must provide at least two hours of anti-harassment training to those in supervisory roles. Newly expanded harassment training requirements mean employees must be trained during the 2019 calendar year. Employees who were trained in 2018 or before will need to be retrained.


Upgrade. A spokesperson at the popular Rialto Cinemas Cerrito theater stated renovation would begin in November with new seating and carpeting. The movie house has two screens so only one will be dark at a time during construction.

El Cerrito beer? The site of the long closed dive bar known as Little Ange’s on Potrero west of San Pablo Ave. could become a brewery and beer garden along with housing. It’s former Redevelopment Agency property and negotiations are presumably underway for the city to sell it. A brewery would be a shot in the arm for local jobs. This stuff takes lots of time so consider it a long range possibility.

Mayfair. Move the pigeons and seagulls. It’s looking like a ground breaking could actually happen this month at the Cutting and San Pablo lot. Next month’s Byline will have a story and photos of the modular units being assembled at Factory OS in Vallejo that will be trucked to the site for new housing.

Raising the roof. Construction should be underway at the Contra Costa Civic Theatre on a new roof, beating the rainy season. The theatre states the oldest parts of the existing roof possibly date back to the 1940s. CCCT board president Kathy Perka expressed thanks for the generosity of supporters and the City of El Cerrito.

Restaurant week. Instead of October, as in past years, the Economic Development Committee decided to move El Cerrito Restaurant Week. Plan ahead; the next event will be January 16-26, 2020.

“Just cause” evicted. El Cerrito City Council voted on August 20th to repeal the new law. A task force of eight people made up equally of landlords and tenants will look for common ground over the next half year in order to recommend policy decisions to the city council. The recently adopted rental registry ordinance stays in effect and will yield data on the housing situation in the city which should be helpful to the task force.

Holiday lights. The word I heard is that Regency Centers is on board with a plan to light up El Cerrito Plaza for the holidays. As for San Pablo Avenue between Carlson and Central, the Chamber will be participating in discussions regarding feasibility and costs.
There’s been a year since our city sidewalks were littered with lime green bikes during the trial period, and evidently, the results were not satisfactory enough to keep the program alive. If the goal was to get people using their cars less to get around town, the clunky bikes weren’t exactly comfortable and required some physical fitness to maneuver.

Maybe we need to try bike sharing again but with the new generation of e-bikes. They will likely be used more often and by more diverse subsets of residents. El Cerrito has hills to contend with and some of us may not be in top shape all the time to deal with that. Here’s a glimpse of what’s going on in other cities with e-bikes. What do you think about it?

From U.S. News & World Report
By Julissa Treviño
August 12, 2019

For years, bike-share programs have been associated with big, heavy and slow bikes. But now in Madison, Wisconsin, riders are pedaling on electric-bikes, or e-bikes, an increasingly popular type of bicycle equipped with a motor. When a rider puts pressure on the pedals, the motor engages to give riders a boost.

In late June, Madison became the first city to replace its entire bike-share fleet with electric bikes. And it’s part of a growing trend. In recent years, more bike-share programs have adopted the technology in hopes of attracting new riders and improving the experience for existing riders. “In the past two years, we’ve seen a huge surge in the popularity and inclusion of e-bikes,” says Samantha Herr, executive director of the North American Bikeshare Association.

As of early August, 41 out of the 192 cities in the U.S. that have at least one bike-share system had incorporated e-bikes, also known as pedal-assist bikes, Herr says. Many of these systems are already seeing significant benefits, including a jump in ridership.

In Madison, which now has an entirely electric fleet, “we’ve seen 1.5 to 4 times the ridership, depending on the day, compared to before,” says Lisa Snyder, executive director of Madison BCycle.

“In Forth Worth, in the couple months since we’ve had them, our average check-out on an e-bike is 1.7, and the average of regular bikes is less than 1,” says Malorie Sarsgard, assistant director of Fort Worth BCycle. She also expects to see a steady increase in ridership over the long-term thanks to the availability of electric bikes.

One of the ways electric bikes are improving ridership is by opening the door to people who may have never considered biking for transportation, including older people and those who are less physically active.

That’s because, for the rider, e-bikes require far less effort. As riders engage the motor through pedaling, they’re able to climb hills or go for long rides, even when the rider isn’t in the best physical shape.

A more recent study in April found that access to e-bikes could increase bike commuting. Compared with those who had a regular bike only, e-bike riders in the study cycled more often to work and for longer distances. Because some riders also feel pressure to keep up with the pace of traffic, e-bikes provide that extra speed and confidence they need to ride on the street, Sarsgard says.

Despite their success in some cities, Motivate, a bike-share provider owned by Lyft, pulled e-bikes in Washington, D.C., New York City and San Francisco earlier this year after riders reported safety issues associated with faulty brakes. Lyft e-bikes are now up-and-running again in San Francisco and they will re-launch in New York this fall, a spokesperson for Lyft confirmed by email.

Herr says not every system needs e-bikes, but for Madison BCycle, there were few downsides to the full switch to electric. Because e-bikes have an on-off button, people who don’t want the motor don’t have to use it, and despite the fact that electric bikes cost more to maintain, Snyder expects an overall increase in ridership.

The views expressed here are the author’s and do not necessarily represent those of the Chamber board. Email: l.martinengo@elcerritochamber.org; cell: 510-778-5883.

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Heather Thomson Offers Exemplary Real Estate Service

**By Lisa Martinengo**

The member profile this month features Chamber member, Heather Thomson, a real estate agent with Red Oak Realty, a local women-owned brokerage. Heather is an early ’80s Berkeley High School graduate, remembering with fondness her childhood exploring the town and the open spaces surrounding it. She was impressed by the inspired teachers that imparted a love of learning and an appreciation for experimentation, tolerance and a broad world view.

She attended college at U.C. Santa Cruz, focusing on American Studies and social change. Her thesis explored the economic, political, gender, and racial issues underlying a Teamsters union strike in the canneries of Watsonville.

Post university, Heather had a full career working in non-profit program management and development, most notably for Habitat for Humanity and the YMCA. She lived first in Oakland, then Berkeley, and in 2004, bought a home in the Richmond Annex, where she lives with her husband and quirky cat.

She was drawn to the real estate industry and chose to work with Red Oak Realty, who provided the thorough training and preparation to succeed in the field. She was ready to be her own boss, and eager to provide help home buyers and sellers successfully navigate the sometimes wild world of Bay Area real estate.

Heather stressed the benefit to clients of dealing with a locally owned business that holds its agents and each transaction to the highest standards. Red Oak agents are a collaborative group with weekly meetings to exchange stories, discuss issues, and learn best practices.

The real estate industry has become complex and it’s important to Heather that her clients have confidence and trust in the process. She works hard to educate and protect clients every step of the way, seeking to empower clients so they understand all their options before signing on the dotted line.

She has recently joined the Lederer Team at Red Oak, a top real estate team known for their extensive knowledge, expertise and ethics, and as part of that team she is now able to offer clients additional services including a free consultation with a financial planner to help ensure clients plans to buy or sell a home is in sync with their short and long term goals.

Red Oak also has a great list of trusted contractors and tradespeople, in case remodeling or repair work is needed by clients now or in the future. Contact Heather for any questions or real estate needs.

**HEATHER THOMSON**
Phone 510-295-5577
Email: heather@redoakrealty.com
Homes510.com
Your East Bay Real Estate Source
be introduced. I then wanted to know if there is a cap as to the number of bills that can be introduced in California during a legislative session per legislator. The answer is as follows:

California Senate Rule 22.5 states that no more than 40 bills in the two-year regular session. The Assembly side is governed by Rule 49 which caps out at 50 bills for the same time frame.

For the sake of comparison Colorado has Senate and House joint Rule 24(b) which limits the number to five bills in a regular session. There are enough serious issues on the table right now at the federal, state and local level that have yet to be resolved but those in government seem to always have something new to introduce. This is absolutely bewildering to me.

Going back to the childhood flashback mentioned earlier in the column, when I was a kid growing up, I did not prepare the dinner menu. A plate was set before me and often time it had items on it that I was not enthusiastic or excited about in the least bit. If there were some lima beans, green peas or Brussels sprouts in the mix I was definitely going into “scheme mode” as in how am I going to finish this meal and not eat these vegetables. In most instances I ended up having to choke them down especially if there was some after dinner dessert involved.

I also had to deal with household chores including cleaning up my room. Saturday was a designated chore day and I wanted to watch cartoons, ride my bike and play with the kids in the neighborhood and this was all fine and good if my chores were done. I had my own agenda and sometimes it was slowed down because the adults were talking. I can remember butting into an adult conversation and being sternly admonished, told not to get in grown folks’ business and summarily dismissed.

By now you might be wondering what all this has to do with an over abundance of rules, regulations and mountains of proposed legislation. Well, I happen to see some parallels. Often in government the officials end up with a lot of things on their plates that they aren’t enthused or excited about and much of it doesn’t taste that good. So instead of “eating their vegetables” they parcel them off to the side and move on to the other items that taste better especially when they’re items that core constituents like too.

Just like the kid who has made a mess in their room and is slow to clean it up, often times the government officials are slow to clean up the messes that they make and instead are eager to “go ride their bicycles or watch cartoons with their favorite friends.” They should be eating their vegetables, that is to say, effectively dealing with the tough not so palatable issues, and cleaning up their messy rooms many times the result of messes that they themselves have created. Instead they find a way to butt into adult conversations and get involved in issues that don’t really concern them at all. The end result is often a bunch of unnecessary legislation, rules, regulations, ordinances and policies. So, while manholes are being renamed, important business is left undone.

In business, most of us have to figuratively eat our vegetables, clean up our rooms, and stay out of grown folks’ business if we plan to stay in business. The sound advice that my mother gave me as a child is still good advice today in both the literal and figurative sense. So, I’ll leave you with these words and this advice: eat your vegetables, clean up your room and stay out of grown folks’ business!
10th Annual Sip & Savor Fundraiser Set for October 13th

BY MARTY KALISKI
El Cerrito Rotary Club President

T he 10th annual Cerrito Vista Sip & Savor fundraiser will have wine, brews, spirits, food and fun from 2:30 to 5:30 p.m. on Sunday, October 13th at the Berkeley Country Club, 7901 Cutting Blvd. in El Cerrito.

Hosted by the El Cerrito Rotary Club, the event will feature delicious tastings and sips (wine, beer and more), barbecue, chocolates and cheeses, a fun and friendly putting contest, live music, and delightful raffle prizes. Not to mention the panoramic bay views from the historic clubhouse.

Serving the extended community since 1949, El Cerrito’s Rotary Club is proud to celebrate its 70th Anniversary this year and is working towards making our tenth Sip & Savor the most significant fundraiser to date!

The fundraiser will support a “Lucky 7” organizations doing great work in the community: Camp Kesem, Contra Costa Civic Theatre, El Cerrito High School (Garden & James Morehouse Project), El Cerrito Library Foundation, El Cerrito Recreation (David Hunter Memorial Scholarship Fund), RotaCare Richmond Free Medical Clinic, and The Milo Foundation.

For more information about sponsorships or anything about the fundraiser, contact Georgina Edwards by email at ecsipandsavor@gmail.com.

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Umpqua Bank
Unique Law, Kathleen Hunt  Joseph Yang

IN-KIND DONATIONS
Centerpieces: El Cerrito Florist
Photography: Compliments of Cindy Lane
Signature Cocktail Napkins: Premier Graphics
RED OAK REALTY

Continued from page 1

has built something that the agents and staff can be proud of, and it is important to preserve that success and minimize changes to agents.”

Red Oak hints at the challenges on its announcement, saying, “While not apparent to the average consumer yet, it’s no secret in the industry that real estate is experiencing immense waves of change right now — some of which we’ll be chronicling on this blog.”

Being independent and locally managed will be a major marketing point, as it has been for both firms for 40 years.

“Real estate is an inherently local and personal business,” Red Oak says in its announcement. “If decisions are made in faraway offices, and management grows distant from market nuances and the experience of clients, something is lost that we are not willing to lose.”

CDTFA Information

Basic Sales & Use Tax
Thursday, Sept. 19, 10-11 a.m.
121 Spear St., Suite 460, San Francisco

Basic Sales Use Tax for Restaurants
Tuesday, Sept. 17, 9-10 a.m.
1515 Clay St., Suite 303, Oakland

Basic Sales & Use Tax for Contractors
Tuesday, Sept. 17, 10-11 a.m.
121 Spear St., Suite 460, San Francisco

New Business Orientation
Tuesday, Sept. 3, 9-10 a.m.
1515 Clay St., Suite 303, Oakland

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Online reservation: www.elcerritochamber.org

The Calendar

Sept. 4 Chamber Board meets, 9 a.m., City Hall.
17 Chamber luncheon; see above.
17 City Council meets, 7 p.m., City Hall.
25 Cerrito Classics: Chulas Fronteras (1976) &
   Del Mero Corazón (1979). 7 p.m.
   Rialto Cinemas Cerrito.

Oct. 3 Ribbon cutting at BrightNow! Dental, 5:30-7:30 p.m.,
    11430 San Pablo Ave. at Blake.

5 Five time Tony nominated musical “Bright Star”
   premieres at Contra Costa Civic Theatre.
   8 p.m., ccct.org

13 10th Annual Sip & Savor; see page 6.

A complete directory of Chamber members
can be printed from the website:
www.elcerritochamber.org

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Jeffrey Wright, Wright Realtors
Nic Tang, Red Oak Realty
Aissia Ashoori, City of El Cerrito

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